INTRODUCTION
AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT
A STUDY OF THE DEBATES IN THE CENTRAL LEGISLATURE
OF INDIA
1937 – 1957
INTRODUCTION

Socrates was the first to call philosophy down from the heavens and to place it in cities, and even to introduce it into homes and compel it to inquire about life and standards and goods and evils.

- Marcus Tullius Cicero, 106-43 B.C.

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

- William Shakespeare, 1564-1616.

OBJECTIVES AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM
This study is primarily concerned with agriculture as a subject of Indian history, approximately spanning two decades, one before and another after independence. The purpose is to delineate and understand the issues related to agriculture and environment as reflected in the debates in the central legislature of India during 1937-57. Therefore its objectives are to:

(1) study the role and place of agriculture in the national reconstruction;
(2) study developments in agricultural education and research;
(3) assess the impact of agriculture on the natural environment in India; and
(4) assess environmental consciousness and awareness in the Indian national opinion during 1937-1957.

This is, therefore, basically an exercise in agro-environment study. It is a truism that there is a circular interaction between 'environment' and 'agriculture': the former affects the latter in several ways everywhere\(^1\); the latter is the epitome of human intervention in the former anywhere; also, there can be no difference in the natural environment somewhere that doesn't make a difference elsewhere. This was true of pre and post-15 August 1947

---

\(^1\) Empirical studies concerned with ecological factors impinging on problems as varied as sources of differentiation among the peasantry, the agrarian context of labour migration, regional variation in the incidence of indebtedness, and factors affecting the peasant's price responsiveness in crop choice have been made in the ecological context. -S. Bhattacharya, 'Introduction', Studies in History, New Series. Special issue on 'The Peasant in Colonial India', Volume I, Number 2, July-December 1985, 159-167.

' Since not every soil can bear all things, one cannot grow the same crop somewhere, but the attempt to grow that anywhere would affect the natural environment; also, when Simla snows, Delhi cools. Eric Durschmied's essays on the impact of weather in The Weather Factor: How Nature Has Changed History (New York, 2000) are old-fashioned military history; all but two of the fourteen chapters consist of vividly written accounts of battle describing miscalculation and the dramatic horror of butchery and setting scenes in which rain, fog, ice, snow, and avalanches make the critical difference in the outcome. The
India, with the difference that pre-15 August 1947 India was a colonial India, neither sovereign, nor democratic, nor a republic, sans fundamental rights, sans the Directive Principles of State Policy* to guide the destiny of the fledging Republic of India: perhaps, therefore, it is unjust to say that the Constitution of the Republic of India was a blueprint of the British Government of India Act, 1935. Yet there was this fundamental blue part of the 1935 Act of which the fundamental spirit found place in the revolutionary -never before 26 January 1950 in the history of India- fundamental right to property in land.* As of yore, therefore, and as per the rhetoric of land reforms, and land-to-the-tiller of the left and the right of the Indian National Congress* during the long course of the open-ended Indian national movement, and the freedom struggle, land could still be acquired, held and disposed, ceiling or no ceiling. Therefore, the objective of the research work is to look at aspects of Indian agriculture, and their consequences, both natural and social, in the context of pre-republic and colonial India and post-colonial Republic of India during 1937-1957. As such, the decade 1937-47 is seen as the last phase of India's history of Politics of Power over Land and People, while that of 1947-57 as the first decade of the beginning of the Politics of Rights over Land and People: end of rajatantra* and the beginning of prajatantra.

• The Karachi Resolution of the Congress Party, adopted in March 1931, was the most comprehensive statement of the combined elements in the development of the programme of civil rights including justiceable rights, protection for minorities and principles of positive reform. Among the provisions of the Karachi Resolution were calls for land reform. –R.S. Gae, ‘Land Law in India: With Special Reference to the Constitution’ in The International and Comparative Law Quarterly, Vol 22, No 2 (April 1973), 312-328.

• Originally, Article 19(1) (f) and Article 31 of the Constitution of India contained the fundamental right to property, i.e., to acquire, hold and dispose of property subject to the right of the State to compulsory acquisition for public purpose by authority of law.

• The aims of land reforms changed from time to time. One of the persistent demands of the Indian National Congress during its early years was the extension of the permanent settlement of land to non-settled areas in order that the rights of landlords might be protected. It was only later that the content of these demands for protecting the rights of the agricultural labourer, the sharecropper and the small tenant. It was by these new demands that the character of the organization itself underwent a change. –R.S. Gae, ‘Land Law in India: With Special Reference to the Constitution’, op.cit.

• The Right Divine of Kings to govern wrong. –Alexander Pope (1688-1744).
Arguably, there is an obvious inadequacy in the notion that all that happened in 1947 was a 'transfer of power'. In Indian perception the attainment of Independence was a significant moment in the history of the struggle against British rule in the subcontinent. The representation of the emergence of independent India and Pakistan as transfer of power, solely an alteration of constitutional relations, tended towards the occlusion of that history.  

OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE

Inevitably, given the constraints of space and the vastness of the literature involved, this overview is not a comprehensive account of the range and depth of writing on India's environment over the last 20 years and more, but an insight into the politics, paradigms and changes within it. Any attempt to synthesize existing literature - far too numerous even to begin listing here- on agriculture and environment is bound to be incomplete with books written in different languages and on different themes that anything like an exhaustive treatise is neither possible nor useful. Without doubt, more books come within the scope of this research work than are referred to. In any case, no one can possibly know enough to encompass so much in face of the fact that for every historical topic there is always more to know; that any account omits more than it can include. “Historians must always select what is significant to the problem they address, separating that from a borderless context and seamless ramifications.”\(^3\) With due deference and apologies to the postmodern* scholarship, here the references are made more representative than exhaustive with the view to arrive at the “truth value” of the discourse in which this research study is engaged. Therefore, only relevant literature, mostly in English, though a few in Hindi, necessary to the understanding of the problem, up to February 2008, has been consulted.

Colonial legacy

Almost since the seventies of the twentieth century, there has been a dramatic increase in

---


\(^3\) Raymond Grew, ibid.

* According to Lyotard's definition of postmodernism as 'incredulity towards grand narrative', the 'post' in postmodern was not a matter of chronology but of attitude, an attitude that called in question the acceptance of any grand narrative as though it was secure against radical question or amendment. However, perhaps, an amendment to the grand narratives demanded a far more serious and quantitative attention to history.

Yet a serious reflection on history, on the interplay of the past and the present, seems to respond to Nietzsche’s meditation on history, on its uses and disadvantages for life: “A historiography could be imagined which had in it not a drop of empirical truth and yet could claim to the highest degree of objectivity.” – Patrizia Lombardo, ‘The Ephemeral and the Eternal: Reflections on History’ in Michael S. Roth, ed, Rediscovering History, Culture, Politics, and the Psyche, Stanford University Press, 1994, 403.
the academic work produced on the environment and environmental action in India. As

with work in political ecology globally, these analyses encompass a range of concerns

and approaches, and unavoidably any attempt to characterize this work is difficult.

Nevertheless, numerous themes and emphases of this literature emerge. Since the 1970s,

when environmental issues became a theme of global concern and politics, several

historians, in the case of South Asia, occupied themselves with the 'colonial watershed

thesis' -- debating and assessing ecological transformations brought about by colonialism.

The debate, focused predominantly on forestry, was broadly classified into two
categories: commercialisation of forests and conservation of forests. The first school of
thought argued that while forest resources were exploited for commercial purposes, there
was an appalling neglect of the forest-dwellers and users; the second school contended
that though commercialisation of forests occurred, conservation was also duly emphasised. For example, it was argued that the desiccation theory and forest conservation for environmental protection was shaped concretely in Madras Presidency during the 1830s and in Bombay Presidency in the 1850s. Further, commercialisation of forests, according to this school, was not an early nineteenth-century phenomenon, but widely prevalent even before colonial rule. However, although it is tempting to believe that the legacy of colonialism as a system of control over society and space, i.e., Politics of Power over Land and People, (i.e., rajaneeti) and consequent attempts to separate nature into protected areas free from human intervention were historical artefacts, perhaps, the legacy continues. Nevertheless, "alternative" conservation models, known as "community-based conservation", "community-based natural resource management", or "comanagement" attempt to rectify a preservation framework that historically excluded human populations from the environmental resources necessary for their livelihoods.

