

PAKISTAN SOCIETY OF DEVELOPMENT ECONOMISTS



**The Politics of Depoliticization in Natural
Resource Management: Representation
of the State in Watershed Development
Projects in India**

Neeraj Mishra

**THE 23RD
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
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MARCH 12-14, 2008**



**PAKISTAN INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPMENT ECONOMICS
QUAID-I-AZAM UNIVERSITY CAMPUS, ISLAMABAD**

Pakistan Society of Development Economists

The Politics of Depoliticization in Natural Resource Management: Representation of the State in Watershed Development Projects in India

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Abstract:

This paper will locate the control mechanisms that the state in the form of its 'street-level bureaucrats' maintains in the project activities and the things that the ground level functionaries and officials do in the name of the state. The World Bank and modern developmental configuration places a strong emphasis on the decentralized form of governance in the project such that the roles and powers of the local community are redefined towards achieving a participatory development. However, the management of the project at the local level is dominated by the institutional configuration that the state agents create in the village, which is highly exclusive in nature. There is a general agreement among the people about the state as being corrupt and thriving on the politics of favoritism, which stems from the actual working of the state agents in terms of the actors in the village who receive powers in the project, the type of powers they receive and the control mechanisms that keep them in their positions sub-ordinate to the government staff. This would lead us to the question, if one could infer this governing strategy of the project as a mechanism of depoliticization.

Introduction:

This paper would work upwards from IWDP¹ and elaborate on the events that were a part of the project implemented by Watershed Management Directorate (WMD) to give a sense of local level functioning of the state, its mechanisms and the relationship that the rural people have to state institutions. Everyday interactions with the project staff and the local state bureaucracy would be seen here as the most important ingredient in the construction of the

¹ Integrated Watershed Development Project, Hills-II was a project funded by the World Bank and implemented with the help of Watershed Management Directorate in Dehradun, Uttarakhand from September 1999 to September 2005.

state forged by the villagers and WMD staff. Looking closely at these settings allows us to obtain a sense of relations between the state officials and clients at the local level.

This would be attempted by the three examples that present a range of relationships between the state officials and rural people. The first example is the formation of women's Self Help Group (SHG) in the project areas and how it was abandoned, formation of GAREMA (*Gaon/ Village Resource Management Association*) in the village and its exploitation of the rural youth and their helplessness to cope with the extreme situations of unemployment. This example is being seen as the institutional make-up that was created for the project management. The second case refers to the issue of voting list for the elections in which no one knew why and how but a large number of names of the villagers were found missing mysteriously. It was still on the list but slashed out by a black line over it and the police would not allow them to vote even if had their voter ID. Though not directly a part of IWDP, this issue also was important in understanding the state-society relations in the village. The pumping set installation during the project and its non-functional status, and finally we look at the issue of access-road construction in the village. Secondly, the chapter would look at the broader fields of representation of the state in the public culture like music, and then demonstrate how local level encounters with the state are transmitted/ represented by the mass media and popular culture by the analysis of a folk-song (as a discourse carrier) which was presumed to be pivotal in the defeat of Congress government and victory of BJP in Uttarakhand.

Finally, we would look at the broader theoretical issues raised in this chapter.

The Context:

While doing my field work in Yamkeshwar, a small block in the Uttarakhand² in north India, I was struck by the frequency of the theme of corruption in the IWDP. Each time a

² Uttarakhand was known as Uttaranchal from 2000 to 2006, became the 27th state of the Republic of India on November 9, 2000. Uttarakhand borders Tibet to the north, Nepal to the east, and the states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh (of which it formed a part before 2000) in the west and south respectively. The region is

conversation began, the first response was that the officials of WMD in collaboration with the President and Secretary in the village eat up the entire money meant for the project. (*Sab paisa Jalagam wale mil ke kha gaye*).

