CHAPTER IV

POLITICAL ASPECT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICT:
A STUDY OF CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION
Environmental Concerns in South Asia

To the four great plagues of mankind ---- war, famine, pestilence and death ---- can be added yet another: environmental degradation. Environmental issues initially became of concern to the richer countries when industrial and other forms of pollution emerged as a serious threat to the well-being of their people, and which created in their wake pressure groups seeking to remedy the situation.

However, environmental issues remained unnoticed in the countries of the developing world. A variety of reasons can be cited: the low level of industrialisation did not generate the same type of concern as in the countries of the 'North'; public interest groups were virtually non-existent because of a generally low level of education and mass participation, much of the media was either controlled by the state which restricted publicity concerning matters of public interest or was too preoccupied with the 'here and now' and thereby giving very little thought to the future implication of policies that would have a direct impact on the biosphere of the region; the overriding national priority being that of economic development and security matters at the expense of natural environment.

However, a general Third World awareness of environmental issues developed after the United Nations General Secretary, U Thant's numerous public expressions of concerns regarding environmental degradation, and the subsequent UN Conference on the Human
Environment in Stockholm in June, 1972 ¹, which drew attention of rich and poor countries alike to this disturbing global phenomenon.

In South Asia, environmental degradation has been taking place for decades but the preoccupation with the security issues made the environmental issues a non-priority one. After the 1971 Indo-Pak war in which the supremacy of the Indian military was established in the subcontinent, the primary security concerns gradually began to shift (or at least the atmosphere was becoming conducive) from traditional defence issues to social matters such as poverty and health. As the frequency and intensity of natural disasters in the subcontinent increased, they began for the first time to be linked to issues such as population increase and the tampering with the local environment.

The material damage and loss of life resulting from these disasters, the social dislocations caused by developmental activities, and the ensuing political unrest in the form of ethnic clashes, civil strife and insurgencies have all the elements to catapult the issues of environmental degradation and its links with domestic and regional security onto the center stage of national, bilateral and multilateral politics.

As we approach the 21st century, the question remains as to whether environmental degradation has become top-of-the-line national agenda? However, before looking into this

perennial question, it is important to highlight the main reasons of the concerns of environmental issues in South Asia. The main reasons stems from how:

1. The sub-national groups while shifting their allegiance from center to the periphery and doing so increasing the possibilities of political disorder, civil strife and insurgency, put stress on the environment and how the environments decline further affects the political disorder.

2. Environmental devastation faced by a country due to social conflicts, especially those originating from beyond its borders, can sour bilateral relations.

3. Environmental calamities and degradation can trigger policy choice, which can catalyse a potential conflict or aggravate an existing one.

Since South Asia houses almost a quarter of the world’s population with diverse ethnic, religious, social and political groupings and since the natural resource base is rapidly eroding, hence the ‘population-resource’ ratio has catastrophic seeds for the eco-system of the region especially when they take the form of conflicts between them for the limited resources.

**Population**

From 238 m. in 1901, India’s population has soured to 860m. in 1991 and has now crossed the 990 m. mark. It is estimated to reach 1.16 b. in 2010. Its current population

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growth rate is 2% a year. The rate of urban growth is further alarming, from 2.3% annually in 1951-61 to over 3.9% at present. At this rate, India will have an estimated 480m. people or 41% of its total population living in urban centers by 2010.³

The population of Bangladesh has grown from 42m. in 1951 to over 116m. in 1991 and has now crossed the 120m. mark. By the year 2010, it will be 177m. The urban population is expected to expand from about 16m. at present to 59m. by 2010 at the current urban growth rate of 7.1% annually.⁴

Pakistan has a population growth rate of 3%, the second highest in the region. At this rate the present 125m. will swell to 195m. by 2010. Pakistan’s urban population has also jumped from 15.4% of the total in 1947 to 28% in 1991.⁵

Nepal has also experienced rapid population growth in recent decades, with an average annual rate of 2.5%. By 2010, the Kingdom will have an estimated 31m. people. Migration is an important demographic phenomenon in Nepal, with massive emigration from the higher elevations in the last two decades. Between 1950-80, the urban population in Nepal increased threefold, with an average annual growth rate of 5%.

⁴ Ibid., p. 197 and Ibid., p. 5
⁵ Ibid., p. 198 and Ibid., p. 5
Bhutan's population growth rate has been affected by the migration of people from Nepal and is estimated to double in the next 24 years.

Sri Lanka's population increased from 12.3m. in 1971 to 17.4 in 1991 and 18.5 at present. Sri Lanka remains the only country in south Asia where there has been no expansion of the growth rate of its urban population (22%) in the last decade. Though its annual growth rate is 1.5%, it may decline not of population check programmes but in view of the insurgency that has enveloped the island since 1985.⁶

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⁶ Ibid., p. 198 and Ibid., p. 5
Table 5

Demographic Characteristics in South Asia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>LAND AREA (Km²)</th>
<th>CURRENT POPULATION (Million)</th>
<th>GROWTH RATE (%)</th>
<th>POPULATION DOUBLING TIME (Years)</th>
<th>DENSITY (P/ Km²)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>143,998</td>
<td>125.8</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>46,500</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>3,166,829</td>
<td>990.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>147,189</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>796,095</td>
<td>125.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>65,610</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


It is evident from ‘Table 5’ that South Asia is a heavily inhabited region with high population growth rate and an increasing urban growth rate. These factors have affected the traditional balance between the region population and its environmental capacities. Rising subsistence needs are placing ever larger demands on water, agricultural lands, forests and coastal habitats and, as these natural resources deteriorate or diminish, they set
in motion a continuous stream of ‘environmental refugees’ who flock to urban and marginalised areas to eke out a living.\textsuperscript{7}

In India, Bangladesh and Pakistan the resource to population ratio is extremely low, which suggests that, in order for these people to survive, there will be a general tendency to exploit resources top the level where the natural resource base, may no longer be renewable. The population pressure for example on Nepal’s limited resource base is increasingly high. At present about 7 people are dependent for their livelihood on each hectare of arable land. The figure is even higher in Bangladesh, where 8.5 persons are dependent per hectare of land. As deforestation in the hill and mountain zones in Nepal continued for decades, migration to the Tarai region in the south of the country, which borders India, and to India itself, greatly increased. The Tarai belt with its population pressure has added a new security dimension in India’s relation with Nepal.\textsuperscript{8}

**Deforestation**

The impact on the environment of the population increase in south Asia is clearly evident in the forestland. Forests are indispensable for ecological, social, economic and cultural reasons. They provide fruit, fiber, medicine, firewood, and timber for human consumption as well as fodder for livestock. They conserve the soil, maintain its fertility and store water.


By providing a habitat for wildlife, they protect as well as stimulate bio-diversity. They also clean the air by absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen, and play an important part in regulating the climate.

The term ‘deforestation’ refers to many different activities, including the cutting of wood for fuel, commercial logging, shifting cultivation, forest clearing for cropping or grazing, gathering medicinal plants, mining, flooding by reservoirs and burning. To this various dimensions of deforestation can be added the effect of ethnic conflict and insurgencies-counterinsurgency operations on the forest resources of the region.

Satellite imagery and remote-sensing techniques reveal that only 15% of land are in South Asia forested today. In India, the National Forest Policy passed in 1952 stipulated that 60% of the hill and mountain regions and 33% of the rest of the country should be under forest cover. Yet 85% of the country has very little or no tree cover.