With a view to extend our argument, as also, by way of examples, we take below three eminent efforts, among many more, for review from a range of worthy publications on the subject towards the last decade of the twentieth century, including of course the pioneering.

6 The Geographical Review, Volume 93, Number 2, April 2003, 273-75.
Where writings on the environmental history of India are concerned, Ramachandra Guha is perhaps one of the foremost thinkers on ecological issues relating to South Asia. His *Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya* (OUP, 1989) set the tone for a certain kind of environmental history writing in Asia. Since 1989, when the book was published, environmental history writing concentrated on aspects of colonial forestry. In his illuminating study, *Fencing the Forest: Conservation and Ecological Change in India's Central Provinces 1860-1914* (1996), Mahesh Rangarajan analysed the colonial period. Exploring the evolution of the imperialist forest policy in the Central Provinces during 1860 – 1914, he argued that it was protection of imperial interests rather than conservation _per se_ that was at the heart of imperial forestry in India. Both Guha and Rangarajan, therefore, concluded that it was the exploitative imperialist interest, with all its logical consequences, which guided the forest policy of the British Raj. In a similar vein, Vasant Saberwal's *Pastoral Politics* (1999) argued that the traditional rights of the pastoralists of Himachal Pradesh were hemmed in by the alarmist degradation discourse of soil erosion leading to fear of floods in the lower reaches and loss of forest cover due to excessive grazing. In effect, perhaps, 'Pax Sylvana was coterminous with Pax Britannica.'

Similarly, in his *The Forest Problem in Kumaon* (1921), Govind Ballabh Pant summed up the forest policy of the British in two words viz. encroachment and exploitation. Yet it appeared that the policy was more of conservation of forests, mainly coniferous, rather than encroachment and exploitation. Perhaps, the British were well aware of the importance of forests. Yet C.M. Johri as early as 1940 reported about the ecological disbalance which deforestation caused. He commented that due to rapid clearance of tree growth, water became scarce and the discharge of springs in many places decreased.

---

7 Rohan D'Souza, 'Disparate narratives', *Down to Earth*, 31 January 2003, 46.
8 A study of the Chipko movement is commonly regarded as having founded the field of environmental history in India.
9 The forest conflicts of the nineteen seventies keenly influenced historical analyses of the colonial origins of state forest policy and the erosion of local rights. Likewise, the then ongoing conflicts over large dams prompted critical analyses of large irrigation systems as well as ethnohistorical studies of small-scale indigenous systems of water management. -Ramachandra Guha, 'Writing environmental history in India', *Studies in History*, 9, 1, n.s. (1993), Sage Publications, New Delhi, 122.
Therefore, the maximum revenue from the forests of Garhwal, for example and for whatever they might mean, even during the second world war was Rs. 3,80,316 in 1941-42; the revenue from these forests in 1951 was Rs. 10,03,522 although the forest areas were the same as in 1941-42. Moreover, a large wildlife sanctuary in hilly terrain, of which the valleys having taken over for agriculture/cultivation, dramatically reduced animal access to key resources located in valley bottoms -such as water, or particular kinds of vegetation. That there was a steady decline in the extent of undisturbed forest cover in the country over the past two hundred years is widely accepted. The causes for this decline were less widely accepted, although there was general agreement on some factors -the British demand for timber to meet demands imposed first by the British Navy and then by the building of the Indian railways; the demands from the two world wars; the post-Independence provisioning of forest resources to industry at highly subsidised rates. On these counts there is little debate.

In all these studies, colonial capitalism was squarely held responsible for initiating processes of resource depletion and social conflict, though scholars have pointed out that in the policies of the post colonial state these processes, in many respects, were intensified. In the Republic of India attempts were in full swing for an industrial revolution, so both private and public capital was encouraged to invest for an economic 'leap'. But this led eventually to 'socialisation of loss and privatisation of profit'. Howsoever it might be, but to many a generation of Indians brought up on R.P. Dutt's India Today, all this was merely additional, though, no doubt, invaluable information presented in inimitable prose verging on poetry: British rule was colonial, and capitalists, colonial or post colonial, wanted more than their share in everything. In that sense all

1983, 73. - F.C. Ford Robertson, a retired forest officer from the hills as early as 1936 wrote a book, Our Forests which starts with a French maxim - "Men find forest and leave deserts". He further comments: ".... simply cutting, grazing and burning, man's immemorial weapons in an unequal war, any two of which (and frequently all are used together) can soon ruin and ultimately wipe out the hardest forest that nature ever grew for her ungrateful children."
10 Ibid., 213.

these worthy efforts only restated/overstated/reaffirmed R.P. Dutt as they capture the central tendency of his method and substance. Thus, the process of depletion of forests and other natural resources during the colonial period may be seen as covered by Dadabhai Naoroji's "Drain Theory" subscribed to by the Indian national movement and the freedom struggle. This theory was based on an empirical study of the nature and consequences of the highest expression of politics of power over land and people, i.e., of British colonial politics of power over land and people of India. But this wheel of India's history came full circle on the midnight of 15 August 1947. From then on India’s history presumably began to move on the wheel of politics of rights over land and people. Accordingly on 26 January 1950, for the first time ever in their history, people of India rewarded themselves with fundamental rights, including the fundamental right to property in land. During the phase of politics of power over land and people in India’s history before 15 August 1947, there was legal right over land, which made it a commodity, a thing of exchange, alienable. The most question is whether fundamental rights are exchangeable and alienable? Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, one of the founding fathers of the Constitution of the Republic of India, and a legal legend, observed in the Constituent Assembly on November 4, 1948:

The most criticised part of the Draft Constitution is that which relates to fundamental Rights....In the first place, the criticism in so far as it seeks to distinguish fundamental rights from non-fundamental rights is not sound. It is incorrect to say that fundamental rights are absolute while non-fundamental rights are not absolute. The real distinction between the two is that non-fundamental rights are created by agreement between parties while fundamental rights are the gift of the law. Because fundamental rights are the gift of the State it does not follow that the State cannot qualify them.¹⁴

But the successful attempts to take the fundamental right to property in land to the court of law as a matter of dispute during the second decade of our study, and the eventual conversion of this fundamental right into a mere legal right*, perhaps, made all the other

*The right to property proved to be the most complicated and controversial. It had a very chequered history in our Constitution. During the various stages of the framing of the Constitution of India in the Constituent Assembly, the property provisions proved to be the most controversial and taxed the framers’ imagination, sagacity, drafting skill and the spirit of accommodation and compromise to the maximum. At last a consensus was found which each of the contenders interpreted in his own way. The consensus was embodied in articles 31 and 19(f) of the Constitution. But, even after the commencement of the Constitution, the property clauses remained the most contentious. They caused sharp confrontations between the legislature and the judiciary and necessitated several constitutional amendments. Finally, the Constitution (44th Amendment) Act, 1978 repealed articles 19(f) and 31 from the category of fundamental
fundamental rights equally exchangeable and alienable, and mere legal rights. But the Constitution of the Republic of India was written for modern times for modern India where not Politics of Power but Politics of Rights was to prevail. We all are aware of the environmental --natural and social-- consequences of politics of power over land and people: law stood mute in the midst of might all through history.

Consequences of agriculture: historical and ecological

However, the primacy accorded to forests in the contemporary environmental discourse in India was significant in both the historical and the ecological sense, because it deflected attention from an adequate environmental assessment of traditional Indian techniques of cultivation, i.e., agriculture. This discourse described traditional Indian agriculture and subsistence systems using terms such as 'stability' and 'balance'. But precisely what such terms entailed in an ecological sense was rarely specified. The fact that there were flows of nutrients between forests, livestock and fields was offered as evidence that the traditional system was, like a triangle, ecologically stable on all three sides. Working from the assumption that through this regenerative triangle soil fertility was renewed, the conclusion was advanced that the traditional production cycle, as a whole, was regenerative and ecologically balanced.15 This discourse also did not acknowledge that limited land and a growing population led to an intensification of the traditional farming system. Not the agricultural system but its intensification caused serious environmental consequences. Again, given the centrality of forests within this environmental discourse, it was perhaps not surprising that the colonial agricultural settlements were virtually ignored by it,16 although economic historians of modern India located the agrarian economy in its ecological setting, and underscored the importance of

---

rights completely with effect from 20 June 1979. Instead, in Part XII of the Constitution, a new Chapter – Chapter IV – and a new article – 300A was added to provide that no person shall be deprived of his property save by authority of law. Thus, the right to property ceased to be a fundamental right but still remains a legal right. Article 300A gives protection against executive action but not against legislative decision. –Subhash C. Kashyap, Our Constitution, An Introduction to India’s Constitution and Constitutional Law (1994), National Book Trust, India, 3rd Revised Edition, 2001. 134-35.