I started my first informal interaction in Talla Banas, a small village on the other side of Rajaji National Park (RNP) around 16 km from Rishikesh. This area is approachable only by entering the RNP and traveling within the park zone for about 7-8 km and then there are these hamlets where the project work was undertaken. We were informed that the government made some legal arrangement with the villagers in 1983, when the Park was about to be made and secured the land which was earlier a part of the village.³

This village was not a part of the project but the networking in the hills is so strong that each family knows almost every other family in the entire village which comes under the same zone, sometimes more than two generations. It becomes possible because of the same and only access road to the villages makes it a very closely knit community as all villagers in the area take the same transportation, namely Jeeps operated by the local retired army men and the marriages which are mostly from among the same area,⁴ are attended with great enthusiasm in the hills.

It was about evening that we reached our first destination in Talla Banas (not a project village- 7 km away from our final destination in Kimsar) and met the first local Garhwali⁵. These were not the common farmers but 2 established men from the village, one was the ex-sarpanch and the other a retired RPF (Railways Protection Force) personnel. He observed that

traditionally referred to as Uttarakhand in Hindu scriptures and old literature, a term which derives from the Sanskrit for *Northern Country* or *Section*. In January 2007, the name of the state was officially changed from Uttaranchal, its interim name, to Uttarakhand.

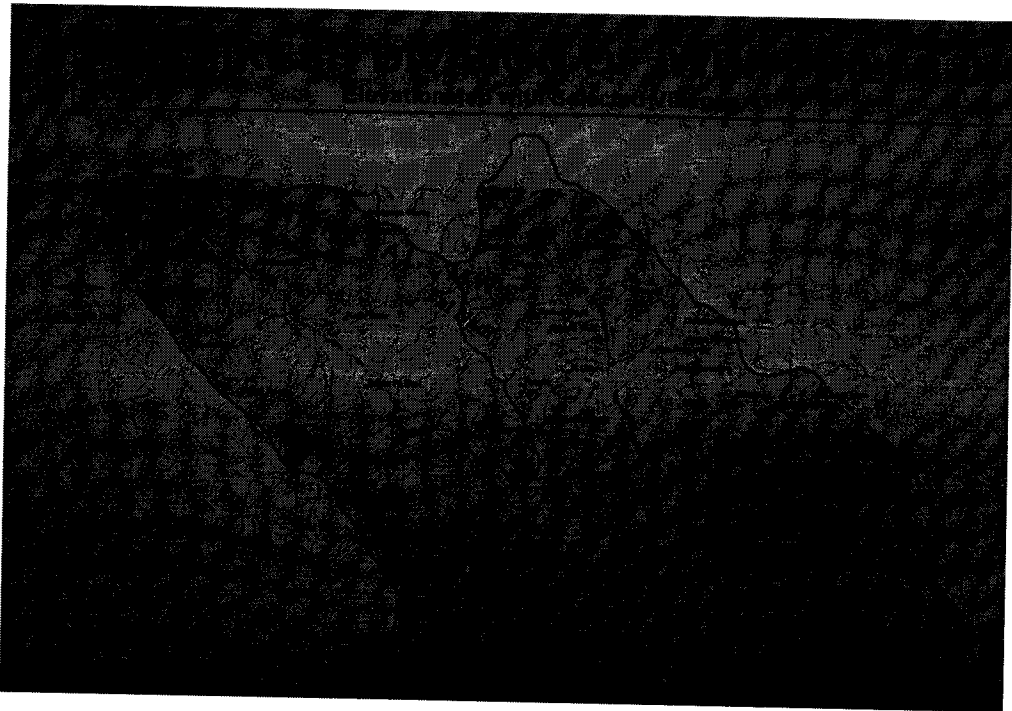
³ The government of UP issued a notice numbered- 5440/ 14-03-1984/ 76, on the 12th of August 1983 in connection with establishing a national park in the state, under the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972, Act No.53, 1972 and its article 35, clause 18, the proposed park has been named Rajaji National Park.³

⁴ A popular saying in the hills about marriage is that never marry your daughter in a place which is more than a day's walk away from the house.