In Bangladesh, total forest cover constitutes only 9% of the land area, and is, therefore, well below the universally accepted minimum of 25%. Of the total available hill forests, 40% have been converted into plantations, 17% have been set aside for the rehabilitation of the 16,000 tribal families made homeless by the construction of the Kaptai reservoir in

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1963 and almost 48% have been fallen to human encroachment. Over 25% of the inland deciduous forests have been felled. It appears that the major reasons for the loss of forests in Bangladesh are illegal logging to satisfy burgeoning demands for timber and firewood and salinity intrusion.\textsuperscript{11}

In Pakistan, the demand for firewood and agricultural land has denuded its forests in the north, while those in the low-lying areas along the major rivers have been depleted by flood reduction techniques. Much of the forests in the sparsely populated areas along the border with Afghanistan have been destroyed by the influx of Afghan refugees. The annual rate of deforestation is 0.03%.

In Sri Lanka, deforestation is widespread. Although the central hills and the south-southwest and western hills contained much of the country's forest resources, they now represent only 3% of the total forest area. The annual rate of deforestation is 1.5%.\textsuperscript{12}

In Nepal, actual tree cover is estimated to be over 34% of the country's land area. The lowland region of the Tarai is the most depleted; approximately one hectare of forestland is lost for every two persons migrating south. The annual rate of deforestation in Nepal is 4.3%. The blame goes to the policies of the state. The hill dwellers are targeted for the

\textsuperscript{11} Hassan, n.2, p. 10
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 10
reasons of deforestation but the government is far more to be blamed. After the Nepal
government nationalised the forests in 1978, deforestation increased because the hill people
felt little compulsion to preserve the forests because of the limitations imposed.13

Forests in Bhutan, like in Nepal play a very crucial role, protecting the hillsides against
erosion and stabilising the climate. At least 60% of Bhutan’s land area is forested, which is
an enviable figure as compared to the rest of South Asia. However, rapid increases in
population and development activities in recent years are contributing to substantial
deforestation. For instance, development projects have created a network of roads, which
provides access to previously remote areas for many grazers and firewood gatherers,
resulting in extensive deforestation.14

In all the above cases, the issue of deforestation has not only found resonance in the
volatile socio-political set up of the sub-continent but has also played a role in soil erosion
and siltation. Some rivers, such as the Sapti Kosi in Nepal, create inland deltas and
channels, which shifts as riverbeds rise, displacing local populations. Soil erosions also
causes flash floods in many places of Nepal, Bhutan and Pakistan.

13 Ibid., p. 12
14 "Bhutan: National Environmental Strategy", Danish International Development Agency (Copenhagen:
DANIDA, 1989), pp. 14-15
In addition other environmental degradation such as topsoil loss, cattle grazing, water logging and salinity have significantly contributed to land degradation in the region. Land degradation adds to the economic as well as socio-political problems of the region. Thus, as the quality of agricultural land in South Asia deteriorates, it creates serious social and political dislocation.\(^{15}\)

With the above mentioned environmental problems as hindsight, the image of South Asia today as it is reflected through the wide range of development literature is that of a region trapped in perennial crisis. While there is growing concerns over population growth, deforestation, soil erosion and desertification, yet the crucial link factor, i.e. the political and economic remains largely unexplored. It is here that the idea of a 'politicised environment' comes into play.

**Politicised Environment**

Environmental problems are largely the making of political decisions. Such decisions are reflected through the priority, the commitment and the long-term goals sought at the national and regional levels. It is all too easy to club South-Asia like any other Third World region as wracked by environmental crisis. But 'whose environmental crisis?' This question focuses attention squarely on issues of political and economic causality and also that South-

Asia's 'environmental crisis' cannot be treated in isolation from the much wider developmental crisis to which it is inextricably linked. 'Politicised environment' starts from the premise that environmental problems are not a neutral process. Rather, it has political sources, conditions and ramifications that impinge on existing socio-economic inequalities and political processes.

There are a breed of political ecologists who have thrown considerable light on the 'politicised environment'. First, they accept the idea that costs and benefits associated with environmental change are for the most part distributed among actors unequally. For example, selected physical changes linked notably to the nuclear, chemical and biotechnology industries may involve the generation of costs (risks) to which all are equally exposed but does not necessarily apply to the benefits associated with these changes. This is line with what Ulrich Beck calls the 'risk society'.

Second, an unequal distribution of environmental costs and benefits reinforces existing social and economic inequalities. This reiterates the point that environmental and developmental concerns are inseparable and that any change in environmental conditions must affect the political and economic status quo, and vice-versa. If for example, the environment in South Asia is above all a livelihood issue, then any change to that environment will inevitably alter the ability of different actors to earn a livelihood.

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Third, the differentiated social and economic impact of environmental change also has political implications in terms of the altered power of actors in relation to other actors. Thus, environmental change not only signifies wealth creation for some and impoverishment for others, it also thereby alters the ability of actors to control or resist other actors.

A striking illustration of this point relates to the ubiquity of conflict over environmental resources in the Third World regions (South Asia being a further example). The existence of such conflict highlights the importance that diverse actors attach to those resources, as well as their recognition that changing environmental conditions hold political opportunities and consequences.

The three assumptions as cited above helps to interpret South Asia's politicised environment. But while these assumptions help, the best way, however, to understand the politicised environment is to focus not on a description of the physical environmental changes themselves, but rather on the way in which those changes relate to both human as well as political activities.
**Dimensions of Politicised Environment**

Raymond Bryant puts forward three dimensions to a politicised environment:

1. Everyday
2. Episodic
3. Systematic

These dimensions are set out in Table in relation to physical changes, the rate of impact, and the nature of human impact, the political response and key concepts. It is the area of 'political response' that merits Bryant’s analysis in this thesis.

The first ‘everyday’ dimension involves physical changes like deforestation and salinisation that comes from day to day human practices.17

The second ‘episodic’ dimension comprises physical changes like flooding, earthquakes, storms that often have a massive, immediate and highly unequal human impact, but occur sporadically over time and can be commonly described as ‘natural’ disasters.18

The third ‘systemic’ dimension involves physical changes that derive from industrial activities like nuclear fallout, pesticide concentration and chemical pollution.19

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18 Ibid., p. 30
19 Ibid., p. 30
Table 6

Dimension of a Politicised Environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIMENSIONS</th>
<th>PHYSICAL CHANGES</th>
<th>RATE OF IMPACT</th>
<th>HUMAN IMPACT</th>
<th>POLITICAL RESPONSE</th>
<th>KEY CONCEPTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td>Soil Erosion</td>
<td>Gradual</td>
<td>Cumulative,</td>
<td>Livelihood</td>
<td>Marginality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deforestation</td>
<td></td>
<td>highly unequal.</td>
<td>Protests /</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Salinisation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Poor people the losers.</td>
<td>resistance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episodic</td>
<td>Flooding</td>
<td>Sudden</td>
<td>General.</td>
<td>Disaster</td>
<td>Vulnerability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Storms</td>
<td></td>
<td>Poor people the main sufferers</td>
<td>relief</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drought</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systemic</td>
<td>Nuclear Fallout</td>
<td>Gradual</td>
<td>General.</td>
<td>Distrust of Risk</td>
<td>Risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pesticide</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>technology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chemical Pollution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and technical experts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 'everyday' and the 'episodic' dimensions are highly interconnected. A case in point is the widely reported and believed link between upland deforestation and lowland flooding, the assumption being that the deforestation of critical watersheds is associated inevitably with intensified flooding events.

With the physical connection of the 'everyday' and 'episodic' dimensions comes also the existence of social and political connections. Thus, a key social factor associated with 'everyday' changes is that of marginalisation. This process occurs when poor grass-root actors such as farmers or shifting cultivators are pushed onto lands that are economically marginal as a result of their marginal political and economic status. Desperate to extract a living from such lands, these actors intensify production, but in the process often only increase the land's ecological marginality. This vicious cycle continues since the prospect of an actor deriving livelihood from the land is thereby diminished. The result is that land degradation is both a result of and a cause of social marginalisation.

