Chapter V

Everyday practices of GOs and NGOs: convergence and emergence of ‘the social’

Chapter IV tried to change the terrain of the discussions surrounding the state by providing descriptions of changes in the formal architecture of the state imbricated in the mission mode of state-fabrication in Kalahandi. This morphing has had many effects. One of the key aspects of such morphings of the state has involved the incorporation of civil society organisations such as NGOs into the body of the state. This has happened through two related processes: first, the formation of NGOs by the government itself (called Government Organised NGOs or GONGOs) and, second, using already existing NGOs as delivery mechanisms of projects.

The formation of DWM, Kalahandi, and more than 300 Committees in the district of Kalahandi for the delivery of watershed development projects and programmes can be located in this context. DWM, Kalahandi and the Committees are registered societies under the Societies Registration Act, 1860. These are more or less exclusively dependent upon governmental funding or funding controlled and routed through the government for their existence. Therefore, these can be termed as GONGOs. Apart from the formation of GONGOs, the projectisation of watershed development work in the mission mode of state-fabrication has also involved the increasing delivery of these programmes through NGOs. In WORLP, Kalahandi, three out of the six PIAs are NGOs. One the main effects of these processes has been a growing convergence with respect to the everyday practices of GOs and NGOs, and the emergence of ‘the social’ as a trope for such locating everyday practice.

The burgeoning literature surrounding NGOs provides the context for the findings summarised in this chapter and the broad arguments offered. This chapter engages with only two important and relevant strands of literature surrounding NGOs. The first strand
surrounds the growth of GONGOs and the second strand surrounds the growth of NGOs as service delivery agents of governmental programmes.

As already mentioned in Chapter IV, such incorporation of NGOs into the workings of the state has been studied as involving GONGOs that are formed by states to go get access to funds and expertise that are relatively inaccessible to governmental agencies and to venture out into unconventional areas of work (Chen 2006). These are generally more prominent in relatively undemocratic countries (Mulligan 2007). In the field of human rights GONGOs have increasingly started playing a role that ends up providing legitimation in international forums for countries with records of violation of human rights (Martens 2003). In China GONGOs occupy a heterogeneous space with respect to their legal status, internationalisation, and depth of influence. But often the work of these organisations in China has grown much beyond what was initially mandated by the state (Wu 2003). But of late these have started rapidly growing in number in democratic countries such as India as well. Increasingly the growth of NGOs and GONGOs is seen as a part of a global shift surrounding neoliberal governmentality (Sharma 2006; Gupta and Sharma 2006).

As already mentioned, apart from the formation of NGOs by governments, the use of already existing NGOs for various kinds of governmental action is also in ascendance in much of the Third World (Lewis 2003). NGOs and governmental organisations are no longer seen as being at loggerheads; they are seen as complementing each others’ roles in development (White 1999).

Development funds earlier administered through governmental organisations are increasingly funneled through NGOs (Miraftab 1997). They are increasingly seen as filling in important roles such as incubating innovative social programmes and in scaling them up (Pick et al 2008). This growth of NGOs as delivery agents of social services has to be seen in the context of the increasing criticism of governmental organisations as being wasteful (Sobhan 1998).
GOs and NGOs: convergence in practice

An important strand of literature that gives an account of the two parallel processes mentioned above generally tends to shift the discussions into the domain of politics. The growth of the service delivery role of NGOs is seen to result in the depoliticisation of development and a change in the earlier role as watchdogs of governmental action (Rahman 2006). In Third World contexts they are also seen as contributing towards depoliticisation of social movements such as women’s movements (Goudar 2010). In the Indian context, NGOs are seen as becoming central to the reproduction of statist ideologies because of the increased service delivery nature of their work even when they espouse an agenda of empowerment and politicisation (Kamat 2002).

There is already a growing body of literature that suggests that the formal procedures of governmental and non-governmental organisations have more commonalities than acknowledged (White 1999). Instead of trying to show how NGOs are becoming similar to the state organisations, this section shows that the increased incorporation of non-state organisational forms into the body of the state and the parallel process of provisionalisation of the state (detailed in Chapter IV) have led to the NGOisation of the state. This section shows this by giving an account of the way watershed development workers make sense of their work and the ways in which the organisations function, and particular forms of organisational practice emerge.