15 Subir Sinha, Shubhra Gururani and Brian Greenberg, op.cit.
16 Ibid.
soil types, climatic patterns and population densities in directing agrarian change, particularly in the colonial period. But this awareness of the ecological context, following the Annales School - whose ecological approach to history was influenced not by the environmental movement, but rather by the close relationship between history and geography\(^{17}\) - tended to see the natural environment as itself unchanging. Theirs was also a one-sided analysis of the influence of ecology on social structure, which omitted from purview the ways in which humans made sense of, regulated and fought over nature and natural processes.\(^{18}\) This study proposes to fill this gap with the aid of the conceptual framework given below as now environmental history writing looks beyond colonial forestry.

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The discipline of history has in the past century undergone an enormous expansion in methodologies of research and areas of focus, opening up fields and topics little thought of earlier, e.g. quantitative, social, gender, ethnic, cultural, subaltern, postcolonial, environmental, feminist, queer, health, food, medicine and leisure histories to name but a few. Yet history, written anew, can revivify our sense of the past by making the familiar strange, and the strange familiar.\(^{19}\) After all, “history is not only itself an enterprise of knowledge, its domain of study incorporates all other enterprises of knowledge, including the history of science.”\(^{20}\) Therefore, it’s worth considering here Jawaharlal Nehru’s caution in his *Glimpses of World History* addressed to his daughter, which also contained ‘a rambling account of history for young people’:

> If you would know the past you must look upon it with sympathy and

\(^{17}\) According to Ramachandra Guha, for decades French historiography has been keenly aware of the impact of the natural environment on social organization. Work by leading French historians, particularly those belonging to the Annales School, can easily be assigned to this category. Among an earlier generation, one can instance Lucien Febvre’s still valuable overview of the match between natural environments and forms of resource use, and Marc Bloch’s great work on French agriculture, a model of ecological analysis in its study of the integration of arable with woodland and pasture. Within the post war generation of Annalists, both Fernand Braudel and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie have emphasized—some would say too strongly—the impress of the physical environment on human life.

\(^{18}\) op.cit., 123.


with understanding. To understand a person who lived long ago, you will have to understand his environment, the conditions under which he lived, the ideas that filled his mind. It is absurd for us to judge of past people as if they lived now and thought as we do. There is no one to defend slavery to-day, and yet the great Plato held that slavery was essential. Within recent times scores of thousands of lives were given in an effort to retain slavery in the United States. We cannot judge the past from the standards of the present. Every one will willingly admit this. But every one will not admit the equally absurd habit of judging the present by the standards of the past. The various religions have especially helped in petrifying old beliefs and faiths and customs, which may have had some use in the age and country of their birth, but which are singularly unsuitable in our present age.

Revolution of 15 August 1947: rajatantra to prajatantra

15 August 1947 divides Indian history neatly into two distinct periods: pre-republic (pre-colonial and colonial) India, and the Republic of India. From this vantage point of view of India, the history of pre-republic India is primarily a history of empires - huge state formations that embraced either the whole or a major part of the subcontinent. Thus the pathway for India's evolution was mapped, starting from the demise of the Indus Valley civilisation and the advent of the Aryans, from the great empire of antiquity (the Mauryas) to the no less glorious empires of the early Middle Ages (the Gupta and Harsha empires), through the Delhi sultanate towards the Mughal state, including (mainly) the mighty state formations like the Chola or Vijayanagara empires of south India, and ultimately to the British colonial empire. In effect, historical explanations of regions in history have usually been a concomitant of the monumentality of 'empires' or outstanding dynasties that emerged there. Thus, the political canvas for the consolidation of state power in India all through history is dotted with empire building. In short, the history of India up to 15 August 1947 was witness to Politics of Power over Land and People that is rajatantra, including the British Raj-tantra, with their concomitant rajaneeti (politics of power). In this panoramic history of rajatantra in India from the

---


* Viceroy Lord Louis Mountbatten had chosen 15 August 'out of the blue', he admitted – it was the second anniversary of VJ Day, but nothing more significant than that. – Alex Von Tunzelmann, Indian Summer, The Secret History of the End of an Empire, Simon & Schuster, 2007, 200.

* Although the Republic of India was formalized on 26 January 1950.


Mauryas to the end of British Raj, 15 August 1947 is a revolutionary day; more correctly, a revolutionary ‘midnight’ when the world slept, and India awoke to life and freedom, and to prajatantra, a democratic republic. That night India replaced thousands of years of rajatantra, including the British Raj-tantra, with prajatantra: overnight a grand revolution occurred in India’s history: rajatantra, i.e., Politics of Power over Land and People was no more! That day presumably, therefore, it was replaced with the ‘politics of rights over land and people’: after all, it was the culmination of the motivations and demands of the Indian national movement, the freedom struggle, including the peasant struggles and movements. Spearheading and providing motive force to these struggles and movements, the Indian National Congress in its evolution since 1885 embodied the values of prajatantra, i.e., politics of rights over land and people. The entire history of rajatantra, where rajaneeti was ‘politics of power over land and people’ was replete with values that taught that ‘means’ justified the ‘end’. Overpowering the ‘other’ was the game played. But Mahatma Gandhi, in modern India, leading the national movement and the freedom struggle since the 1920s, in the ultimate analysis, talked only in terms of politics of fundamental rights over land and people, where ‘means’ were more important. He wished to work for “an India in which there shall be no high class and low class of people”24 He was pre-eminently a person of civil society. Two of his key ideas and practices, Satyagraha, militant but non-violent action in search of truth in action, and Sarvodaya, service on behalf of others, were civil society forms of action that provided alternatives to state solutions.25

As is well known, in rajatantra, albeit in the British Raj-tantra, the high class and the low class divide, in the ultimate analysis, had to do with the quantum of power over land and people. Therefore, the realpolitik of Politics of Power over Land and People, i.e.,

---

24 “The distress of the peasantry may be said to be the raison d’etre of the Congress.”- Mahatma Gandhi in Harijan, July 31, 1937.

Almost from the time the Indian National Congress was founded in 1885, Indian nationalists had charged the British with exploitation of the peasantry. They resolved that when power came to them, agrarian reform would be at the top of their agenda. Three programmes seemed critical. The first was the abolition of land revenue. The second was the massive expansion of irrigation, both to augment productivity and reduce dependence on the monsoon. The third was the reform of the system of land tenure. Particularly in north and east India, the British had encouraged a system of absentee landlordism. In many other districts too, those who tilled the land usually did not own it. - Ramachandra Guha, India After Gandhi, The History of the World’s Largest Democracy, Picador, 2007, 202-203.


rajaneeti was bound to be exclusive, bound to thrive on 'divide and rule', and, therefore consequently, bound to cause 'fear and hate'; on the other hand, the realepolitik of Politics of Rights over Land and People (of prajatantra), i.e., prajaneeti (politics of rights) is bound to be inclusive, and therefore, bound to thrive only on the principle of 'unite and live', and, therefore, consequently, bound to ensure fearlessness and hatelessness. This was great testimony to Mahatma Gandhi’s all-India but 'structure-less' mass mobilisation programme of action, in a 'structured' society, to conquer, not the British, but fear and hate. In the ultimate analysis, the Indian freedom struggle was not exclusive. *It was a means of realising the noblest of human aims: freedom from fear and hate. This freedom from fear and hate could be achieved only through non-violence. “Well, Gandhi came and he told them that there was a way out – a way of achieving freedom. ‘First of all,’ he said, ‘shed your fear. Do not be afraid, and then act in a united way but always peacefully. Do not bear any ill will in your hearts against your opponent. You are fighting a system, not an individual, a race, the people of another country. You are fighting the imperialist system or the colonial system’. "27 Thus, a major feature of peasant protest in the twentieth century colonial India was that it was increasingly an integral and inseparable part of the anti-imperialist movement, especially in terms of its ideology, but also by way of its impact and often even in terms of leadership and organisation. 28 But, unfortunately, even in (the prajatantra of) the Republic of India, 'politics' continued to be rajaneeti, the pursuit of 'power', not of 'rights'! For example, witness the various attempts in independent India to 'empower' the marginalised of Indian history, including women, tribes, castes and communities, the subalterns, and above all, the ubiquitous land