⁵ People of Uttarakhand are generally called either Garhwali or Kumaoni depending on their place of origin in either the Garhwal or Kumaon region. Colloquially they are also referred to as Pahari meaning "hill person".

the *Jalagam* (IWDP) was not a very successful project and mainly focussed his talk on the corruption that was prevalent during the entire project period.

The point is that the ex-sarpanch of Talla Banas and another retired man from the Railway Protection Force (RPF) who was now spending his retirement time in the village, knew all the presidents and secretaries of IWDP in the entire Aamkatal MWS (Refer-map) comprising of around 14 villages. The ex-sarpanch Mr. Udaipuri was the first person we met in his house and started the discussion on IWDP. The discussion was an enumeration of the activities that IWDP undertook, the role of implementation staff and the participant villagers. This later emerged as one of the core-categories⁶ under which the presence of the state and 'seeing of the state' could be understood. Excerpts from above mentioned interview have been reproduced in the later section for a better clarity.



Map: Representing the project areas and the main research Watershed of Tal river, green belt represents the RNP zone (on the extreme left of the map forming the horse-shoe shape) around the river Tal, which later joins Ganga close to the point represented by Bnj Rao on the map.

Source: WMD, Dehradun

⁶ This term is derived from the literature on Grounded Theory, which works upwards from the field. The theoretical structure of the studies conducted with this methodology is emergent.

Development of the core-category: Corruption

Most of the evening conversation in the village tea-shops, of which there were three in Kimsar, began to discuss the IWDP once the research team reached there. The word spread real fast that there is a group of students enquiring about the IWDP. Besides that, common people shared their opinion more freely among themselves and with us, now that the project was over and there was no fear of ruining one's chances of deriving any more benefits by appeasing the WMD staff. At least then there was a hope that the next water tank will be constructed in their house if they kept quite publicly.

I felt that the presence of the research team gave people an opportunity to voice their real thoughts about the project, almost ventilating in front of a neutral party. We brought the topic once more on the table for a post-mortem and the villagers took active interest as the summers were closing in and the water system was still incomplete. The pump set installed by the project never worked, the pipelines were not laid out completely, the pipes were still on the ground and not earthed. In a nut shell, the water was still as far away as it always was, but now there were pipelines running across the village roads and a new pump set hidden somewhere away from the direct public gaze.

The topic of corruption (mostly expressed by signs of hand or typical gestures that I was told meant misuse of funds, for e.g. the word 'corruption' was replaced by a movement of two fingers- the thumb sliding upwards on the index finger resembling counting of money or placing the palm on the mouth and sliding it downwards simultaneously placing the thumb and index finger on the middle of the upper lip and moving it outwards to trace the moustache and sliding it down towards the chin to mean-they ate up all the money) and the role of the state representatives came up for discussion each time the IWDP was mentioned and now that the research team had settled in the village with the announced purpose of studying this case, the mention was very frequent, almost all evening conversation revolved around the project and the how it was a scheme to eat up the funds meant for the project. The elected

government after the formation of Uttarakhand, represented by the congress found mention in these discussions as the perpetuator of this high level of corruption. ND Tiwari, the then chief-minister has always been under controversy for his corrupt office and the politics of appeasement. 'Of course the staff would be corrupt when the government at the center is so corrupt' (*Jab mukhya-mantri hi bhrasht hai to baki karmchari bhi bhrasht hi honge*)⁷.