In contrast, an important social factor in understanding the relationship between 'episodic' physical change and human activities is that of vulnerability. The latter constitutes a measure of the exposure of different actors in society to 'episodic' changes such as flooding or storms. However, the relative vulnerability of actors to such changes is often related to their degree of political and ecological marginality. Thus, marginalised farmers working on ecologically marginal lands are typically more vulnerable to drought or
pestilence than wealthier or more powerful farmers who work on better lands. As Bryant says, "These episodic changes may, in turn, reinforce even further the marginality of these poor actors by leaving them physically weaker, and thus less able to work the land, or by forcing them into an increased dependency on local money-lenders or politicians."20

It is thus, in relation to human activities that the connection between the 'everyday' and 'episodic' dimensions of a politicised environment may be most clearly seen. However, the political process also has a tremendous bearing and more often than not a crucial impact.

'Everyday' and 'episodic' physical changes may reflect and strengthen the political control of traditionally powerful actors (landlords, state officials, and large corporations) over their weaker counterparts in a manner similar to that associated with socio-economic inequalities.21

Such changes may also prompt a response by weaker actors through various forms of covert or overt resistance. The ensuing conflict may lead to a partial reversal of the socio-economic inequalities, thereby highlighting that 'everyday' and 'episodic' changes do not necessarily result in a perpetuation of the political and economic status quo.

20 Ibid., p. 32
By looking into the different dimensions of a politicised environment, it becomes clear that different types of environmental change become meaningful only in the context of an integrated understanding of human-environmental interaction in which political and economic inequalities influence the social distribution of costs and benefits of everyday and episodic changes.

The three dimensions also indicate that South Asia's environmental crisis is more of a crisis for some actors (poor, marginalised people) than it is for other actors (landlords, business corporations and industrialists). It can be suggested that this crisis might also be a source of opportunity for powerful actors. This point becomes clearer when the 'scale' of politicised environment is examined.

**Scale**

To think about a politicised environment is to reflect on how that environment is constituted and how it changes at different scales in relation to both physical problems and actors. Different physical problems are frequently associated primarily with one or another scale. Thus, for example, soil erosion or deforestation is essentially seen as being local problems, while coastal pollution or drought may be described as regional problems. In contrast, greenhouse warming and ozone depletion is considered to be classic global problems. The scale of environmental problems cannot be understood in totality without recognising simultaneously that different actors contribute to, are affected by, or seek to
resolve, environmental problems at different scales. The involvement of actors can be different. While one actor's involvement may be predominantly in destroying the environment, the other might be involved in an attempted resolution.

'Table 7', shows two scales: deforestation, which is predominantly a 'South' feature and greenhouse warming a 'North' feature. In both the cases and in particular deforestation, the relatively poor and weaker grass-root actors like farmers, shifting cultivators bear the burden of direct environmental degradation, were as the richer and powerful communities like the landlords, the business communities and business corporations in comparison are less affected. In terms of costs and benefits, the poor and weaker actors rarely receive a significant proportion of the benefits that usually attach to the economic activities that contribute to the problems. In contrast, the powerful actors through their activities like large-scale logging or cash crops production gain maximum profit through their contribution to environmental degradation. It, therefore, must be reiterated that costs fall mainly on poorer and weaker actors while benefits accrue mainly to wealthy and more powerful actors.

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### Table 7
Environmental Problems and Actors Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Deforestation: A ‘South’ Feature</th>
<th>Greenhouse Warming: A ‘North’ Feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contribution</strong></td>
<td><strong>Impact</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conflict</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>States</strong></td>
<td>Logging as a source of wealth</td>
<td>Deforestation; Loss of biodiversity; Loss of “sink” for carbon emission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Business</strong></td>
<td>Small to large logging operations</td>
<td>Creates wealth, jobs but net result is deforestation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multilateral Institutions</strong></td>
<td>Technical advice and loans</td>
<td>Controversial aid programmes for megadams; Conditionalities attached to aid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grassroot Actors</strong></td>
<td>Fuel wood gathering, 'slash and burn' cultivation</td>
<td>A factor of deforestation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
‘Table 7’ shows the interrelation between actors and environmental problems. It also indicates that environmental problems can interact at various scales and likewise different actors interact simultaneously over the environment at different scales. What follows is that relationship for example at the local scale may be directly influenced by interaction between two actors at the global scale and likewise relationship at the global scale may be the direct outcome between actors at the local scale. What precisely determines the relationship is the diversity of political, economic, and ecological conditions. These conditions are then shaped and emphasised by the role of power that the actors wield and conditions who benefits and who loses.

**Power**

In the human-environment interaction, there exist unequal relations between actors. This in turn relates to the power that each actor possesses (in greater or lesser amounts) and which directly influences the outcome of environmental conflicts.²³

In the ‘politicised environment’ of South Asia, ‘power’ is an essential concept. Power in this context refers to the ability of an actor to control his or her own interaction of other actors with the environment. In sum it is the control that one party has over the environment of another party.²⁴ In a human-environmental interaction, power encompasses

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both material and non-material considerations. In this interaction three inter-related questions emerge:

1. Ways in which one actor seeks to exert control or dominance over the environment other actors.

2. How power defines itself in terms of physical environment.

3. How weaker actors are pitted against/behave with the more powerful actors.

In the first question, an actor controls the access of other actors to various resources like, land, forests, water, minerals or wildlife. The objective of this is to monopolise a valued resource so as to gain economic benefits. The greater the denial of the resource to the other actor, the larger the benefit. This not only operates 'between' states but also 'within' states.

A classic example of this is the colonial states and the colonised states in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The colonial states through the power equation monopolised control of commercially valuable timber. The colonised states, which later became the post-colonial states exerted control ‘within’ their boundaries over selected actors. Such policies led to partial or total exclusion over one community/communities. States have demonstrated their power over other actors in so far as they have been able to determine who exploits selected environmental resources, the conditions under which those resources are exploited, and often even for what purposes they are used. Power, hence, manifested, as control over access is liked to a marginalisation of weaker grass-roots actors which also leaves them vulnerable to episodic changes.
In the second question, power is defined not as a control of environmental resources but as an allocation of the financial resources of the state so as to intervene in different types of human-environment interaction. This is done in way of either ‘remedying’ environmental problems or ‘supporting’ desirable environmental projects. A case in point is the plantation/cash crop forestry. In recent years such methods to solve the problem of deforestation has caught the fancy of states. With the influence of business, states have granted special subsidies to promote what has been called ‘sustainable’ forestry. Clearly it favours certain select actors and is invariably opposed by poor farmers and various grassroot actors.

The plantation/community forestry struggle is but one example of how different actors assert competing claims with aim of influencing the state in its prioritisation of environmental problems. It also indicates how selected actors control the environment of other. Since actors seek to legitimise the triumph of their respective interests over others, hence power also becomes one of “regulation of ideas”. In the case of plantation/cash crop growers v. small farmers, the former justifies his practice by trumpeting “ecologically good” and opposing the small shifting cultivators as “destructive”.

In effect, states and other powerful actors seek to maintain or enhance their power over the environments of other actors by controlling what is termed as the ‘public transcript’ ---- that is, the socially accepted version of events represented in public documents, legal
political ideologies, popular music and theatre, etc. It is through the control of the 'public transcript' that actors seek the triumph of their partisan interests on a broad basis.

Unequal power relations are inscribed in the environment. South Asia offers a clear example of how power politicises the environment. This can be indicated through the patterns of control (powerful actors) and patterns of resistance (weaker grass-root actors). Activities like timber plantation, air and water pollution near factories reflect the imprint of powerful actors ---- states and business. Resistance of weaker actors are associated with what the powerful actors' call 'illegal' exploitation of resources like forest clearances linked to illegal cultivation or fuel-wood gathering in reserved forests/national parks.