NGOisation of government: case of the review meeting

Within the first three months of starting fieldwork in Kalahandi I had occasion to attend a monthly review meeting of the governmental Project Implementing Agency (PIA) that was being intensively studied for doctoral fieldwork. The relevant PIA-in-charge at that point of time was Mr. Kundu. His home district was the neighbouring district of Bolangir, and like most other government staff on deputation to DWM, Kalahandi, he was from the soil conservation department. In addition to the 10 microwatersheds of the WORLP project, he was handling 23 microwatersheds belonging to other projects for a
large part of the duration of fieldwork. Therefore, when this review meeting was happening he had a relatively large number of staff under his command.

For this meeting I accompanied the PIA-in-charge from his place of residence to the office. Mr. Kundu lived in Bhawanipatna, the district headquarters. But his office was located in a rented house just in the outskirts of the block headquarters of Kumursinga. This office lay at a distance of around 35 km from his place of residence. Like his place of residence, the office was also housed in a rented house that belonged to a local, business-owning Marwadi family\(^3^8\). Whenever I visited the office, it was mostly empty of the staff. Once in a while one bumped into the odd secretary or the president of a watershed committee. Otherwise most of the staff was supposed to be on the field.

The office did not have much furniture. Most of the chairs in the office were made up of cheap plastic apart from a slightly grand set of chairs in the room reserved for the PIA-in-charge. In fact, the office gave out the impression of half-heartedness and as if the office staff was going to shift out sometime soon. Nothing looked settled. Investing in buildings and furniture in the district and the state watershed missions was discouraged as this was seen as ‘wasteful’ expenditure and creation of fixed assets was seen, more often than not, as a liability by the higher officers in the project. But this office was conveniently located and allowed easy access to everyone. Therefore, it was never completely empty of people. Every time one passed the office on the highway one would see at least a couple of motorcycles parked in front of the office. But the office definitely did not have the hustle and bustle one associates with government offices, and was more or less empty of stationery and files. In fact most of the files were housed in the home of Mr. Kundu, and on many days a young man who was the computer operator could be seen typing away reports on a computer in a corner of the office.

On the day of the meeting, the PIA and I left at around 10.00 in the morning when the meeting itself was scheduled around 10.30. We left in the office car, dropped his

\(^3^8\) Most houses that are rented out in Kumursinga belong to Marwadis. They form the richest and the most influential part of the population in the town.
daughter who studied in the local Central School for her examinations, and then left for Kumursinga for the meeting. By the time we crossed Bhawanipatna and were on the highway it was 10 minutes past 10.00. I started asking the PIA questions about his career and family, and he answered all my questions with an easy familiarity. He also asked me questions about my educational background and my family which I answered. The highway was in terrible shape and it took us nearly 90 minutes to clear a 35 km stretch; we reached the office only around 11:45.

By that time a large number of the staff, around 20, had arrived, but not everyone had reached. So the meeting did not start immediately. We waited for the rest of the staff to arrive. The mood was raucous. There were people milling around, joking, staff of the opposite sex flirting with each other, and guys horsing around. It came to me as something of a shock. It did not feel like the review meeting of a government organisation at all. It felt like the experience-sharing workshop of some middle-sized grassroots NGO. By the time everyone arrived and the meeting started it was around noon. The attendance was more or less full and there was a shortage of chairs, so some people sat on the window ledge. And the meeting then started in earnest. First attendance was taken in an informal manner. Two of the important project staff, a Livelihood Support Team member and a Watershed Development Team member, were on leave.

Just before the meeting started, Mr. Kundu went out to take a call on his mobile phone. In the meanwhile, everyone started talking about the strike that they had in February 2009. Before starting fieldwork in the watershed mission in Kalahandi, a scoping exercise was done regarding the work of the district administration in Kalahandi. On one of the visits to the Kalahandi district collector’s office, I had seen a group of people sitting in dharna in front of the gate of the collector’s office with their representatives giving rousing speeches. It was the WDT staff agitating for better salaries and permanent postings. Later in informal interactions with the officers in charge of the PIAs, it came out that they in fact sympathised with most of the demands of the staff, but

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39 This was another feature of review meetings of the watershed mission. In every meeting there seemed to be a shortage of chairs. Everyone complained about it, but no one seemed to want to do anything about it.
40 Dharna is a sit in for a protest. It is often used by striking workers as a tactic.
some demands, especially that of becoming permanent employees of DWM, Kalahandi, were seen as a little unrealistic. By the time of this review meeting, the strike had been withdrawn and things had settled down. In fact, a large number of the staff had not participated in the strike. Now a large part of the conversation in the absence of Mr. Kundu in the room was around whether the salaries of those who had participated in the strike and had not reported for work would be deducted or not.