* The overwhelming all-India inclusive opinion was against British rule, inspite of the partition.
* Despite the much-quoted jest- ‘I think it would be a good idea’ –the Mahatma’s love for Western civilization was perfectly genuine. During the Battle of Britain this enemy of the British Empire had wept at the possibility of Westminster Abbey being burnt to the ground. – Ramachandra Guha, A Corner of a Foreign Field, The Indian History of a British Sport, Picador, 2002, 272.
reforms to 'empower' the landless, with the political refrain 'land to the tiller'. But 'empowerment' smacks of 'politics of power over land and people', i.e., rajatantra as opposed to 'politics of rights over land and people', i.e., prajatantra. Power can never be equitable rights ought to be. Politics of power celebrated the military and police instincts: in rajaneeti, one got to have a killer instinct; in prajaneeti, the instinct to live and let live. Our biggest failure in independent India was on the educational front. We failed to teach the generations of Indians born in the Republic of India that rajatantra (politics of power over land and people) was for the landlords; consequently, prajatantra (politics of rights over land and people) is for the landless; owning land was a matter of pride in the rajatantra; consequently, owning land automatically ought to become a matter of shame in the prajatantra; and that, in effect, politics of power, i.e., rajaneeti was essentially politics of conflict and, therefore, of competition for power. In the ultimate analysis, cutting of heads did rajaneeti (politics of power), counting of heads does prajaneeti (politics of rights).* In any case, however, the theme of power in colonial Indian rural society, not so much the formal power system, i.e., state power invested in the Governor-general-in-Council and the provincial governments and their agents at the district levels or further below, but the more intangible localised power derived from asymmetries of economic and social control over resources and men, leading to the domination of some over others in village India have been discussed by historians. Studies in the sociology of politics in rural India – particularly the ever-growing literature on the processes of political mobilisation of the peasantry – tell us a good deal about the power structure, especially in the post-1947 period. But the way in which the power structure impinged


* The partition of India in 1947, birth of Bangla Desh in 1971, Emergency in India in 1975, the Ayodhya dispute, demolition of the Babri masjid in 1992, the recent Raj Thakare’s venom of spleen are some of the recent landmark examples of politics of power over land and people in the history of India in particular, and of south Asia in general. Nevertheless: 'The home, as other scholars have pointed out, was used as a root metaphor for narrating personal and collective pasts as well as being a site for reformist intervention.' – Mary Hancock, 'Home Science and the Nationalization of Domesticity in Colonial India'. Modern Asian Studies 35, 4 (2001), 871-903.
upon economic activities (and vice versa) is less known.29*

desa-kala-patra: space-time-people

It is a traditional Indian concept that whatever subject, topic or theme one chooses to discuss in whichever field of knowledge, one must do so in the context of the person or persons who were brought to play on the stage in that particular space and at that particular period in time. The traditional Indian approach to history rests particularly in this 'space-time-people' (desa-kala-patra) concept in their essential interaction and interdependence.30 Keeping this historical tradition in mind, it would be worthwhile to look for continuity and change in 'agriculture' and 'environment' in the twin opposed contexts of rajatantra, albeit the British Raj-tantra, and the Republic of India, i.e., prajatantra in the debates engaged by the members in the central legislative assemblies of India during 1937-57. However, since like all projects on history, our research work is a study of the past in the present, therefore, the majority of questions discussed here would be affected by hindsight, 'whether through fuller knowledge, or through further experience and the transforming of old questions in new forms'.

According to Ramachandra Guha: "Inside every thinking Indian there is a Gandhian and a Marxist struggling for supremacy. The battle was joined in 1917, the year of the Bolshevik Revolution, also the year of the first satyagraha on Indian soil."31 In contrast, though, Karl Marx preached and, exhorting his followers, practised politics of power over land and people, Mahatma Gandhi preached and practised politics of rights over land and people. Howsoever interpreted, Mahatma Gandhi’s Theory of Trusteeship32, in the ultimate analysis, “is the surest method to evolve a new order of life of universal benefit in the place of the present one where each one lives for himself without regard to

* We still only think in terms of power politics. For example, the last (May 2007) election results of the U.P. legislative assembly are seen as 'the shift of power from the upper castes to the backward castes to Dalits'.
31 Ramachandra Guha, An Anthropologist Among the Marxists and other essays, permanent black, 2001, I.
what happens to his neighbour.” It may perhaps be helpful to remember here that both Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), though separated in space and time, functioned in political and social environments saturated with politics of power over land and people. No wonder then that Karl Marx spoke of dictatorship of the proletariat: politics of power could be only matched by politics of power; accordingly there were many nationalist leaders who held this view in response to British rule in India. But Mahatma Gandhi thought otherwise. Therefore since the 1920’s the mainstream freedom struggle, the Indian national movement, the peasant struggles, the peasant movements, the Indian National Congress have been preaching and practising as well as they can what the Mahatma taught, i.e., politics of rights over land and people (i.e., prajaneeti) within the larger arena of politics of power over land and people, i.e. rajaneeti. Politics of power is exclusive, politics of rights, inclusive; the one either crushed or absorbed the weak, the other was for the good of all, and universal benefit, sarvodaya. Therefore:

In India, as in Africa, Gandhi’s program went far beyond the struggle against British domination. His goal was to build an India that could govern itself. Therefore, he spent as much time training his countrymen in constructive work in the villages as in the effort to achieve national independence.  

**Traditional Agriculture in India**

Yet, howsoever, in the context of India, it is well known that a large part of her agriculture is practised under semi-arid conditions; that agricultural practices in India have evolved over several centuries of cultivation; that the practices also varied considerably across the regions having evolved in response to regional environmental conditions. And through most of her history, at least from the Nandas of Magadha up to 15 August 1947, it was essentially under the conditions of politics of power over land and people that all these agricultural activities in the different regions of the Indian subcontinent were performed. This no doubt affected both the natural and the social environments in particular ways, including the colonial way.

Examples of notable advances in agriculture that have taken place without the aid of

---

33 Ibid, 69.
science are to be found all over the world. 35 Similarly, everywhere in India agriculture was largely empirical, based on knowledge and traditions passed down over the generations, rather than on ideas from books. Everywhere it was chiefly based on local inputs. The water, the fuel, the fodder, the fertilizer; these were all gathered in the vicinity of the village. The land was tilled with a plough pulled by a pair of bullocks. The homes were built of wood and thatch fetched by hand from the nearby forests.36 Therefore, with a view to explore the consequences of agricultural practices impacting on the natural and social environments of India during 1937-57, the study has, within this conceptual framework, the following points to elaborate:

(A) INDIA'S TRADITIONAL AGRICULTURE AND ECOLOGICAL BALANCE

The extent of environmental change in India, due to agricultural practices, during and since the colonial rule is difficult to overstate. Because even in 1960, the agricultural sector employed in part or in full 74 per cent of the population; in the case of industry, 11 per cent of the population was engaged in small-scale and large-scale industries.37 Mahatma Gandhi liked to say that 'India lives in her village'. At Independence, this was overwhelmingly a country of cultivators and labourers. Nearly three-quarters of the workforce was in agriculture, a sector that also contributed close to 60 per cent of India's gross domestic product. There was a small but growing industrial sector, which accounted for about 12 per cent of the workforce, and 25 per cent of the GDP.38 Both together affected the ecological balance of India.

(B) BACKSEAT TO AGRICULTURE IN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY

Although agriculture is the epitome of human intervention in the natural environment, as well as in their own social environment, yet agricultural topics tend to take a backseat to studies of wilderness and industrial pollution, even within environmental history, perhaps

35 Albert Howard, 'Agriculture and Science', Presidential Address, Thirteenth Science Congress, 31 January-5 February 1926, Bombay.
38 Ramachandra Guha, op.cit., 201.
only because unlike industry, where the effect on the environment is direct and readily identifiable, the impact of agricultural development on the eco-system is more complex and ramified, in effect, perhaps all encompassing; also because the focus had been on colonial forestry where the natural environment was concerned as discussed above. The study proposes to highlight this aspect.