That the state facilitates or maps which actors and environments fall under its control, it is, therefore, vulnerable to pressures. It is hence not surprising to see the influence of powerful actors in the state machinery over weaker actors. Specific modes of control like infrastructure projects (dams, reservoirs) or industrial plants serve to symbolise the power of stronger actors. The nodes of resistance like small-scale projects, decentralised programmes, community participation are the symbols and aspiration of the weaker actors. The development debate in South Asia is one of big, mega, over centralised projects v. small, minor, decentralised projects. Pitted is one actor's interest over the other actor's need. Yet in this highly unequal power relations weaker actors do retain power. The emergence of a "grass-root" force is partly because of weaker actors local environmental

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knowledge and largely because state as a public institution seeks legitimacy. The notion of the state as a steward of the environment corresponds to a need for a popular legitimisation. Yet, powerful actors tend to shape the 'public transcript' that surrounds the question of legitimacy. In the end all environmental decisions and policies become political, growing as it does from the clash of interest between actors. The kind of policies that government take are underlined by the fact as to how much the actors influence the corridor of power.

The third question highlights the fact that weaker actors are potentially becoming a force to be considered. Though traditionally the tools of power favour the powerful actors now, however, through the growing power of the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs) and also through communication advancement, the weaker actors are able to publicise and garner support for their cause. In a relatively fluid scenario that is associated with multiple power centres, weaker actors are now well placed to voice their interests in relation to the powerful actors.

Power whether concentrated with a select group or becoming diffuse is at the heart of the politicised environment. This suggests as much as it reminds that it is the unequal power relations of actors that are central to environmental conflicts. Since it is political decisions that ultimately shapes/rectifies environmental problems and vice-versa, therefore, it is important to understand how state behaves within its jurisdiction and at times beyond it and also how it manages its people and environment.
The State

It is in the "national interest" that the power of the state is exhibited. This, at least in theory establishes the state as a society's need for an institution. The practical realities like concern for economic development with conservation of the environment or to predominantly act as a developer and not as a protector of the environment, poses a lot of problems. These problems then transforms into intra-state and inter-state conflict.

The theoretical justification for the state revolves around a linked set of assumptions concerning human behaviour, collective interests and the capabilities of the state to pursue such interests. Thomas Hobbes in 1651 described how in a stateless world, people would inevitably pursue individual interest. This according to him would shape a highly destructive process in which the "life of man" could only be "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short". To avoid such a situation, Hobbes argued that rational individuals would recognise the need and importance for a state so that order would exist. This invariably meant that individuals would have to surrender voluntarily some of their liberty to the state. The price of order was thus a sovereign state with a monopoly on the means of coercion within a given territory. While the theoretical basis for the state has been elaborated since Hobbes time, the underlying assumption that individual action in the absence of a state can lead only to anarchy has, however, remained unchanged.

Game Theory has helped to examine the obstacles preventing the development of trust and cooperative behaviour between ‘rational’ individuals, notably with reference to ‘Prisoner’s Dilemma’. This ‘game’ as it is well known uses a hypothetical situation in which two men arrested for committing minor crime are suspected of being responsible for a serious crime. The two suspects are questioned separately and to acquire conclusive evidence, the interrogators present each suspect with a deal: ‘squeal on your accomplice, and if he is convicted of the major crime, go free; or stay silent, and be convicted of the lesser offence and go to jail’. The collective interest of both men is to stay silent since that option presents the largest aggregate sentence. Because it is in each convict’s individual interest to squeal, provided the other does not follow suit, hence he is able to escape any punishment.

That both convicts separately reach this conclusion and squeal accordingly, hence the result is that both are convicted of the major crime. This worst possible result illustrates the main lesson of ‘Prisoner’s Dilemma’ — that it is in the absence of trust between individuals that leads people to act individually.

Can then state articulate and enforce collective interest? Garret Hardin’s essay on ‘the tragedy of the commons’ tends to precisely describe the above question. In the essay, Hardin puts forward a situation in which individual herders graze their cattle on a common

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pasture. Each herder seeks to increase the number of cattle on the 'commons' until eventually the 'carrying capacity' of the land is exceeded. However, rather than curtailing use of the commons, each herder continues to add cattle to the pasture, resulting inevitably in tragedy as the land is degraded and the livelihoods of the herders ultimately impoverished.\footnote{Ibid., p.1247}

The logic derived from this is that the benefit associated with each additional animal accrues entirely to individual herders whereas the costs of additional cattle accrue to all herders. Hence, individual action in Hardin's illustration leads to environmental ruins, which further leads to social disruption. All this of course in the absence of a state to protect collective interest.

Taking the case of 'Prisoner's Dilemma' and 'the tragedy of the commons', it can be argued that the state is placed in an omnipotent role to tackle the world's mounting environmental crisis. But on theoretical understanding of the state, that is --- as a sovereign actor holding a monopoly on the means of coercion within a defined territory --- and on evidences that has been explored, that is --- matters relating to economic and political power --- it can be clearly noted that the state's quest for power has inevitably led to the growth of environmental problems at the local, regional and global level.
Because states' guard their sovereignty passionately or because states' are hardly prepared to shun economic benefits hence any globalised system of environmental management fails or becomes difficult to achieve. The neo-Hobbesians further this by exalting the position of the state in relation to other actors. They call it 'environmental protection from above' which when expanded at a global level is called 'the global Leviathan'. A classic statement can be suggested from Ophuls work, "ecological scarcity in particular seems to engender overwhelming pressures towards political systems that are frankly authoritarian by current standards, for there seems to be no other way to check competitive over-exploitation of resources and to assure competent direction of a complex society's affairs in accord with steady-state imperatives. Leviathan may be mitigated, but not evaded." All this in a nutshell for Ophulus means that ecological crisis renders authoritarian state action seemingly inevitable.

'Environmental protection from above' as harped by the neo-Hobbesians fails to take into consideration social justice and grass-root resentment. It also lacks the explanatory power in a world situation. Ironically, a tragedy of the global commons ensues in which individual states continue with policies and practices that degrade the global environment,

31 Hardin, Baden, Heilbroner, Ophulus as stated by Raymond Bryant and Sinead Bailey, n.16, p. 51
while refusing all the while to give up the individual right to action (sovereignty) ---- which is at the root of the problem.

The theoretical critique of the state further explores the possible incapacity of the state to address effectively environmental problems, whatever is the scale. In this appraisal the state because of it being either 'too small' or 'too big' cannot handle the environmental problems. It is hence not surprising that states have invariably been described as 'Janus-faced' actors ---- deriving, as they do, their power from being at the nexus of the national and international political structure. The derived power ---- political and social ---- however, does not indicate any compatibility with sustainable development or proper environmental management. On the contrary state power has hindered environmental initiatives of grass-root actors at local levels and has failed to develop any far-reaching or comprehensive framework at a global level.

Its becomes imperative to look into the state role before coming to any understanding as to why environmental problems occur and why it is not easily solved. States, at least since the seventeenth century, has been a powerful social and environmental actor. The development of the state has been closely linked with the local environments and its management. Because both states and the people they govern are dependent on the environment. The increase of state power was directly related to economic surplus, which led to maximising

natural resources production, often beyond sustainable levels. The rise of the modern state in Europe by the beginning of the seventeenth century marked the ascendancy of this actor as the leading player in human-environmental interaction.

Now as we approach the 21st century, the growing power of the state can be related to the global capitalism. The state today because of its wider role --- from providing security to giving social and physical infrastructure (for example roads, education) --- has provided fertile ground for the growth of capitalism. As a leading scholar notes, “states must be there to do certain things, otherwise capitalism will fail.” The state has become an institutional necessity under the greedy eyes of the capitalist system because without its presence a Hobbesian anarchy would prevent capital accumulation.