One of the most surprising things for me was the way the lunch was conducted. Food for everyone, including me, was ordered from a restaurant close by. Those who wanted vegetarian food had to specify their order. Most people preferred and ordered non-vegetarian food. Later one WDT member told me that most of them would not turn up for review meetings regularly without the promise of free non-vegetarian meals. Dheeraj, a WDT member of the PIA, took the responsibility of getting the meals to the office. Two of the other staff also went with him to help. It took Dheeraj a long time to get back. By the time he returned, the meeting was about to get over, and he had missed most of the meeting. With the arrival of food, everyone started getting fidgety and things were wrapped up soon.

Since there were no tables, and there was a shortage of chairs all of us sat on the ground and started eating from our lunch packets. After 10 minutes or so, Mr. Kundu and the other officer also came and joined us for lunch. There was pleasant banter between the officers and the other staff. Mr. Kundu was pleasantly needling those who had participated in the strike. They also were ribbing him about not getting paid for the days on which they had struck work because after the strike they had worked overtime and had achieved the targets for the month.

What surprised me was that there was little of the overall symbolic and material hierarchy that operates in most government organisations (Singhi 1974; Dwivedi et al 1989; Kumar and Kant 2005; Gould 2010). Mr. Kundu had gotten the same meal packet as the rest of the staff and he also joined everyone in having food sitting on the floor when he could easily have had food in his room on the table. This was not merely true of
this particular review meeting. All the review meetings I attended at various levels of DWM, Kalahandi were characterised by an overall culture of informality. The officials seemed accessible to both lower-level project staff and members of the community. In the case of the DWM, Kalahandi, there seems to be a convergence of the organisational cultures of GO and NGO PIAs, with the governmental ones increasingly adopting the organisational culture of NGOs. This has to be seen in the context of academic literature that sees the culture of NGOs as being more accessible and informal compared to that of governmental organisations (Sooryamoorthy and Gangrade 2001; Lewis and Siddiqi 2003).

Comparing GO and NGO PIAs: staffing and contractualisation

Descriptions offered in the previous sub-sections point at the fact that government organisations working in the mission mode of state-fabrication have in many ways started resembling the ways of functioning of NGOs. There are other related processes through which there has been a convergence between the functioning of GOs and NGOs. One of these ways has been the staffing pattern and the contractualisation of work. This is borne out by an examination of the staffing pattern of the DWM, Kalahandi, and the two PIAs.

The PD, Mr. Nag, was on deputation from the soil conservation department. Two APDs (Additional Project Directors) were also on deputation from government departments. The APDs are supposed to support the PD’s work on various thematic areas, such as finance, and natural resource management. The PD was also supported by the CBT (Capacity Building Team). During most of the period of fieldwork there were three CBTs; two of the CBTs were drawn from the open job market and they had substantial experience in the NGO sector in Odisha. Although the third CBT was also hired through open competition, he was drawn from the horticulture department.

In the NGO PIA, the PIA-in-charge was drawn from the NGO sector. He had done a masters’ level course in development management, and after passing out he had spent most of his time working in the watershed/natural resources management sector.
Prior to joining as a PIA, he had worked close to five years with a leading NGO in Odisha in the sector of watershed development. Towards the beginning of fieldwork, there was no WDT engineer with the organisation, but within a few months an engineer joined whose training was in the trade of civil engineering. He had experience in the corporate sector, the NGO sector and had worked with the government as well. The accountant was from a village in the project area of WORLP. He had a B.Com degree and had worked for a few years as a secretary for one of the Committees. Sudhir Padhan, WDT Social at the NGO PIA was a BA in economics, and had also worked as the secretary of the Committee of his village. One of the community organisers (CO) had a BA from a local college. His primary work experience had been working as a labourer and then as a supervisor at a garment factory in Uttar Pradesh. For most of the period of fieldwork, there was only one LST member in the PIA. For the first half it was Hara (LST member, livelihoods). For most part of his career (after a correspondence Master’s degree from Utkal University in sociology), he had worked with a leading voluntary organisation in Bhubaneswar, the capital of Odisha. The second LST member was also drawn from the NGO sector. For a couple of months, both the LST members worked in the organisation and then Hara quit to join another watershed project as an LST member in a neighbouring district with a GO PIA.