(C) INTENSIFICATION OF AGRICULTURE AND IMPACT ON INDIAN SOCIETY

Agrarian history shows that the demands of economics often overrode the constraints of morality and law in village cultivation arrangements; in some parts of north India, for instance, Brahmans did their own ploughing, and Rajput thakurs discarded their stereotypical image of indolent rentier pride when economic circumstances provided incentives. Such examples can be matched and multiplied from all other parts of the sub-continent. The ecological continuities or breaks in patterns of land use as a result of agricultural settlements have attracted much less consideration, this despite the fact that these settlements codified and institutionalised peasant’s rights and titles to their land under colonial rule, i.e., under colonial politics of power over land and people. Current research indicates that the ecological consequences of intensified traditional agriculture were not necessarily benign, and well preceded colonialism.

(D) ‘ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE’ IN INDIA

It will be anachronistic to use the terms 'Environment' or 'Ecology', as understood today, in the context of India during 1937-1957. However, the awareness that 'scientific research is the life-blood of economic progress' was amply reflected, more than a decade before the year of commencement of our study, in the inaugural address by the Viceroy Lord Irwin to the Indian Agricultural Conference held in Simla, 1st-6th October 1928:

Knowledge of the processes of nature must be progressively improved and applied in order to stimulate her bounty. Nature must be led, not driven; and if we, by study of her ways, lead nature by the hand, she will join hands with us in placing new treasures at our disposal. If therefore we wish the land to yield to us a harvest richer in measure and quality than what she does to-day, we must call science more and more to our aid. Scientific research is largely responsible for the agricultural prosperity of Java. The same is true of all nations with a developing and progressive agriculture. In this country, the improved varieties of Pusa wheat and Coimbatore sugarcane have added materially to the prosperity of the agriculturist in the wheat and cane-growing provinces of India. The veterinary work done at Muktesar has

40 Subir Sinha, Shubhra Gururani and Brian Greenberg, op. cit.,
saved and is saving the lives of hundreds of thousands of cattle every year.\textsuperscript{41}

In view of the above, this study, covering the period 1937-57, is divided into the following six chapters:

**Chapter I** Agriculture and the Colonial State
**Chapter II** Agriculture and the Nationalist Demands
**Chapter III** Agriculture and Concept of Environment in Higher Education in India
**Chapter IV** Researches in Agriculture and Impact on India's Environment
**Chapter V** Environmental Consciousness and New Trajectories
**Chapter VI** Conclusion

Pan-India agrarian concerns

As already noted, all through the period of this study land and agriculture, as well as taxes on land or agricultural income were among the subjects assigned exclusively to the Provinces \textsuperscript{*} yet a reading of the debates on agriculture in the central legislature of India during 1937-1957 reveals that the central legislators concerned themselves with agrarian questions of all-India character, asking for legislation for the whole of India, a reflection of the inclusive character of the Indian national movement and freedom struggle, particularly since the 1920s. For example, agricultural indebtedness and distress were all-India problems, and every province was affected and, more or less, uniformity of treatment was called for. Therefore on 24 September 1936 Mr. N.C. Chunder (Calcutta: Non-Muhammadan Urban) moved the Resolution Re Indebtedness of Agriculturists in the Legislative Assembly:

That this Assembly recommends to the Governor General in Council to appoint a Committee consisting of both official and non-official Members, with non-official majority, to enquire into the question of indebtedness of agriculturists of the whole of India dealing particularly with the following points:

1. to find out:
   1. the approximate total debt.
   2. the area of land which has passed from the hands of the agriculturists to money-lenders, the area of land mortgaged with money-lenders at present.
   3. To enquire and report on the remedies and provisions of

---

\textsuperscript{41} Proceedings of the Indian Agricultural Conference, Simla, 1-6 October 1928.

* Under the Montague-Chelmsford reforms, land revenue became a provincial source of revenues; and many a province, like Bihar and Orissa, lived only on land revenue and on the money derived from excise duties.
law up till now legislated in different provinces for their amelioration
and what results have been achieved by such measures in different
provinces.
This assembly further recommends to the Governor General in
Council that the said Committee be authorized to incorporate in its
report the ways and means and provisions of laws by which the
interests of the agriculturists could be fully safeguarded and thereby
extricate them from their present miserable plight.

Holding that it was not enough that each province should be left to take care of its own
agricultural indebtedness, he pleaded that it was an all-India question:

I am reminded that agriculture is a transferred subject. So are roads,
but does my Honourable friends suggest that the Central Advisory
Board for Roads should be abolished? Does my Honourable friend
suggest that the problem of road transport should not be dealt with as
an all-India question? ... In the British Dominions also, for instance in
South Australia a Debt Adjustment Act was passed in 1929 for the
relief of farmers. In New South Wales, the Crown Lands Amendment
Act of 1932 provides for the general writing down of interest
obligations due to the crown by 22 ½ per cent., and the Farmers' Relief
Act of 1932 was passed combining temporary moratorium with
positive State assistance. In New Zealand also the Mortgagers' Relief
Act of 1931 and the National Expenditure Adjustment Act of 1932
deal with questions of relief of agricultural indebtedness. In 1931 in
South Africa a Farmers' Special Relief Act was passed. So, elsewhere
in the British Dominions attempts are being made to deal with this
problem of agricultural indebtedness as a national problem, and I
cannot understand why in India it should not be dealt with as an all-
India problem.42

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Being a historian means to conceive hypotheses and to choose facts.43 Yet every
historian, however expert and objective, writes within the limitations imposed by his
sources and by the values that he unconsciously absorbs from the surrounding society.44
Environmental history, “the study of changing human relations with the natural world”, is
a fast developing field of historical enquiry and has acquired a new thrust and relevance
in recent years. Consequently, a plethora of questions have been posed, and answers
sought in a variety of innumerable sources. Can nature as an area of scientific research
help historians understand the dynamics of past? If so, how? The sciences of nature have
given us oodles of data on all possible dimensions of our material existence. They have

42 The Legislative Assembly divided. The motion was adopted. (Ayes-74; Noes-41.) Legislative Assembly

43 Patrizia Lombardo, ‘The Ephemeral and the Eternal: Reflections on History’ in Michael S. Roth, ed,
44 Michael Howard, ‘Introduction’ to Chester Wilmot’s The Struggle for Europe, First Indian Edition,
given models and new paradigms. What place should these have in historical thinking and historiography? How do the environmental ideas emerge? Are they socially constructed or they emerge from the top as instruments of authority and explanation? Contest and defiance have played no less significant a role. The Chipko and Narmada movements are recent examples. Environmental ideas have undergone numerous changes. "It was never linear. Its beauty lies in its truly 'world history' perspective. But it can also 'zoom in' when needed to explain certain special circumstances. One such special circumstance which comes easily to mind is the history of imperial expansion, arguably the most potent historical force in modern times." What impact this expansion had on knowledge and use of natural sciences? How did the latter shape the 'pattern' of imperial expansion? "The empire brought to Europe the shock of world's 'diversity', more so in terms of flora and natural resources. It held immense possibilities for commerce and power. One can easily justify the empire as an instrument of development. But here the key question is 'whose development'?" In politics of power over land and people, the answer is: for the powerful; similarly, during the British colonial politics of power over India and Indian people, the answer was: for the powerful British. However, the degradation of our environment is linked with the development process and the ignorance of people about retaining the ecological balance. Indeed, no citizen of the earth can afford to remain aloof from the issues related to the environment. It is, therefore, essential that the study of the environment becomes an integral part of the education process. 

The debates on agriculture in the central legislature of India during the period of our study (25 January 1937–28 March 1957) were largely concerned with 'Development' which must be seen versus 'Environment' simply because the ecological impacts of agricultural development as such cannot be isolated from those of economic development in general. A reading of the debates also helps us to formulate a number of research questions, all bearing, in one way or another, on the impact of agriculture on the natural environment as well as on the reconstruction of India during this period, and seek the most appropriate answers contained in them. The tenor and the spirit of the debates

reflect the tenor and the spirit of the Indian national movement and the freedom struggle, which had not certainly ended on 15 August 1947.