While capitalism plays a big role that has inextricably linked the state to a particular mode of production, it nonetheless is still defined in terms of power. The state still retains its distinctive interests and its sources of power are through its own political, economic and strategic areas that derive from its spatial position at the “intersection of the domestic political order and the inter-state system.”

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In practice, however, the interest of the state and that of capitalism do not always correspond. The state has always protected selected conservation policy in the face of business interest. Often, the seeds of conflict has centered not on whether an environmental resource is to be exploited commercially, but rather on the conditions under which such exploitation is to occur, for example, restrictions on logging in order to ensure long term production versus the triumph of *laissez-faire* 'cut and run' practices.\(^\text{37}\)

The state has the power to enforce its will even when it comes to the spirit of capitalism today. Technological advancement such as witnessed through railways, roadways, and physical infrastructure has enhanced the state's coercive and surveillance powers. Military technology has also aided the state to impose control over populations and peripheral areas. Helped by detailed knowledge about the location of people and aided by maps, surveys and statistics\(^\text{38}\), the state has exerted control over natural resources.

The European conquest of much of the Third World territories in the colonial period triggered a flow of environmental resources from the Third world to the First world, which not only enriched state coffers but further aggrandised them.\(^\text{39}\)

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\(^{37}\) T. Skocpol, "Bringing the state back in: Strategies of analysis in current research", in P. B. Evans, D. Rueschemeyer and T. Skocpol (eds.), *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), Pp. 7


Does State Develop or Destroy Environment?

State as an actor as can be understood from the theoretical point of view is supposed to be dedicated to the promotion of collective goods. However, understanding from the practical point of view, the practice of the state ---- in as much as the environment is concerned ---- has been disappointing. Rather than acting as a possible solution to environmental problems, states has typically contributed to exacerbating those problems.

At the heart of the matter those seems to be a paradox in the state’s function. There is as described, “an inherent, continuing potential for conflict between the state’s role as developer, and as protector and steward of the natural environment on which its existence ultimately depends.” 40 This can be assessed in the Third world context and more particularly in South Asia. After WW II and then the end of colonial rule, environmental conservation was hardly a priority. The immediate goal was the assertion of political control by the state over the people living in the territory under its jurisdiction. The quest for political survival was prominent and environmental conservation under these circumstances was an obstacle to the survival of the political regime itself.

After the establishment of political control followed a quest for economic development and self-reliance. This further led to the state’s neglect of its stewardship role. In an atmosphere of grand development plans based on rapid industrialisation and western aid, the newly

independent countries had to maximise natural resource exports in order to offset soaring import bills. Environmental conservation hardly featured in development plans.

The quest for industrialisation and development has had a twofold impact. First, because of maximising natural resource extraction like timber. Minerals, fish and cash crops the political and economic marginalisation of weaker grass roots actors accelerated. Civil strife, ethnic conflict and political instability within the territory and at times across the border have been a direct resultant of the state development policies. Second, because of rapid industrialisation pollution has rapidly increased in all the spheres — air, water and land. The growing concern of pollution and related health hazards allowed politics between the industrialised countries and developing countries to seep in intensely. The First world has invariably imposed stringent industrial regulations and the Third world has stubbornly refused to follow the diktai in the name of development. Pollution worries has led the First world to resort to 'green conditionality' — the use of environmental goals to condition the objectives, direction and circumstances of aid flows — so as to attempt to exert influence on the policy process in the Third World countries.

As the South-Asian countries gained independence, national security became an important preoccupation of the state. Concerns about national security in the context of boundary disputes led to policies specifically designed to transform the environment as part of a nation-building process. This process, however, has been coated not only with perceived
external threats but also threats arising from groups within the country. Low-level insurgency that dog the region has been countered by state initiative 'clearance of forests' so those guerrillas do not make use of forests for hiding. 'Burning down trees' has been a staple counter-insurgency approach.

Environmental conservation is therefore rarely seen by states as an end in itself, but rather as a means to various political and economic ends. Yet, whether relating to activities that lead to environmental degradation or conservation, the state is an actor that rarely speaks with one voice, but rather represents an amalgam of institutional interests. Under such conditions, the tension between the state's role as developer and steward of the environment often plays itself out in terms of conflict between rival agencies within a state, or between different states interacting at the international level.

**Key Features in South Asia**

**Political Factors**

As explained above undermines environmental corrective policies. In a similar vein, South-Asian countries have encouraged poor and marginalised farmers to migrate in their thousands, to clear forest and settle in remote areas in part as a means to reduce social discontent in the places from which these people come. Frontier areas have served as a 'political safety-valve' to which surplus landless populations have been explored, thereby obviating the need for land reform. These transmigration programmes have had the added
security benefit from the state’s viewpoint in that they have served to ‘pacify’ ‘unruly’ grass-root groups living at the periphery of the country.

**Bureaucratic Resistance**

The hold of the bureaucracies in South-Asian region is widespread. The reluctance of the states in the region to implement environmental conservation or corrective measures can be relayed to the resistance of bureaucracies within the state itself, which have benefited from the *status quo*. Often the most powerful agencies/department/ministries within the state are precisely those agencies that have derived their institutional power from control over such environmentally damaging activities as energy generation (coal and hydroelectric sources), mining and logging and intensive cash-crop production.41

This can be reflected through the agriculture, power and Forestry ministries. Although agencies completely directed towards environmental protection have emerged yet they possess little substantive power, and must confront the policies of diverse powerful agencies to implement conservation measures. What then emerges is an institutional conflict within the state in which conflict over policies, programmes and resource allotment further delays any effective implementation.

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Corruption

This might seem an inconsequential reason but on close examination and in particular to the South Asian region it merits consideration. Corruption among political leaders has often been a further political factor hindering a balanced approach to environmental management in the South-Asian countries. An important reason why many leaders fail to promote environmental stewardship beyond rhetorical level is simply that it has not been in either their political or economic interest to do so.

There is a tendency for many leaders to base political decision-making partly on calculations of personal economic gain. Thus, a characteristic feature of the South Asian countries is the existence of a close and symbiotic relationship between state and business leaders. Such a state-business partnership has been the source of many of the physical changes to the environment, and related environmental conflict, that is at the heart of the politicised environment. That political benefits may also accrue to leaders as a result of the judicious and highly selective awarding of contracts to exploit the environment to potential or actual political supporters must only tempt even further leaders who are keen to retain political power but who are unsure of their ability to do so without additional help.
Hidden Agendas Behind Green Credentials

South Asian countries have responded in recent years to calls for 'sustainable development' and conservation by introducing 'eco-friendly' policies. However, as mentioned earlier these policies are means to various political and economic ends. The most notable example is the promotion of 'eco-tourism'. Tourism in general is big business and eco-tourism is one of the most rapidly growing sectors within this industry.42 States in the region are capitalising on widespread tourist interest in biologically diverse tropical forests or exotic wildlife through conservation initiatives that seek to protect forests and wildlife for tourist consumption. While states 'claim' their stewardship role and 'extol' the environmental basis of reforestation and park development programmes, yet hidden behind these policies are political and economic factors. The economic reasons are linked to the policies and practices of First World states and multilateral institutions such as World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF).43

'Green conditionalities' in the flow of aid and loans from the First World to the Third World has shaped the latter countries green policies. To the extent that such financial transfers are now linked to environmental considerations, South Asian states hence have a strong incentive to adopt 'green' policies. The political consideration for promoting such

43 Ibid., p. 253
policies is related to internal security and/or social control. Such conservation initiatives are a means for states to assert their authority over people and environment, thereby strengthening the position of the state. For example, in the creation of a park, there is not only the delimitation of the borders of the new administrative entity, but also the appointment of a whole troop of rangers and guards to ensure that excluded actors (a particular tribe or caste) do not interfere with park management. Invariably an opposition is put up by local farmers or shifting cultivators to the creation of parks or ecological reserves. What starts as a state’s stewardship role transforms into a social conflict.