The GO PIA-in-charge had two LST members all throughout fieldwork. One of them was a PhD degree holder in sociology from Utkal University, Bhubaneswar. Prior to joining the WORLP project he had worked for nearly two and a half years in a leading NGO of Kalahandi. The other one was from Western Odisha, from Nuapada district. He had substantial work experience with a leading NGO from Western Odisha for more than eight years, out of which a significant amount of time was spent in supervising watershed-related interventions. For a large part of the period of fieldwork, the CO was also drawn from the NGO sector and belonged to coastal Odisha. Nirakar, the WDT social, had a Master’s degree in sociology from Utkal University, and had prior experience as a teacher and as a community worker for an NGO. The WDT engineer had worked for a leading NGO of the region in a neighbouring district before joining the GO PIA.
As these short profiles of the staff of both the GO and the NGO PIAs show, a large number of all of these people had worked with projects (apart from WORLP) that had significant investments by the government. This kind of experience base of the staff seems to be representative. All of them, apart from the staff of the line departments who were on deputation, were working on the project as contractual staff. It also must be mentioned here that although the WDT members of CDI, the NGO PIA, received their salaries from WORLP, they ended up doing work for the other projects and initiatives of the organisation as well. Thus, the WDT staff at the NGO PIA were as much the workers of the NGO as they were workers of a governmental project, i.e. WORLP.

One of the results of this contractualisation of work has meant that there is a significant turnover of staff. The project’s guidelines demanded that the WDT engineer must be a degree holder; many posts remained vacant. Alternatively one had to hire relatively incompetent people or see engineers leaving the project on a regular basis. Towards the beginning of fieldwork in the field sites of the NGO PIA, there was no WDT engineer with the organisation. Estimates of earth-work and other kinds of work are mandatory according to the project guidelines of WORLP. As a result, progress of work, especially NRM-related work, was happening at a very slow pace. An engineer joined for a few months, but he also left after getting better opportunities in the corporate sector elsewhere in Odisha. The WDT engineer in the government PIA in Kumursinga was widely perceived as incompetent and rarely ventured into the field for work. But due to the non-availability of engineers, he was not thrown out of work. There was also some lateral movement of staff within the WDM, Kalahandi.

The experience of convergence

This sub-section flows up from the insights gained from the earlier discussions in this chapter and tries to answer this question—if there is an increased convergence between
the everyday practices of GO and NGO PIAs in DWM, Kalahandi, then how do the beneficiaries experience such a convergence?\textsuperscript{41}

The way villagers saw the watershed staff did not vary much across the GO and the NGO PIAs. Although the villagers saw ‘the watershed’ as a government project, the way they related to and interacted with the watershed staff was different from their interactions with officials from other kinds of governmental organisations especially from the line departments such as Revenue Department. For example, almost all Committee members had the mobile number of the PD, DWM, Kalahandi. I often saw them calling up the PD even slightly late in the evening (say around 8.00 pm) and discuss minute details of the work of the Committees. This kind of access to a higher government official would not be possible in most line departments, and villagers often remarked about this. On being asked which departments staff visit the villages the most, most villagers invariably replied that it was the watershed staff. This familiarity seems to have resulted in contempt for the officials. I often saw village-level functionaries of the Committees complain about PIAs-in-charge in a roundabout fashion to the PD even when the concerned officer was around. Villagers seem to have started treating officials, even middle-level ones, of a government project, in a very familiar fashion.

\textit{Case of a committee meeting}

To illustrate this, details of what transpired in a monthly Committee meeting in the village of Kusumpadar may be pertinent. We were sitting around in the office of the Committee in the village of Kusumpadar on a hot Tuesday afternoon. At the time scheduled for the beginning of the meeting only three of us were there: the Secretary Mr. Kulamani Sahu, a member of the Committee and I. It was already 12.30 pm, when the meeting was supposed to start at noon. The office was a small room just outside the home of the secretary, and he had rented it out to the Committee for a sum of Rs 200. The room had a low-sloping roof with tiles and on that day, it looked particularly disheveled. It was

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{41} For quantitative data on comparisons of people’s experience with the state as framed through WORLP please refer to Appendix 5.}
full of gunny sacks packed with rice, and there was hardly any space left for sitting. We were sitting on all the three chairs available, with a charpoi lying askew, leaning on the wall.