What was the association between the prevailing socio-economic and political systems that were based primarily on agriculture and the natural environment during the period of the study? What impact was caused by the colonial/postcolonial agricultural practices on the environment? What practices were available traditionally to restore environmental health? What conditions prompted the launching of the 'Grow More Food Campaign' in 1942? Was it ever also thought of in terms of 'produce less children' with a view to population control? Since population affects the natural as well as the socio-economic environment, was India's high population the cause of her poverty or vice versa? Was the labour required for manual technology of an agricultural society, slowly losing his rozi (employment) and roti (bread) to machines that could work more relentlessly than him? Were there any incentives offered in terms of guaranteed minimum economic price to the agriculturist to grow more food, because if he were to grow more food, the supply would increase and bring down the prices? What more areas, in terms of acreage, were brought under cultivation due to this campaign? What was the increase in acreage of different food crops? Was any cash crop land diverted to food crop because of this? Did this entail clearing of forestland for food crop production? What steps, if any, were taken so that cattle dung was not used for fuel purposes so that it could be used for manurial purposes only? Was there any scheme of developing quick-growing trees to meet the fuel requirements of the population? Were there compost schemes available to the farmers? What impact, if any, the import of food grains from abroad have on the agricultural produce of India? Perhaps this could have caused incidental hybridization of crops and plants of India? What were the environmental costs of the partition of India, and the consequent civil and political disturbances that temporarily overtook the country?

What percentage of student population studied agriculture and related arts during the period of this study? Were they taught to disseminate weather forecasts and warnings against floods to Indian agriculturists? What was the status of the science of meteorology during this period in India compared to the scientifically advanced West? What was the status of agricultural research in plant physiology and animal husbandry? What were the significant trends and results of research conducted by the Indian Council of Agricultural
Research during this period? Was there any perceptible difference in the trend, if any, before and after India achieved freedom?

Perhaps, the national leadership, under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi, whose oft-quoted maxim, eloquent of his ecological vision of life, that 'the earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed' were aware of the economic, social and spiritual importance of the environment to the society.*

PERIODIZATION: 25 January 1937 – 28 March 1957

Keeping in mind the ecological and cultural diversity of the Indian subcontinent, as also the perennially persistent question confronted in any historical study: 'what is the appropriate spatial context for historical analysis?' 48, this research work begins its analysis in 1937, when after the elections, held under the Government of India Act, 1935, Congress ministries took office in U.P., Bihar, Orissa, C.P., Bombay, Madras, and N.W.F.P., and by September 1938 in Assam winning 711 out of 1585 provincial assembly seats. By now the national movement had gone 'far beyond its original elite-intellectual confines'. So that by 1936 the Congress President could legitimately claim that Congress had now 'become the largest organization of the common people drawn very largely from the village population and counting amongst its members lakhs of peasants and cultivators and a sprinkling of industrial and field workers.' 49 The Indian National Congress in fact owed much of its success in the provincial elections of January 1937 to the agriculture related agenda of the Kisan Sabha, then functioning very much as an arm of the Congress, however independent its political positions were and would become. Out of a total of 152 seats in the Legislative Assembly, the Indian National Congress contested 107 and won 98, that is 65 percent of the total and 92 percent of the seats it contested. Approximately 75 percent of all votes cast went to the Congress. In the rural constituencies the Congress secured 68 out of 75 seats, significantly a function of Kisan Sabha campaign efforts, of which the basic or long term demands, accruing from agriculture, included the abolition of the zamindari system and the writing-off of agrarian debt. The immediate demands included the abolition of rent in kind, the exemption of

* Mahatma Gandhi of course was a vigorous advocate of the politics of rights over land and people against British imperialism's politics of power over India and Indian People.
uneconomic holdings from rent, the cancellation of arrears and the reduction of rent and canal dues by one half.\(^5\) [After all, peasant risings are traditionally tax rebellions.\(^6\)] Despite the opposition of the Congress and the zamindars to these positions in the 1930s, it is a matter of historical record that however weak its structural meanings, the first serious agriculture related reform legislated by the Congress Party governments after independence was in fact zamindari abolition.\(^3\) Whether or not the congress comprehended the little known world of the peasant, the fact remains that its election manifesto of August 1936 had played a vital role in securing the peasantry’s support in the contest for provincial legislatures.\(^4\) However, it may be observed that during the first decade of our study (1937-47), the Indian National Congress, and all other political parties, including the Muslim League, in the ultimate analysis, were revolutionary parties in the sense that they confronted British colonial politics of power over India and her people in their own ways with the avowed aim to overthrow it. This decade perhaps, saw the fructification of ideas latent in the freedom struggle of earlier years, the underlying spirit was the *anticipation of freedom* in diverse ways.\(^4\)

**Towards Freedom from British Raj-tantra**

The 1920s, in India, were witness to a most naked exhibition of politics of power over land and people at the Jallianwala Bagh in April 1919 since the aftermath of the 1857 revolt. Yet particularly since the 1920s, the non-violent radicalisation and popularisation of India’s struggle for freedom from British politics of power over India and the Indian people made bold the anti-British attitude. This attitude found, at times, expression in the Legislative Assembly too. For example, participating in the debate on the Resolution Re Agricultural Distress on 10 September 1931, Sirdar Harbans Singh Brar (East Punjab: Sikh) exhorted the Assembly to:

---


\(^3\) Walter Hauser, ibid.


help the agriculturists in the most distressing trouble which they have ever faced since the British rule in India, because during these 160 years the condition of the agricultural masses has gone from bad to worse, and now they are almost on the verge of insolvency....that unless the Government adopt these measures, revolution will come and we are in the midst of it. Let them now guard against it if they want to remain any more in India.  

Perhaps, the process of transition from dependence to independence set in with the 1937 elections in which the 'vote for Gandhiji and the yellow box' signified appreciation of patriotic self-sacrifice, plus some hopes of socio-economic change.  However, in its election manifesto of 1936, the Congress only pleaded for reform of the land tenure, revenue and rent without spelling out what the nature of the reforms should be. It was only in the election manifesto of 1946 that the Congress specifically put forward as its objective the removal of intermediaries between the peasants and the State and the acquisition of the rights on payment of equitable compensation as the first step in the reform of the land system. The events happening from day to day and the experience that the people of India were passing through confirmed the opinion that British rule in India must end immediately, not merely because foreign domination even at its best was an unmitigated evil in itself and a continuing injury to the subject people, but because India in bondage could play no effective part in defending herself and in affecting the fortunes of the war that was destroying humanity. The resignation of the ministries abruptly halted the pursuance of the Congress agenda, of clearing the way for the establishment of an egalitarian society. This led to widespread anger and disappointment in certain circles. Meanwhile the breach between the Congress and the government widened to such an extent that Mahatma Gandhi launched yet another civil disobedience movement in the autumn of 1940. Vinoba Bhave solemnly inaugurated the individual satyagraha movement by delivering an anti-war speech at Punaur, a village near Wardha. Nehru was arrested on 31 October at Chheoki railway station while returning from Wardha. From now on, Mahatma Gandhi would lift the anti-colonial struggle to new levels.

55 Resolution Re Agricultural Distress, LAD, 10 September 1931, op cit., 238.
56 Sumit Sarkar, Modern India, 1885-1947, op cit., 349.
57 R.S. Gae, 'Land Law in India: With Special Reference to the Constitution', op.cit.
* All through British rule, there was this thread of Indian dissatisfaction with imperial rule and the tactics employed by different Indian groups to weaken its foundations and diminish its credibility. - Partha Sarathi Gupta, 'Editor's Introduction' to Sarvepalli Gopal, Gen Ed, Towards Freedom, Documents on the Movement for Independence in India 1943-1944, Part I, ICHR/OUP, xvi.
heights by launching the Quit India Movement.\textsuperscript{58} Therefore, the exhortation during the ‘Quit India’: “Every Indian who desires freedom and strives for it must be his own guide urging him on along the hard road where there is no resting place and which leads ultimately to the independence of India.”\textsuperscript{59}

\textbf{British Dominion to Republic of India: New Political Context}

As conceptualised above, this period is also important for the efforts to consolidate India’s hard won political freedom as a modern Republic, given the inherited socio-economic structure that was fundamentally agrarian and pre-industrial. Moreover, the transformation - partly juridical, partly real, partly ideological - of people from colonial subjects to sovereign citizens suggests a changed moral context, as Clifford Geertz (1988) has suggested. Therefore, while India secured freedom from foreign yoke on 15 August 1947, ‘transition from a dependent to an independent status always acquires a new meaning in a new political context’.\textsuperscript{60} For example, N.V. Gadgil said in the course of a debate in the Constituent Assembly of India (Legislative) in the new political context on 17 February 1948:

\begin{quote}
I feel that after the 15th August last there can be only one caste - that of Indian - and one religion - that of humanity. But Government have to deal with practical aspects of administration and have no clean slate to write upon.\textsuperscript{61}
\end{quote}

In any case, the victory of Indian independence on 15 August 1947, at first as a British Dominion but carried forward as the Republic of India proclaimed on January 26, 1950, constituted a landmark in world history, and the fruit of generations of struggle of the

\textsuperscript{58} Mushirul Hasan, ‘Editor’s Introduction’ op.cit, xx.
\textsuperscript{61} Constituent Assembly of India (Legislative) Debates, 17. 2. 1948, 847.