In the Indian context, efforts to protect tigers, elephants and other prized animals have usually involved the displacement of local people whose ‘way of life’ is viewed as inimical to wildlife conservation. There is thus a strong coercive element to the development of ‘green’ projects in India and elsewhere in the region as states use force, where necessary, to protect valued wildlife and trees, as well as to resolutely oppose resistance from grassroots actors.

From the key features highlighted it can be emphasised that the countries of South Asia encompasses diverse agencies and interests, and further operates in a world of states. Therefore, the state’s role vis-a-vis the environmental worries can be understood as an outcome of intra-state as well as inter-state conflict. Without it no ground can be broken to
understand why states make a particular decision or why they do not. Both intra-state and inter-state are critically linked.

Intra-state conflicts have been conditioned by the relationship of individual states to each other in an international system characterised by widespread conflict over environmental issues.\textsuperscript{45} South Asian states present a typical case of ‘pursuing their own national interest.’\textsuperscript{46} There is also a general unwillingness of states in the region to surrender sovereignty, which remains a perennial stumbling block to conflict resolution over environmental management issues at the regional scale, or even for that matter at the global scale.

South Asian states mirror the Third World countries as far as preference for non-binding targets/guidelines on certain environmental issues are concerned in which they are free to implement at whatever pace they see fit rather than accepting any firm and unambiguous obligations. This is not only true with the South Asian states and other Third World states but with their First World counterparts also. The result is that there is no effective and equitable global environmental management regime. The functionally defined states and the territorial definition of states have prevented any far-reaching and effective global environmental cooperation.

\textsuperscript{44} A. Kothari, S. Suri and N. Singh, “People and protected areas: rethinking conservation in India”, \textit{The Ecologist}, no. 25, 1995, p.192
Is the State Declining?

As it has been argued that states, as they have grown in power they have only enhanced environmental degradation. The reason being that states have used their political power to promote economic development over environmental conservation. However, will states continue to play the pivotal role in political-ecological issues in the future? By answering this and answering it in the positive, an area of potential conflict can be charted — conflicts that are already or have already been witnessed. In a world characterised by increasingly powerful non-state environmental actors and the growing power of other actors linked to the combined forces of ‘globalisation’ and ‘localisation’, does seem to demerit the power of the state.

A key feature of ‘globalisation’ has been the integration or a push towards a single economy world dominated by TNCs. By its very name and nature, TNCs operations are determined by the availability of resources, cheap labour and local markets.47 The ability of TNCs to translate economic might into political-ecological power is undeniable specially when many Third World states have sought to industrialise rapidly. But when the power of TNCs is pitted against more powerful states like Brazil, Indonesia, China or India in the South Asian context, it can be noticed that the state retain considerable power to regulate the development process. It is in this scenario that a conflict of business ‘conditions’ arises.

'Localisation' of environmental and social crises have prompted the development of an increasingly assertive 'grassroots' movement which, acting in conjugation with First and Third World NGOs, demands the devolution of powers from the state to the local community level. Conflict between the state and local community is mirrored through the states centralised approach and the local community's aspiration for a decentralised policy. The power of grass-roots groups resides primarily in their ability to hinder developmental projects supported by the state, but which are the sources of local popular opposition.

Although the competing pressure at the global and local level does make the state vulnerable, yet it is only the state that is in a position to mediate between 'globalisation' and 'localisation' as they come to bear. In that and in the words of Hobsbawm, the state "remains indispensable". At the junction of the 'global' and the 'local' the state is the only actor today in a position to address with authority political and ecological problems at different scales. Because it has failed to do so and because other actors are making a mark hence the conflict over states authority and other actors' demands are bound to occur.

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Some key contemporary issues:

The Cauvery River Issue

The Cauvery water sharing between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu has become a classic case of intra-state rivalry that threatens the centre-state relations and has the potential to uproot the government of the day. This 'River of strife' has moved away from a workable solution — as experts note changing crop patterns and exploiting dry-farming techniques — to a highly conflictual situation in which any negotiated settlement seems highly unlikely and any imposed settlement seems only to injure intra-state relations that can ignite violence.

Power politics clearly thwarts any solution to the decades-old dispute. Behind this power politics is the AIDMK leader Jayalalitha. The AIDMK and its allies have used the power equation at the centre to threaten the national government through calls of 'withdrawing support' in order to achieve what the Cauvery Tribunal in 1991 had ordered — that being for Karnataka to release 205 tmc. Ft. of water to Tamil Nadu's farmers annually. That Karnataka under successive chief ministers — S. Bangarappa, Deve Gowda and J.H. Patel consistently flouted the Tribunal order goes to show that regional chauvinism can mar cooperative approach.

49 Quoted in the Editorial, Indian Express, New Delhi, 20.7.1998
50 Sunday 26 July- 1 Aug 1998, New Delhi, p.24
In the present coalition government scenario in India, Karnataka is an important power base for the BJP party (which heads the coalition at the centre). Therefore, it becomes impossible for the centre to implement the interim award without displeasing its supporters and hence eroding its power base. Karnataka offers one side of the coin is the AIDMK and its allies in Tamil Nadu whose over two dozen Lok Sabha seat is crucial to the coalition government at the centre to survive. Aware of this critical power that meager two dozen or so parliamentary seats have and the fact that the law (the apex court directive) is ON Tamil Nadu's side, Jayalalitha has used this power strength to pressurise the government at the centre to implement the Supreme Court order. At the heart of Jayalalitha's strategy is to regain power in the provincial state of Tamil Nadu and see the back of the ruling DMK under M. Karunanidhi. The Cauvery water becomes a mean to achieve that end.

At the other side is another political actor, J.H. Patel, the irrepresible chief minister of Karnataka. His statement, "she (Jayalalitha) might win against Vajpayee but she will not win against Karnataka", 51 is almost at a war-footing tone. Such nonchalant and chauvinistic approach that can trigger off unruly situation between the people of the two states is solidly rooted in power factor. To ask why J. H. Patel is so insouciant is to realise that the BJP led coalition at the centre has 13 MPs from Karnataka plus an ambition of winning the next Assembly election there. Therefore, it has much more to lose in terms of power if it gave in to the demands of Jayalalitha.

51 Ibid., p.24
The Cauvery water dispute, which has been hanging fire since the first agreement was signed in 1892, is like a clarion call for all parties to come together in aid of Karnataka. The view of the present central government and its electoral ally the Lok Shakti in Karnataka is no different from that of others. Karnataka has exploited the power equation at the centre whether at the time of the Congress rule or the national Front government of V. P. Singh or the coalition government of H. D. Deve Gowda and I. K. Gujral, in expressing 'a raw deal' regarding the Cauvery issue.

While Tamil Nadu has the ruling of the Tribunal in its favour and a logical reason to aggressively ask for its implementation, Karnataka on the other hand has transformed the dispute to framing of a 'national water policy' to achieve any long standing solution. Cauvery River to Karnataka is an emotive issue for the river flows 381kms. through the southern part of the state. In fact the Cauvery basin decides as to which party rules the state.

During the last assembly elections in Karnataka, the Janata Dal had won a large number of seats from this region on the promise that H.D. Deve Gowda, the region's stalwart, would be made the chief minister and fight for the Cauvery water distribution. The Cauvery water will still be a deciding card for the next assembly election in 1999. It hardly comes as a

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52 Ibid., p.24
53 Ibid., p.25
surprise that no party or political actors in Karnataka are willing to budge an inch on the Cauvery water sharing.