The fourth person to arrive was Mr. Routray, a retired government official who now worked as a WDT member for the governmental PIA. He was more than 65-years-old during fieldwork, and had been working with the PIA for WORLP from the very beginning of the project in the district. He was jovial, and generally did not allow most things to ruffle him. He was generally perceived by the committee members as being negligent, and as not paying enough attention to his work. For example, one of the chief grudges of committee members was that although Sundays and other holidays were convenient days for most of them to have meetings, they never took place on those days in Kusumpadar. Mr. Routray had made it very clear to the Committee that he would not turn up on holidays if he were to be called.

When he landed up in the committee office that Tuesday, I got up and greeted him. No one else did, and the secretary very reluctantly offered him a chair that was broken. Since I had already gotten up, I offered my chair to Mr. Routray, and after having pulled the charpoi down sat on it. After the initial greetings and pleasantries got over, Mr. Routray asked the secretary about work, and the latter started complaining about the president and his general non-cooperation in implementing the works of the Committee. Around this time, Sarang Sahu (a committee member and a relative of the secretary) entered the room and greeted Mr. Routray. Then he [Sahu] suddenly flared up and shouted, “This constantly blaming others has to stop. I am sick and tired of hearing excuses of why the work is not happening. Now I want to see work. I don’t care for anyone—the secretary can go to hell, the president can go to hell, the point person [referring to Mr. Routray] can go to hell, even the PIA and the PD can go to hell. It does not really matter. If responsibilities are not fixed today regarding why work is not taking place, and we do not figure out mechanisms to ensure work, I am going to lock the president, the secretary and the point person in this room and go. I do not care what happens after that.” By the time Sarang Sahu was done with his tirade, a couple of other
committee members had turned up as well as a group of five women SHG members who had come to apply for a loan. This was not a stray incident, and there were many such instances.

Not many people would dare to do so with respect to a staff from a line department such as Revenue or Forest (Gupta 1995; Kumar and Kant 2005). This is despite the fact that the villagers do see ‘the watershed’ as a government project, and the staff of the project as governmental staff. Most of the PIA-level watershed staff felt resentful about the fact that despite working for the government they were not getting the due respect and deference from the project beneficiaries and the village-level functionaries of the watershed mission.

For example, Nirakar would perpetually complain that nobody offers him even a glass of water when he visits people for work in their houses; he resented having to ask for water. Similarly Mr. Routray would complain that people did not wait for him when he had to do some work with them. He also resented the fact that he had to keep on waiting for the secretaries and presidents to turn up for work. Thus, not only have the everyday practices of governmental organisations changed under the mission-mode of state-fabrication, but villagers cognise these changes and respond to governmental staff in a differential manner.

The first sub-section of the preceding section showed that in some key respects such as informality of the workplace and accessibility to the communities, government organisations in the mission mode of state-fabrication have started behaving like NGOs. A key aspect of such convergence has been the contractualisation of work in the mission-mode of state-fabrication, and the lateral flow of personnel between GOs and NGOs. This has meant that staff of the governmental project under study are no longer objects of respect and fear, and the erstwhile awe accorded to government officials has decreased.
Mission mode of state-fabrication and the emergence of the social

The preceding section of this chapter discussed how the mission mode of doing government and the attendant growth of the quotidian logistics of state-fabrication can be understood through the trope of convergence between governmental organisations and non-governmental organisations. The present section presents another such trope—the emergence of ‘the social’ as a site and object of state-fabrication. This is counter-posed against the narratives surrounding political society that have tried to account for processes of multiplication of technologies of governmentality and the simultaneous morphing of the state (Chatterjee 2004). In this formulation, Chatterjee argues that the domain of negotiation and claim-making with the state that the various subaltern social groups engage with maps out on the terrain of political society, the domain of civil society being the preserve of rights bearing ‘citizens’.

This section argues that we need to shift the terms of discourse from claim-making upon the state (political society being the domain which helps us locate such claim-making by communities) to the state itself. If we do this, then one sees that there has been the growth of the social as a trope of governmental action in the ways such action takes place and the ways in which it is understood. The watershed-plus approach of WORLP as operationalised under the mission-mode of state-fabrication in the DWM, Kalahandi, can be seen as a way in which the state is being socialised and being embedded deep inside village society. The way the project is structured—with all the work supposed to be happening through the village-level Committees—is itself a significant move at socialisation. This change has meant that ‘the social’ is being incorporated through certain institutional assemblages such as microwatershed development committees, SHGs, and user groups. This is evident in the way in which the project staff of WORLP perceive the emergence of the social as an increasingly important domain of intervention for the state.