Other times, it would focus on how the district collector or the park commissioner had refused the road building proposal or how someone got the tank made for free during the project or how some villager got the *gobar*-gas plant installed for free while the others had to pay the project staff Rs.2000 or more or less. The representatives of GAREMA were implicated to have secured the water pipes and fencing wires for their own use, which still lay unused in their fields or how they built the tanks for themselves with cover while the other water tanks in the village were left without one. They were equally guilty of playing along with the WMD staff (*Jalagam wale*) and sharing the funds among themselves. The topics remained the same in the entire Taal Valley with minute changes in the types of activities undertaken, trees planted, number of tanks made but the rules of commission payment to the government staff, registration of VWC⁸ and puppetry role of the VWC members remained the same.

It became clear that in-spite of the decentralized management structure proposed in the documents and claimed by the WMD in conferences (Power-point presentation- ICR Mission, 3rd-6th June 2005)⁹ had no validity in the field where the GAREMA never came into existence

⁷ Source: Field Notes, 2007

⁸ Village Watershed Committee

⁹ The power-point presentations act as the carriers of the discourse to the western world or the educated decision makers. No one ever feels the need to question or even critically eye the points that are made in these presentations. A typical example of this mismatch between reality and representation was the presentation given to me in the WMD office by DJK Sharma. The 1st slide presents the management of IWDP by the local people and the committee formed for this purpose, called GAREMA while in the village no such committee was ever formed. The WB would only see the presentation for the sanction of future installments without feeling the need to verify the truth value of these. Of course, there are practical problems in this verification as the truth may not be shared totally with the 'strangers' nor would the villagers like to implicate some one from their village even if

as a registered body nor did it have any say in the workings of the project. The WMD claimed that all work was done by GAREMA and the money was put in their account and all expenditure was done by them, but what it does not say is that not a single GAREMA was registered in the Aamkatal MWS and the 'invisible but ubiquitous state' worked as the control agency for the day to day working of the project.

The 'state' agencies reformulated the project on the ground to get maximum personal benefits and worked in a way that facilitated their income and did only as little as possible and used only those men in the village who would agree to their proposal of sharing the funds with minimum village beneficiaries, like the shopkeepers in the village (*lala*) or young college students as their puppet presidents and secretaries. The first village that we visited in Kandakhal had two young boys aged 20-22 as the President and Secretary. Both these boys had their own shops in the village and the wife of one was also the President of the SHG in this village. The benefits remained exclusively confined to one or two families in every village by following this method of project management.

The next village in Jogyana had Subodh Negi, the village shopkeeper as the President, who later resigned because of his business responsibilities. The third village in Dharkot was the same story and so it continued in other villages. These shops were also the evening joints where people gathered and discussed about the politics of the state as well as the village among other things. It was no secret in the village that the project was a good opportunity to make money and the village pradhan in Kimsar agreed that it was all right to take a commission of up to 30% of the government funds and he did it too, but criticized the IWDP functionaries on the claim that they misused much more than that and it was unfair.

What is noteworthy about this situation is the degree to which the state is woven into the social fabric of the villages and their vocabulary. This was not a unique situation in the field village but a phenomenon common to the entire Taal Valley and it was surprising to find the

they are corrupt. It follows from their strong belief in 'Bhaibandi' or a sense of brotherhood among the *paharis* of the same area.

lack of academic analysis on this topic. Most of the studies were surveys that told only half the story.

Aamkatal Micro-Watershed- The first Impressions:

Our first interview was conducted in the village called Talai, with a woman member of the SHG formed during the project period. It was the example of how the women perceive the state agents and the working method that they followed.

This woman was also a member of the SHG formed during the IWDP. She wanted to get the money back from the bank where they had initially deposited the amount. She took us to her house and asked us to be seated. There were 3 more chairs in the room. She came inside and sat on the floor in front of the vacant chair. She remained seated on the floor in spite of our requests that she should sit on the chair. It was better for her, she said. We began to discuss about the IWDP and asked her if she knew about the project and had been a part of it in any way. Who benefited from it and what did she gain personally from the project?

She asked us if we could help her get the money back, which she had deposited during the project period and felt she was cheated in some way by the project staff. She wanted to complain to some higher authority but was not educated enough to do it and the sense of brotherhood among the hill people kept her away.