\footnote{This was no mean feat. Dominion status had been seen as an unacceptable halfway house by Congress since its declaration of ‘purna swaraj’ (complete self-rule) in 1930, and by Jawaharlal Nehru, who had been behind that declaration, for longer still. It is a clear demonstration of Edwina’s extraordinary intimacy with Jawaharlal Nehru and her influence over policy. ‘I have often wondered how Jawaharlal was won over by Lord Mountbatten’, wrote Nehru’s close friend Abul Kalam Azad, the highest-ranking Muslim in Congress. ‘Jawaharlal is a man of principle, but he is also impulsive and amenable to personal influence...perhaps even greater was the influence of Lady Mountbatten.’ Where several viceroys and Sir Stafford Cripps had failed, Edwina Mountbatten succeeded – saving her husband’s political career as well as the entire process of the transfer of power. – Alex Von Tunzelmann, Indian Summer, The Secret History of the End of an Empire, Simon & Schuster, London, 2007, 193.}
Indian people. The period of Indian history since 1947, writes the political theorist Sunil Khilnani, might be seen as the adventure of a political idea: democracy in India’s history. Thus the Indian national movement and the freedom struggle continued, but in the new context. The first years of freedom were as full of dramatic interest as the last years of the Raj. The British had formally handed over power, but authority had to be created anew. Despite the triumph of politics of partition of power over land and people, partition had not put an end to Hindu-Muslim conflict, or independence to class and caste tension despite the transfer of politics of power, or perhaps because of it. Large areas of the map were still under the control of the Maharajas; these had to be brought into the India Union by persuasion or coercion. Amidst the wreckage of a decaying empire a new nation was being born - and built. The division of India was to cast a long shadow over demography, economics, culture, religion, law, international relations, and party politics; also on the sub-continental natural and social landscape, both politically and geographically. Whatever the geographical dimensions of India were in the Indian mindset and consciousness, these needed now to be reconstructed on the basis of the geographical boundaries of the Republic of India with effect from 15 August 1947. In the end, the nationalist movement was not successful in realizing its objectives in full measure, and the history of India’s struggle for freedom in the decade 1937-47 became simultaneously the history of the break-up of British India into the two sovereign states of India and Pakistan in August 1947. This climacteric decade showed rather how the British discharged responsibility for government in war as in peace, and more particularly the reasons for which, and the means and the stages, it was decided to transfer it to Indian hands. These twin preoccupations, the one administrative, the other belonging to the realm of haute politique, were themselves distinguishable in principle, even though in practice that distinction was often blurred, since administration could rarely be carried on

63 Ramachandra Guha, op. cit., xxii.
64 Ibid, xxiii.
65 Ibid., 34.
without some regard to political decisions or attitudes, and political decisions could hardly be reached without some regard to administrative consequences. Yet as the Secretary of State for India Amery wrote to the Marquess of Linlithgow, the Viceroy, signifying their upper most consideration:

Anyhow, it seems to me that everything in India is now subordinate to getting ahead with the war. Even from the political point of view the most important thing is to show to the world the absurdity of the Nehru parrot cry of an "incompetent Government".

Constituent Assembly of India

The provincial legislatures elected in early 1946, as well as the Constituent Assembly later formed from them by indirect election, were chosen on the basis of the 1935 franchise of around ten per cent of the adult population. A clear disjunction had manifested itself between the marked Hindu-Muslim unity on the streets in 1945-6, and the predominantly communal voting during the same months by the enfranchised minority, with the Congress getting 91.3 per cent votes in the general seats, but the League obtaining 86.6 per cent of the Muslim votes. In its talks with the Cabinet Mission, the Congress in its eagerness for a quick negotiated transfer of power quietly abandoned what had been a central political position since the mid-thirties, Constituent Assembly elected by universal franchise.

The proceedings of the Constituent Assembly of India were printed in eleven bulky volumes. These volumes- some of which exceed 1,000 pages -are testimony to the loquaciousness of Indians, but also to their insight, intelligence, passion and sense of humour. These volumes are a little-known treasure-trove, invaluable to the historian, but also a potential source of enlightenment to the interested citizen. In them we find many compelling ideas of the nation, of what language it should speak, what political and economic systems it should follow, what moral values it should uphold or disavow. The debates and their tenor are, indeed, witness to the members' wit, wisdom, serenity, and their honest sense of purpose, and responsibility. The Assembly met between 1946 and 1949, against a backdrop of food scarcity, religious riots, refugee resettlement, class war

---

68 Nicholas Mansergh, op.cit, Volume II, 197-198.
70 Ramachandra Guha, op.cit., 103-04.
and feudal intransigence. 'Fundamental Rights were to be framed amidst the carnage of Fundamental wrongs'.

Constitution of the Republic of India

With 395 Articles and 8 schedules the constitution of India is probably the longest in the world. Coming into effect in January 1950, it was framed over a period of three years, between December 1946 and December 1949. During this time its drafts were discussed clause by clause in the Constituent Assembly of India. In all, the Assembly held eleven sessions, whose sittings consumed 165 days. In between the sessions various committees and sub-committees carried out the work of revising and refining the drafts. Moral vision, political skill, and legal acumen were all brought together in the framing of the Indian Constitution. This was a coming together of what Granville Austin has called the 'national' and 'social' revolutions respectively. The national revolution focused on democracy and liberty -which the experience of colonial rule had denied to all Indians- whereas the social revolution focused on emancipation and equality, tradition and scripture had withheld from women and low castes. Therefore, the most likely justification for this periodization (1937-1957) is that by January 1950 a broadly democratic constitution was promulgated - despite many limitations, a big advance on British Indian institutions which had avoided universal suffrage till the very end. Princes and zamindars were gradually eased out, land ceilings imposed (though seldom implemented), the old ideal of linguistic reorganization of states was achieved in 1956, basic industries were built up through planned development of a public sector, and food production increased considerably in sharp contrast to the near-stagnation of the first half of the century. The duly elected first parliament of the Republic of India successfully completed its full term of five years in 1957. During these years the contours of the post-war world order, both political and technological, impressed themselves on the Indian leadership. Thus, with the culmination of the struggle for freedom from colonialism, independent India, suffused with techno-optimism, embarked on the struggle for freedom from poverty and want. Yet

71 Ramachandra Guha, op.cit., 105.
72 Ibid, 107.
73 Sumit Sarkar, Modern India, 1885-1947, op.cit., 454.
it was during this period that the western world had begun to awake to the fact that they had 'in some ways industrialised too far and not made the world happier thereby';\textsuperscript{74} that this process of development called for the ultimate sacrifice, Life, for the better or for the worse in the history of human beings, and, as such, of the natural environment. But, as Albert Einstein (1879-1955) is reputed to have warned: 'The significant problems we face today cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them'.

**DATA COLLECTION**

The focus of convergence of the primary source materials is fundamentally the debates concerning agricultural issues – particularly those relating to the impact of agriculture on the natural environment, though every agricultural activity directly and immediately impacts nature - in the central legislature of colonial (pre-Republic) and postcolonial (Republic of) India during the period of the study. These are available in print in the Parliament Library, New Delhi, and looked after by a conscientious staff. Foregrounding certain key primary source materials as may be gleaned from these debates - beginning from 25 January 1937, being the first day of the Fifth Session of the Fifth Legislative Assembly, cognate debates in the Constituent Assembly of India (Legislative) from 17 November 1947 to 26 November, 1949\textsuperscript{75}, as well as in the provisional Parliament w.e.f. February 1, 1950 and the first House of the People \textsuperscript{*} from 13 May 1952 to 28 March 1957 - and such references as made in the course of the debates in the central legislature on agricultural issues likely to impact the natural environment unless unnecessary, again with apologies to postmodernists, have been consulted. That is, the research work has attempted 'to winnow out the essentials' and to include everything that was significant in the debates to this study. Clearly, it was impossible to list all the reasons why something had happened, and as a result we have to choose what we are going to include, and also what we are going to exclude, by way of explanation.\textsuperscript{76} Since agro-environmental studies

---

\textsuperscript{74} A.C. Egerton, a visiting British scientist, in a broadcast to All India Radio on 2 October 1948; quoted in Deepak Kumar, ibid.