As mentioned in Chapter II, a significant aspect of the mission mode of state-fabrication has involved the growing importance of social technologies. The growth and
deployment of these technologies and their imbrication with village society under the quotidiano logistics and the tactics (as detailed in Chapter IV) has engendered the emergence of the social as a site, trope and object of governmental action.

The perceived importance of ‘the social’

It was a warm day in March—one of those days when one feels that spring in Odisha is not a concoction of the imagination of a slightly delusional poet. There was not even a nip of coolness in the air, but neither was it hot. I was travelling inside an old, ratty ambassador car with Mr. Mahanty, a WDT member working with one of the governmental PIAs, to attend a meeting of a Committee. The previous month the meeting could not take place due to a lack of quorum. This time the secretary had sent an emergency notice to all the committee members to attend the meeting, and Mr. Mahanty was hoping that the meeting would take place.

He was a reticent man and spoke slowly emphasising every word that he uttered. He was curious about me and my research, and after the initial pleasantries, he looked at me in amusement and said, “Your work sounds interesting; during our student days we could not even think that such kind of work was possible.” After talking for some time about his masters dissertation, his interest in research and his regret in not having followed a career in research, he said, “These days ‘social’ is very important.” He gave the example of the watershed mission, and said, “See, at every level of the project there is some social person; at the district level there is a social CBT member, at the PIA level there is a WDT social and at the village level there is a CLW social. Recently they are thinking about eliminating the posts of the CLW, but one hears that the post of the CLW social will remain. This is only to be expected. When I started working many years back, it was just about doing technical work and distributing stuff. Now it’s all about motivating people. When we started working, we never thought that things will come to such a pass. Now we have to be servile to these ignorant villagers to get their own work done. Not that I mind it too much. It’s after all people’s work. But I am not used to this,
that’s all that’s there to it. Now for young people such as you, this new focus on the social is of course an opportunity.”

As mentioned earlier, this focus on the social is not merely there in the narratives that the project staff tell one another and to other curious observers such as this researcher. It is there in the very architecture of the project itself, including the way the accounting heads of the project work. There are heads that are generally perceived as ‘technical’, while others are perceived to be ‘social’; the technical heads are NRM and Community Development Fund (CDF) and the ‘social’ heads are RF (revolving fund) and grant. The money budgeted under the RF head was mandated to be given to SHGs. The tasks of the WDT social and CLW social, along with those of some of the LSTs, were supposed to focus on the work of the SHGs and other aspects of livelihood enhancement, such as making sure that the livelihood grants were put to productive use.

**The social as ‘messy’**

The ‘social’, in many accounts of work given by staff of the project, was seen as something messy. Once, in the NGO PIA, all the staff, apart from the PIA himself and the WDT engineer, had gone on leave because of a long weekend. The work in the village of Kalampadā has been stuck for quite some time now, and even the committee meetings were not taking place. The secretary of Kalampadā had fixed up the meeting at a time when the meeting of another Committee was also taking place. Thus, the PIA went to attend the meeting of the other village, and sent the WDT engineer to Kalampadā, along with me.

This WDT member was very reluctant to go, and we left a little late. For a change, when we arrived in the venue, the village school, everyone was already there including the president and the secretary. When the meeting started it came out that the reason for the stalemate in the work of the Committee was something relatively small, but something that was symbolically a big issue. One of the committee members who had taken the contract as the head of a user group to construct a drain in one of the hamlets of
the village (as a community development initiative through WORLP) had apparently
done substandard work, and had overcharged the Committee. The problem was that he
had refused to share the spoils with anyone else. In the meeting, people almost came to
blows, but the WDT member did nothing to diffuse the situation. Ultimately the relevant
Committee member agreed to donate a couple of thousand rupees to a temple that was
being constructed in the village, and agreed to give bricks for the construction of a
platform around a big tree in a public place for the use of everyone.