‘We always wanted that some one should come and make an enquiry about this project. Because the poor like us never got anything and only those who already were well-off and connected got away with all the benefits’. She quoted the example of the cow-dung cooking gas scheme of which there were three in the village, one in the house of the president of the project, another with the secretary and the third one was the elder brother of the president. ‘We are aware that there could be no more funds to undo the injustice in the project, but

whatever amount the women's group has contributed, we want to withdraw it and not be associated with anything like this again'.¹⁰

'There we have around 15-20,000 INR. We used to lend money at the rate of 10%. And depending on the amount borrowed, there were interests charged. There are two signatories who are needed to withdraw the money. They have to go together and put their signatures to withdraw the money. Treasurer and the motivator sign the withdrawal slip. Now that the project does not function anymore, we want the money back.

In the IWDP, they made 5 water tanks and some fodder tanks for the cattle. The villagers got labour work, around 70-80 INR. In Garhwal there is a lot of '*bhaibandi*' (Brotherhood). So the villagers do not go to complain as every one is known by everyone else. But the President and the Secretary of the project took all the benefits for themselves. There were 50 poly-plastic chairs which were meant for the meetings of the women's group but the president of IWDP took it in his personal custody and now lends it out to other villagers during marriages etc. for a price. There was a Dhurri (low quality Carpet) for the use of the women during their meetings, to sit on the floor but the president took that too. So we want to push for an enquiry. The president got the tanks made for himself and his near and dear ones. We were cheated badly by our own people in cooperation with the WMD officials'.

This interview was setting the stage for us to understand the way the development agents from the state were perceived by the villagers. Our aim was to verify and cross-check all information that we gathered till we reached a *consensus gentium*, approaching the truth value of a proposition by the theory of consensus. For this, we needed to find out not only if everyone agreed to a certain proposition, but also that everyone agreed that everyone else agrees to the same proposition, within the given sample space.

¹⁰ "Hum to yahi chahte hain ki koi aaye, koi enquiry ho iss project ki. Kyonki koi Gareebon ko to mili nahin, aise logon ko mili jo pehle se hi samridh the... Hum yahi chahte the ki inse bada koi aaye aur iski jaanch kare. Hum jaante hain ki project ko chalane ke liye aur paisa nahin aa sakta. Lekin Mahila Samooh ka jitna bhi paisa hai, usko hum nikaal lena chahte hain aur dubara yeh galti nahin karma hai. Mahila Samooh ka paisa yahan Alaknanda Grameen Bank mein jama hota hai, jo ki Kimsar mein hai."

We gave a brief overview of the interview that we had with this woman in the next village who was a part of the SHG formed during the IWDP and told Mr.Udaipuri, the ex-sarpanch in Banas Talla, and the reaction of some of the villagers we met during the jeep ride to this village. We began the conversation by telling him that the women in Talai village were quite unhappy with the project members and wanted us to file complain on their behalf to some higher authority. But they were also afraid that no-one will listen to them as the government staff was also a part of this corruption and it would make no sense complaining about the village office-bearers as the government in the state was also together in this.

Interview with Ex-Sarpanch, Talla Banas:

R1: The villagers in the Tallai complained that if the person who is corrupt, holds the post, then who will they report to?

A: 'The entire community, I well tell u, if they agree, a 'white letter' should be demanded from these rascals!! (Referring to the IWDP staff and the village level functionaries and abusing them in local language, maybe he found no way to express his frustration with the situation), that provide us with a white letter!! 'But no assembly question, no parliament question' (in English), because all of them are together in this. (*Sab mile hue hain.*)

R2 to R1: Please tell *Tauji* (Uncle) that it's not a NGO that is working in IWDP. It's the WMD, a government body. It's actually the government working. The NGOs are not involved in this.

R1: He says, IWDP is not run by any NGO, but is a government program.