For Jayalalitha and the AIDMK power politics dictates the initiatives. She may go to the extent of withdrawing support from the centre as that itself makes good vote-bank politics in Tamil Nadu but before that she would have to test the waters to see whether any larger and consequential party for e.g. the Congress party would support her.

The Cauvery River at the centre-state relationship is also conflictual. The centre views the Cauvery distribution as a model of national interest prevailing over regional interests. The centre sees the Cauvery not as a body of water divided between two states and involving the interests of two others (Pondicherry and Kerala) but as a river system that happens to run through two states and serves the needs of two others. The model seeks the creation of the Cauvery River Valley Authority (CVRA). The scheme seems to be more troublesome for the centre to notify than for the state (Tamil Nadu in this case) not to accept because establishing a CVRA that is charged with implementing an award validated by the highest judicial authority is what Tamil Nadu wants. It is certainly not what Karnataka wants. In logic it is correct for the centre to come out with this model after all it has harped profusely the so-called National Agenda for Governance (NAG) but the power politic proceeding in Karnataka acts as a stumbling block. The conflict is defined in either having a National

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Agenda for Governance or a confederation of warring satraps (that Karnataka represents).

There can be no cohesion between the two.

Water issues as an intra-state conflict in India (Centre v. State) is governed by the following facts:

1. In a federal-state form of government, the states and central government have to agree before water development can be undertaken. While no development can take place without the concurrence of the state/states concerned yet, the centre through the Parliament law can, if the project is "expedient in the public interest" override state consideration. The constitution makes the centre a superior player in water resource development over states.

2. Centre has the financial resources. States have limited funds. Since water resource development is capital intensive hence states invariably negotiate as lesser player.

3. States do not have the authority to negotiate with multilateral or bilateral funding agencies. The centre has the right.

4. Centre has the authority to legislate water quality. If the state does not comply to it, the centre has the right to cut funds.

\[^{55} \text{Indian Constitution, Entry 56, List. 1} \]
Rajaji National Park and Community Strife

National parks and forest management/reserves in India are becoming an issue of rural social conflict and the inclusion of considerable area as "indigenous land" in these parks with consequent prohibition on grazing and ban on use of non-forest timber produce is affecting the livelihood systems. This issue has gained focus with the attempts by authorities of the proposed Rajaji national park combining the territories of Chilla, Motichur and Rajaji sanctuaries, to evict one of the few surviving pastoral Muslim tribe from their habitation in the forests of Shivalik hills in Uttar Pradesh (UP). The development of national parks is part of the expansion of eco-tourism that not only brings forth much needed revenues but also sends the right signals to the First World countries about India's commitment to conservation and wildlife protection. However, it has a cost as the Rajaji National Park shows --- which cost being segregating and alienating the community. The conflict that emerges is one between wildlife protection and human consideration.

The WWF for Nature along with other institutions like the Asian Elephant Conservation Centre, IUCN are a formidable group representing wildlife conservation --- in this case being the elephants. The effected Gujjar families are a small number of 1,300 that exist within the national park.56 The meagre number itself makes them an insignificant player but they have the propensity to transform themselves into a big social issue concerning human

56 Statesman, New Delhi, 25.5.98
apathy, elitist conservation approach, low caste treatment etc. Seeing the present social fabric and polarised politics in India this can easily be picked up as an issue and be transformed into an altogether different conflict that dramatically shifts from the original position of a certain compatibility between wildlife preservation and human consideration.

**Gujarat Cattle-Breeders and Industrial Lobby**

In Gujarat, the state government recently decided to hand over pastures (known as gochar) used by cattle herders known as Maldharis to various industries. This has resulted in resentment of the 55 lakh Maldharis of the state who use the land for feeding their cattles and hence a source of their livelihood.\(^{57}\) Obviously the state government considers the Maldharis a non-significant actor who neither have effective leadership nor any strong community representative in the provincial parties. While on the other hand the industrial lobby is awesome owing to its financial power to fund parties. The Indian Express report stated,“The fact is, industrial units do not want to buy undeveloped land, and instead, want developed land which is used as gochar.”\(^{58}\)

**Kalapani and Politics**

Kalapani, a barren, rocky area of about 35 sq. km. At the trijunction of the 16,000-ft. high India-Nepal-China border, is as the name suggests a black water spring said to be the

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\(^{57}\) Indian Express, New Delhi, 18.2.1999

\(^{58}\) Ibid
source of the Mahakali River. Very recently the domestic politics of Nepal has put this area at the centre of a border dispute. When Nepal's minority government headed by Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala faced the new session of Parliament on June 28, 1998, there was much questioning and uproar over the Kalapani issue.59

Bringing the issue into direct contention is India's role. India has said that ever since the 50's, the UP police have patrolled the Kalapani area. In 1996, a small Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) post was also set up. India's compulsion is over strategic-security matter for Kalapani controls the route to Lipi Lake pass, which leads to Kailash Mansarover in China. Nepal on the other hand has insisted that India's strategic concern is a garb to make Kalapani a part of India.

In 1996, after the Mahakali Treaty — which deals with mutual cooperation in the region's development — was signed, the first signs of difference arose. The Communist Party of Nepal (CPN-UML) in order to gain good political mileage raised the issue of Kalapani as being an integral part of Nepal.60

Politics in this case too dominates the issue. In Nepal, the domestic political compulsions is shaped by the fact that Nepal goes to election in 1999 and that the present government is

59 Outlook, New Delhi, 20.7.1998, p.36
60 Ibid., p. 36
highly unstable. In Nepal, India remains the most enduring political theme, where parties are still defined by their perceived proximity with India. ‘Pro-Indian’ and ‘anti-Indian’ are widely used to describe a party. Kalapani obviously has become a rallying issue for ‘anti-Indian’ parties especially when on June 3, 1998, the Indian ambassador K.V. Rajan issued a statement stressing that successive British-Indian and Nepali governments had acknowledged Indian sovereignty over Kalapani. Nepal reacted strongly and testified it with series of border maps drawn by British India in 1837, 1854 and 1905 which “show that Kalapani lies inside Nepal since it is situated east of the Mahakali River.”

Historically, the Sangauli Treaty of 1816 between Britain and Nepal, says that all land west of the Mahakali would be part of British India. After a series of survey in the 1920s, it was finally stated and reconfirmed by Nepal in 1929 that the status of Kalapani falls in the Indian territory.

The importance to Kalapani to Nepali parties is to sensitise the public to the Indian aggression. The Kalapani issue not only threatens to mar the cooperative effort to develop the Mahakali River towards hydro-electricity but also threatens to nullify the whole process of border negotiations between Nepal and India.

61 Ibid., p. 37  
62 Ibid., p. 37
The Sardar Sarovar Project

This mega-project of multi-purpose dam construction on the river Narmada in Central India is one of the most controversial ecological and development issues that has gripped the country. The scheme based on the conception that mega-projects with multi-dimensional roles is the panacea for the energy problems has been a hot bed for socio-political conflict. The project is a ripe example of the neglect of local communities needs and views in the development equation and the state hard attitude bordering on repression against dissent when affected communities want to have their voices heard.

The Sardar Sarovar Dam (SSD) project is the largest and most expensive multi-purpose scheme ever attempted in India and perhaps the largest irrigation scheme on earth. The scheme comprised of 30 mega dams, 135 medium dams and 3,000 small dams, plus several canals and irrigation projects with an estimated cost of about US $ 12 billion. For the government both at the centre and at the state level it was a perfect development card to play taking into consideration the wide public support it would garner and hence a certain certainty of its vote bank. After all, the project was designed to provide drinking water to 40 million people, irrigate about 4.4 million acres and generate electricity.