On the way back to the office when the WDT member was asked as to why he did
not intervene in the meeting at all, he said, “It’s beneath me to get embroiled in village
politics; I am much better off dealing with estimates. Merely because the relevant staff
are absent, I need not deal with all this messy social work.” He then gave a comparative
account of the work he had done in the same block, but with a government PIA as an
engineering WDT member in another project. According to him, that project did not
focus on the ‘so-called’ social aspects of work that much and, therefore, the ‘real’ work
happened in a much more efficient fashion. He gave the example of the village Laimerā
where he had constructed three water harvesting structures on a single stream, and he
referred to this work as a ‘visible’ piece of work that people still remember him for.

This was not an isolated case. The discomfort of the engineering staff in dealing
with non-technical/social aspects of the project was very much evident in the way they
did not want to fill in for social WDT members when the latter were on leave. Even
senior project staff, especially some officers drawn from the soil conservation
department, saw the overtly social aspects of the project as ‘messy’. Many times in
interviews they would voice concerns about the deteriorating quality of the ‘technical’
aspects of the work because of the need to factor in what they termed as ‘social
concerns’. Thus, ‘the social’ was construed as something messy due to the fact that it
was difficult to deal with and manage, and it was seen as something that adversely
affected the quality of the technical aspects of the work of watershed development.
The social as a marker between governmental organisations and NGOs

Many officers in charge of the PIAs, APDs and CBT members saw ‘the social’ as a distinguishing marker between GO PIAs and NGO PIAs. Once after a review meeting held at the district headquarters, a government PIA-in-charge elaborated informally over lunch about the differences between the way he worked and the way NGO PIAs worked. He said, “See, the NGOs are slightly better than us in terms of the work related to the social aspects of the project, and this should be acknowledged. Since they have been working in these areas for quite a few years, they also have a better understanding of social aspects of these kinds of projects. Moreover they are used to work in a contractual fashion, therefore, they find it much easier to deal with the contractual staff of the projects hired under the District Watershed Mission. To be honest, we government PIAs who are mostly on deputation are yet to get a hang of the ways of dealing with the contractual staff. But we are definitely better at doing the technical work. Most of these NGO PIAs, in Kalahandi and elsewhere, have never employed proper engineers, and these organisations have very little experience in doing construction work. So the villagers can lead them on whereas no villager can take us for a ride. The NGOs also have better experience in these new things such as community mobilisation and awareness building. But we are also learning. After all, all this new social nonsense is not rocket science.”

Narratives surrounding ‘the social’ were also used as a marker to distinguish between the earlier way of doing watershed-related interventions by the soil-conservation department, and the work now being done under the aegis of OWDM. The higher level staff of DWM, Kalahandi see this difference through the trope of participation. As a senior official voiced in an interview, “Earlier when the soil conservation department used to work on watersheds there was no community participation. An engineer would go and survey the area and depending upon the availability of funds and the needs of the watershed he would draw up estimates depending upon technical criteria. And only when the actual earth work started, people would come to know that a project has come to their village. Now there is community participation because of decentralised planning.
Therefore, the importance of the social aspects of the work has grown quite a bit.” This focus on the ‘social’ as a marker of difference posits certain aspects of the work of the project as not being ‘social’. For example, the work of accounting and auditing is not seen as being ‘social’ but as requiring technical expertise that is difficult to acquire.

Emergence of ‘the social’ and imbrications in the field

The way WORLP is structured as a project—with all the work supposed to be carried out through the village-level Committees—is in itself a significant move at ‘socialisation’. This change has meant that ‘the social’ is being incorporated into the machinery of the government through certain institutional assemblages such as watershed committees, SHGs, and user groups. This focus on ‘the social’ has interacted with many other processes in the field with some interesting results, one of which has been that the project has aided vastly increased sightings of the state. Most of the villagers identified project staff from WORLP as the most visible amongst all government departments. The creation of the Committees and the fact that work happened through them meant that at least one government staff visited the village at least once a month to attend the monthly meetings of the Committees. Similarly the work surrounding the small grants and revolving funds involved frequent visits by the staff of the project of both GO and NGO PIAs for facilitation and monitoring. Thus, one of the more important results of the focus on ‘the social’ has been to increase the number of sightings of government staff and in effect the state itself.