Ans: Ya, I know. I am just giving you an example of a NGO. I am just quoting an example. And Jalagam (could mean either IWDP or WMD, depending on the context referred to. It could refer to the work done or the implementing agency) also works in a similar way. In the beginning, they never told anyone what is this organization all about, what does it intend to achieve or what were its objectives to approach the village in the first place. What

job does it want to get done? Nothing was explained to no one. Arbitrarily, president and secretary for IWDP were chosen by the government officers. And when they visited the village, these two persons would speak to him secretly behind the closed doors. They would only discuss what we can save from exposure tours, plantations etc, and then these officers collected their commission and would disappear back into the plains till the next installment was released. They have now made big mansions in Dehradun (state capital city) with this public money, even the simple unit officers. There is no employee who was part of the IWDP and now doesn't have a mansion now. ¹¹

R1: Where did they make these houses? Why no one ever asked about it?

Ans: I will tell you who all made big houses and where are they, who have started what business from this money. I have collected all the information. The presidents have bought land plots costing 17-18 lakh Rs. There were some smart ones also who are still quiet (haven't made any big investments), they have not shown their money to the world. There is nothing that one can do.

¹²Mr. Udaipuri expressed his complete dissatisfaction and hopelessness with our presence in the village and felt that we were a part of some NGO which was here to collect the numbers of some type or another. He was referring to the quantitative research methods which he described as 'survey', apparently a mechanical process which is just to fill up some log books. He felt it wouldn't make any difference because we were just making another 'survey'.

'I know, they have sent you to do another routine survey...so do your survey and go, what else could you do? I understand your situation too; you may be required to fill some log books. I

¹¹ *Jalagam ka bhi yehi hai..pehle logon ko samjhaya bataya nahin kya hai, yeh sanstha kya hai, iska 'job' kya hai..Kuch bhi nahin. Bana diya iska adhyakash, chairman, secretary aur yeh sab mil gaye... aate the... gup chup baat hoti thi, kisme kitna bachat, isme kitna bacht, yehi baat hoti thi aur apna commission leke sab nua-dogayarah. Sab kothiayan khadi kar di...ek mamuli adhikari ne, aisa koi adhikari nahin hai jo jalagam mein appointed tha aur uski kothi khadi na ho aaj.*

¹² *Main bata doonga ke kisne kahan kothi khadi ki, kisne kya business kya. Main sab figures le rakhe hain. Adhyakshon ne land pieces book kar liye..17-17 lakh ke, 18-18 lakh ki zameen kharidi..Jo koi smart that woh chup hai..usne who paisa show nahin kiya. Kuch nahin hone wala hai.*

also understand that you are not an enquiry officer and you are not here for any enquiry-(to mean that there was very little point of his talking to us and telling us the corrupt practices that were rampant during the project because it was obvious that we would not be able to bring the culprits to justice) I understand that you are not from the vigilance commission or anything. You just have to submit a report, that's all you are here for and that's where your influence ends.¹³

He gave us the example of how the 'educated' people in the village were also supporting the government agents in securing their rent and make some profit for themselves.

'In our Uttaranchal, IWDP did the work and here everyone is like a family. But you will go to Malla Banas village, where the president is a retired professor of Geography and he too played along with these state agents.' He further added that after some time we would forget this issue too (because public has a very short memory) and blame the nature again as usual (referring to the villager's belief in god and 'kismet'), saying when the nature has chosen to deprive us from water at the right time, how will the plantations grow and survive?¹⁴

Suddenly, a man from the BPL family walked past and stopped over at Mr. Udaipuri's house seeing the research team. Mr. Udaipuri shouted out that we are a research team from Delhi and have come for an enquiry of the project. (This man is the only person in village who makes illegal alcohol, called '*Kuchhi Sharaab*' and sells to his regular customers. Probably he is one of the many adherents that this man has because of his *ex-sarpanch* status.) The *sarpanch* told us that he has got three houses sanctioned for this man from the government.