The main actors in this mega project besides the farmers and local communities and the technical planners are the politicians. This project covers two states ---- Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat and both combined have 65 seats in the Lok Sabha ---- goes to prove that their
is much political mileage to draw. In India’s constituency based parliamentary system each Member of parliament (MP) has a clearly defined base area, for which he/she for all practical purposes functions as a resource broker.

The grass-root movement generated through the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) under the leadership of Medha Patkar and various NGOs has made a considerable impact in the concerned areas in Madhya Pradesh. The NBA had published a report showing that the mega-project benefited the rich, “it is clear that engineering and economic imperatives have driven the projects to the exclusion of human and environmental concerns.”

The World Bank (WB) which had given US $450 million in 1985 dropped the funding in 1993 at the request of the Indian government. The government through the effort of the NBA was clearly suffering from bad public relations. While the NBA gained ground in Madhya Pradesh, the politicians in Gujarat, citing numerous advantages of the project rallied to speed up the dam construction. In fact the mega-dam project has become a key factor for Shankar Vaghela a key politician and leader of the Gujarat State to regroup his party and exert pressure at the centre.

Power and greed are two factors that define the conflictual positions of the Sardar Sarovar Project. As Vandana Shiva says, “the whole free trade group of institutions, the TNC’s and development institutions like the World bank, who act on the behalf of corporations, because for every dam they build they are basically generating contracts for the turbine manufacturers and construction companies. Once there is that kind of greed behind any exercise, whether it is development or free trade, greed stumps out people’s chance of survival and people protest.” 64

While the basic foundation of the SSP is to provide services (drinking water, sanitation, electricity) in ways that are affordable, environmental sound and socially equitable, yet it has run in to considerable trouble. The project now is generating conflict at three levels:

At the Agencies (lending and development assistance institutes) level there is an effort to incorporate environmental considerations and social consideration into lending programmes.

At the Government level, individual countries power is being undermined through the Agencies to chart their environmental course. Yet national government retain considerable power to accept it or dismiss it.

64 Ibid., p. 285
At the local level grass-root movements are rapidly gaining strength. NBA represents this fact.

The Sardar Sarovar Project demonstrates that commitment to any sound development project depends on the political agenda. Implementation strategy depends on the dominant political ideology. If the dominant ideology today is economic liberalisation and the market, it is hard to foresee the government shifting from it. The NBA represents the other side of the development project and a conflict between the state is a resultant feature. It is not so much the environmental and social consideration that shapes the government view of the SSP but the 'dominant ideology' through which it assumes power.

The work on the Sardar Sarovar project, which was stopped in 1995 has been granted by the Supreme Court (18.2.1999) to restart construction. The decision has been welcomed by Gujarat, which was described by Chief Minister Kejriwvai Patel as a “fortunate day for the 4.5 cr Gujaratis.”

Indigenous Territories and Natural Resources: Jharkhand

When “economic imperatives” are imposed on territories rich in natural resources that is the habitat of politically subordinated indigenous populations, it can be observed that such “imperatives” are opposed by the indigenous population. Jharkhand in South Bihar offers a

65 Quoted in Pioneer, New Delhi, 19.2.1999
good case. The adivasis have been in the frontline of the battle for social justice and local control of the natural resources. The reason being that "development" has adversely affected them — natural resources (minerals and timber) are extracted from the Jharkhand region and delivered to the more developed areas and exported, displacement is rampant and exclusion from employment.

The adivasis struggle can be described as an expression of a "culture for resistance", developing in opposition to what has been described as a "culture of oppression" which operates throughout Bihar. Their struggle can be described as changing the politicised environment. The opposition politics of the adivasis are not limited to economic level alone but embrace realms of the social reality, which the mechanisms of formal politics and the state have subordinated to economic imperatives, and to the "higher" goals of a sectional "national interest". The struggle is in the widest sense — the defence of the physical, historical, social and cultural continuity. It also expresses a strong indictment on the dominant ideology of "progress".

That an environmental issue, in his case natural resources can be transformed into a political movement can be justified with the creation of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) in 1972. JMM became a potent force as much as a popular movement aimed at producing social and economic changes as well as demanding a separate Jharkhand state.

Specific social and historical meanings attached to a territory induces a sense of belonging and collective identity. Not surprisingly, the defence of land/territory appears as a key issue in the political discourses of indigenous movements. In India the "tribalist" perception has provided elements for the state to formulate functional ideology. This ideology serves to support and reproduce capitalist relations of production and patterns of power relationships as much as to also justify cultural hegemony.

Official category like scheduled or backward tribes (under which the indigenous population are catalogued) determines a "special" social sector with "special" problems", deserving "special" treatment. Ironically such treatment has been translated by the state to rapid "development" and in the name of it the objective situation gets diluted. Calls for statehood or autonomous regions are a direct result of the conflict between the approach of the state and the indigenous people opposition to de-historisation and deculturation.67

In the Jharkhand area all forests are marketable. Developing forests commercially means restricting use by local people. The forest policy of 1952 clearly states that village communities would not be permitted to use the forests at the cost of "national interests". Much of India's current environmental conflict has roots in policies adapted in the post-independence time. Increasingly forests in India became "reserved" for forest constituted a

fairly good net foreign exchange earner. In Jharkhand area the state government through the Forest Department introduced teak plantation by uprooting sal trees. Teak for the government had commercial meaning, it uprooted the tribal, destroyed their sanctimony that sal trees gave, hardened their livelihood — products like lac, honey and mahua came from sal trees. The Indian Forest Bill of 1980 gives the right to state governments to auction juridically owned forests of the government of India. This only encourages commercial monoculturists and timber tycoons.

The achievement of the state hegemony through the culture of oppression has led to counter-hegemonic practices by the adivasis in the region. Taking up arms and violent resistance has been met with ruthless police repression, many a times as a “preventive measure”. These repressive tactics can be seen as exercises in the theatre of power and as manifestations of the culture of oppression. Two incidents can be cited: the Ichahatu firing (on the Chaibasa-Goilkera road in Singhbhum) on Nov 3, 1978. The justification for the firing was that there were rumours that teak trees would be felled and bridge burnt; and the Serengda village firing on Nov 25, 1978 on an unarmed crowd as a response to the villagers symbolic cutting of some teak saplings.

In resistance to the oppression, the trebles started the so-called “felling craze”, a campaign in defence of land and the traditional forest. The felling of trees became the basis of the

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68 N. Sengupta,(ed.), *Fourth world Dynamics: Jharkhand* (Delhi: Authors guild Publication, 1982), p. 139
dialogue that Jharkhand Party initiated with the government. When that failed the JMM backed the continuation of the protest.

Thereon, the issue over teak became the centre-point between the state and the adivasis conflict. The issue transformed into a highly political one. The people’s confrontation with the government agencies culminated in September 1980 in the Gua massacre in Singhbhum.

On that fateful day — Sept 8, a procession of adivasis, wishing to submit a memorandum to the forest officials, was allowed to march into Gua to hold a public meeting organised by the JMM. The Bihar Military Police (BMP) sensing danger arrested two leaders and abruptly attacked the multitude. The adivasis replied by shooting arrows and killing two policemen. In retaliation the police opened fire. It was a counterpoint between power and subalternity, part of E. P. Thompson calls “a continuous theatrical style”.69 The tribal violent reaction was situational but the state oppression continued.

The Jharkhand shows that from different political and class angles, the adivasis have found their existence at risk. In the course of this struggle to exist, cultures of resistance are forged. The implementation of “progress” in Jharkhand has produced a situation marked by the poverty of development, what A.G. Frank called “the development of

underdevelopment". Uneven development is a politely academic way of saying, "war"70 and as Galtung says, "the more development, the less peace."71

71 J. Galtung, Peace and Development in the Pacific Hemisphere (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Institute for Peace, 1989), p.3