As already discussed in Chapter IV the focus on the social has also involved dramatically increasing the number of direct beneficiaries. In many ways this spreading things thin and the ensuing increased sightings of the state seems to be built into the very project architecture. For example, one of the goals given to all project staff, and especially the staff hired to deal with overtly social aspects of the project, has been to ensure that at least 80 per cent of households in the project areas are covered through SHGs. This is sometimes resented by the staff as it expands the scope of their work, and makes them a lot more ‘accessible’ to villagers.
The ‘social’ and the attendant establishment and strengthening of institutions such as SHGs have resulted in the increasing penetration of micro-credit institutions in many areas. Because of the existence of a robust network of these SHGs, commercial microcredit institutions have found it easy to operate in these villages. Most of the SHGs in the microwatersheds in the project area of the government PIA have a relatively poor record of ensuring the return of the loans received through the WORLP as revolving funds. But it will be perhaps unfruitful to judge these institutions as ineffective on these grounds. In creating these SHGs and handholding them in the initial part of their existence, the project has created institutions that then have gone on to perform other and, sometimes, similar roles.

Many women stated that by being part of SHGs, they have been able to become ‘forward’; earlier they would not have the confidence to talk to a government official, and other outsiders. But now they are able to do so. This they see as a direct result of being a member of the SHGs, and, thus, a result of their experience of trainings, exposure visits to other areas and the increased opportunities of interacting with the outside world in the village itself.

Another important aspect of the emergence of ‘the social’ is the importance that is given to ‘process’ in WORLP. The process dimensions of the social components of the work are stressed upon to a greater extent compared to the same dimensions of the ‘technical/engineering’ aspects of the project’s work. The way auditors would want to ensure whether certain social goals were fulfilled or not was by insisting that certain indicators and processes of the social components of the project’s work were consistently followed; consequently a large part of the work happened so that auditors could be satisfied as and when auditing happened.

A focus on ‘the social’ is built into project design of WORLP, as well as the actual everyday practice of the project and increasingly in the work of the DWM, Kalahandi. This can be seen in the context of the growth of watershed development as an
alternative approach to provisioning water resources, especially in the marginal areas of the country, a large proportion of which are characterised by rain-fed agriculture (Kerr 2002). Following critiques of approaches to watershed development that emphasised biophysical criteria, concerns surrounding non-biophysical issues such as those involving livelihoods, especially those in the dry-land areas, have come to the forefront (Turton 2000; Kerr 2002).

The growth of projects such as WORLP and the increasing importance given to social aspects of watershed development such as livelihoods and the use of social technologies such as district-level watershed missions, village-level watershed development committees and SHGs can be understood as part of a process of change in governmental interventions that has involved a relative shift in emphasis from the technical to the social (both as sites and tools). Emergence of ‘the social’ is seen as an important marker of difference between the work of the NGOs and GOs, on the one hand, and between the work of the OWDM and the state soil conservation department, on the other. The emergence of ‘the social’ has resulted in increasing the sightings of the state by villagers. It has also resulted in the creation and partial strengthening of new village-level institutions such as SHGs that have gone on to play other, albeit similar roles in village society. It has also facilitated deeper imbrications between village society and the state.

Conclusion

Following the overall theoretical and methodological turns detailed in chapters I, II and IV, this chapter has shifted discussions surrounding the politics of so-called population groups in India, and the way they make claims and act upon the state, to a discussion surrounding the effects of tactics of state-fabrication. This chapter showed that two key effects of the mission mode of state-fabrication are the growing convergence between governmental and non-governmental organisations, and the emergence of the social as a site, object and trope of governmental action. The chapter then argued that this can be
seen in the broader context of growth of social technologies associated with the quotidian logistics of state-fabrication.

The question is how do we see such changes and make sense of them? If we do not want to see India’s present as a mere variation of Western Europe’s past, the theory of political society is the only theory coming from the global South that seems to give us tools to discuss changes happening in social formations in the South. The question, therefore, remains that if we jettison political society, how do we understand differences between the global South and the West? There have been scholars who have argued that we can interrogate the global march of development and modernity by formulating a concept such as regional modernities in which ‘region’ is not a spatial descriptor in between the local and the global but as a specific site of operations of socio-political, economic and cultural forces. But in this discussion what is foregrounded is the nation-state as a region (Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003).

There is a need to take the original theoretical impetus for the formulation of political society on board—this is a question of difference. If we need to understand the politics of communities and the way they interact with and perceive the state, it cannot happen at a level of India or the global South. Such interactions happen at the regional level, and these are mediated through vernacular formulations. In the case of Odisha one such important vernacular formulation seems to be the one of toutary. The next chapter, Chapter VI, aims at understanding toutary as a social domain of actions and perceptions.