\textsuperscript{75} C.K. Jain, *The Union and State Legislatures in India*, Allied Publishers Limited, 1993, 4 -7. The Constituent Assembly (9.12.1946-26.1.1950) became the Provisional Parliament of India (27.1.1950-16.4.1952) and functioned as such until the first General Election based on adult franchise was held in 1952 and Parliament was constituted under the provisions of the new Constitution.

\textsuperscript{*} Named Lok Sabha w.e.f. 14th May 1954.

are inter-disciplinary, therefore, their sources are also diverse and, perhaps, as innumerable as the causes that affect the agro-environment. On cognate themes, therefore, much better people have written much better things, in much better ways, much before this study; and therefore, this research work is a synthesis of corroborative and supplementary ideas and opinions — those often thought, but never so expressed -- from the various primary and secondary sources referred to in the footnotes and the bibliography at the end.

DATA ANALYSIS

With the data collected, an analytical study primarily of the debates on agriculture

* But one of the undoubted attractions of environmental history is its ability to draw upon the insights and techniques of several disciplines, and then to combine them in novel and often provocative ways of its own.

* 'For such kind of borrowing as this, if it be not bettered by the borrower, among good authors is accounted Plagiare.' [John Milton (1608-1674), Eikonoklastes [1649], 23.] However, Shakespeare who wrote without knowing the Vedas: 'Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale Her infinite variety', could be charged with plagiarism, for, in the Rig Veda we find: 'Years do not age Him, nor months nor days wear out Indra.' [A.C. Bose, The Call of the Vedas, Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, Bombay, Third Edition, 1970, 5.] In any case, Shakespeare was not original: he borrowed plots and even thoughts. The thoughts were platitudes, and the plots nursery tales handed down from the infancy of the race. —C. Narayana Menon, Shakespeare Criticism, An Essay in Synthesis (1938), Mittal Publications, Delhi, Reprinted 1988, 1. Past and present are interwoven, and the present casts light into the past through the historical being who lives in his century and writes history. The historian is the measure of the past, the creator of history. Moreover the historian is not alone, buried in the dust of the archives, but works and should work with other people, dealing with other disciplines. Historical research, like scientific research in the twentieth century, should be collective. —Patrizia Lombardo, 'The Ephemeral and the Eternal: Reflections on History' in Michael S. Roth, ed, Rediscovering History, Culture, Politics, and the Psyche, Stanford University Press, 1994, 391.

* Lok Sabha questions are of four types:-

1. **Starred Questions:** Questions to which answers are desired orally on the floor of the House during Question Hour. These are distinguished by an asterisk.
2. **Unstarred Questions:** Questions to which written answers given by Ministers are deemed to have been laid on Table of the House at the end of the Question Hour and are printed in the day’s proceedings (Debates) of the House.
3. **Short Notice Questions:** Questions which can be asked orally in the House at a notice shorter than that prescribed for Starred and Unstarred Questions. These must relate to matter of urgent public importance. These are asked and answered soon after Question Hour.
4. **Questions to Private Members:** A question may be addressed to a Private Member provided the subject matter of the question relates to some Bill, Resolution or other matter connected with the business of the House for which that member is responsible. Supplementary Questions are asked on Starred or Short Notice Question with the Chair’s permission, immediately after the Minister has answered with a view to elicit further information.

In Lok Sabha, the List of Starred Questions is printed on green paper, the list of Unstarred Questions on white paper, the list of Short Notice Questions on pink paper and the list of Questions to Private Members on yellow paper, so that Members can distinguish these Lists easily. —Orientation Programme for New
impacting the natural environment engaged by the Indian national leaders in the central legislature of India during the period 1937-1957 has been attempted.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

In scope our study is a variation on the reconstruction of environmental history of India. It is now recognised that in many ways, environmental history is intimately linked to the development of agriculture since pre-historic times. And since environmental history writing is beginning to look beyond colonial forestry, \(^{77}\) therefore, the basic thread of our story here has been the transformation of natural ecosystems into humanized ones; that agriculture is the fundamental example of this transformation. Our viewpoint has been anticipated in a recent landmark study. In the first comprehensive global biodiversity evaluation programme, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, in its summary report, the biggest review of the earth's life support systems, baldly says that humans have changed ecosystems more rapidly and extensively in the last 50 years than in any other period of their existence. Also that more land has been converted into agriculture since 1945 than in the 18th and 19th centuries put together, resulting in a substantial and largely irreversible loss in diversity of life on Earth. \(^{78}\) Environmental history constitutes a major expansion of the intellectual horizon of history. The model of society that most historians and social scientists work with can be conceptually divided into four broad bands—the economy, the polity, social structure and culture; an environmental perspective adds a fifth basic category to this model—the ecological infrastructure of human society—i.e., soil, water, flora, fauna, climate, etc. Humans are unique amongst the world's creatures in their elaborately developed culture(s), but this does not exempt them from fundamental ecological processes. It is true that to a considerable extent, historical events and processes can be adequately explained without reference to the ecological context; yet in many instances they cannot be properly understood without taking into account the natural environment within which humans, like any other species, live, survive and reproduce. While the ecological infrastructure powerfully conditions the evolution and direction of social life, human intervention itself tries to reshape the natural environment

---

*Members of Fourteenth Lok Sabha (18 to 27 August, 2004), Parliamentary Questions*, Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training, Lok Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi, 3.


78 'Down to Earth, Landmark study confirms degradation of environment', *The Times of India*, Saturday, April 2, 2005, New Delhi, 16.
in its own image. It is this interdependence of the biophysical and sociocultural worlds that provides environmental history with its point of entry. According to some, however, history is only another word for ongoing evolution. Nevertheless, the main determinants of peasant agriculture are a) biological b) ecological c) institutional and d) economic ones that are interrelated in many ways. For example, the ecological determinant is closely related to the biological one as it refers to the biology of the environment within which the peasant worked. The pattern of rainfall, the quality of the soil and other physical characteristics that determine the kind of crop, which the peasant can grow, were of great importance particularly when agricultural technology and irrigation were at an elementary level. A comparison of a rainfall map of India with a map showing regional distribution of the major food crops demonstrated this fact very clearly. And history, albeit environmental history is important because life can only be understood backwards, though it has to be lived forwards. Again, history is important. Gareth Stedman Jones reminds us, not only with lessons to teach us but also with misconceptions to redress. The immediate nationalist aims of the Congress have long since been achieved. The protests of masses of the labouring poor, in towns and villages, played no small part in that achievement. What the latter had gained from the success of the nationalist movement is a question that many like Hori were still asking in the decades after 1947. The nation, for them, was yet to come to its own; though, agriculture is the seed and the root of the nation. Without doubt, Indian agriculture and related activities were forever reconstructing the environment, and as ever were engaged in the national reconstruction. Perhaps, nationalism was the highest expression of the exclusive right of a people to agriculture. Therefore, whatever theories of nation or nationalism or nationality or nation-state there might be, all of these had one common

79 Ramachandra Guha, 'Writing environmental history in India', op.cit, 124-25.
and universal culture that was agriculture.

**Twin Contexts**

Given the paucity or near absence of studies on the impact of agriculture on the natural environment in India, this exercise is a modest attempt to provide a preliminary mapping of the various dimensions of changing relationship of people of India with the natural world in the twin contexts of politics of power *over* land and people (*rajaneeti*) versus politics of rights *over* land and people (*prajaneeti*), through a synthesis of the ideas and opinions discerned from both primary and secondary sources. Their content and intent have been examined in the background of the different contexts of colonial and postcolonial socio-political environments of India: from a tax collecting and property protecting Government to a welfare State, from a pre-republic to a Republic, from *rajarajatendra*, including the British Raj-*tantra* to *prajatantra* respectively.