The introduction to the situation was not very pleasant and we were still looking for more

¹³ *Wo theek hai.. aap ko bheja hai survery karne ke liye..aap survey kar lo aur kya karenge aap..main to jaanta hoon apko bheja hai survey karne ke liye..aap kar lo surveyy..aap koi enquiry officer thodi hain..main yeh bhi samajhta hoon ki aap enquiry mein nahin hain..aapne to bus report de dena hai.. bus itna hai.)*

¹⁴ *Hamare yahan hua, hamare Uttaranchal mein jalagam ne kaam kiya..yahan to sare apne hain..ab ye dekhiye.. aap jaayenge Malla Banas mein, adhyaksh hai geography ka professor, lekin who bhi bhaiya.... rang gaya aisa (paise ke) rang mein..bus!!!*

Q: Kya kaam chal raha hai..kaise chal raha hai..kya aap sochte hain ki ek enquiry committee hona chahiye.. Main aap ko bataun..jab bahut din ho jayega hum iss mamle ko bhi bhool jayenge..aur phir nature ko hi dosh denge ki jab nature ne humen pani hi nahin diya time pe to plant kaise lagega..

evidence to falsify what we had just heard. It was apparent that this man himself was not very honest as a *sarpanch*, which was made clear by his last statement that he extracted illegitimate benefits for this BPL man, maybe because he was his follower, in the form of three houses, probably under the housing scheme of the government. (*Indira Awas Yojna, Nirbal Varg Awas Yojna.*)

Next day is the election and many villagers who have migrated to the other cities like Dehradun or even Delhi, are here to see the elections, maybe to participate if there was a possibility. But to their surprise, many villagers found their names missing from the voter's list. It was still on the printed list but was slashed out by a black line over it.

IWDP and Interaction with the state:

The number of names slashed out is a rough governmental record of the people who have migrated out of the village and the government believes that they have been out long enough to have acquired new voters' card in their new place of migration. However, many villagers who are seasonal migrants also suffered the seizure of voting rights as they have been migrating regularly for a long period of time and the government has no data to ascertain that they are still living in the village. These migrants suffer the worst because they migrate from the villages for the lack of cultivable land in the first place, find low-paying employment in the cities hence no access to the facilities that are extended to a respectable citizen in the cities, to mean no voting cards also. At the same time the 'landless status' in the village leaves no material proof that they are a part of the village community. Mostly, there is a inherited house, an obliterated structure which is in severe need of repair due to the harsh weather conditions (houses are repaired every year in these villages in the summers, so that the monsoons do not catch them off guard nor the winter. The harsh weather, both strong monsoon and cold winters, due to the mountainous terrain, ensure that the house is in need of repairs before the next summer comes.

It's quite easy thus to locate the houses from which the families have migrated. The more the number of years that they have been away, more dilapidated is the house. There are cases also, where the villagers migrate permanently and never come back unless they retire from whatever form of employment they found in the village. It is then that they again rebuild the left house and begin the last lap again in the village. This practice has gradually led to a social fabric which has more old men and women, followed by the young women and young babies. The most popular employment in Garhwal is joining the defence forces or the police services. There are only 5% houses in the village where no one has ever been in the defence forces. The 'Garhwal Rifles' which was a strong regiment after 1890, has its headquarters in Lansdowne, around 30 km from Yamkeshwar. This occupational structure gives rise to a society where there are very few young men and women in the village. The 'cream' of the village lives outside the place, which is a major cause of the backward status of the area.

The Garhwali having a saying among them that 'the Garhwali will be happier washing the plates in Dehradun than cultivating his own farm' to mean that mostly the young uneducated youth who migrates to the city ends up as a dish washer in the big cities but still they prefer it to staying in the village. Notably, the second most popular employment option in Garhwal is working in the hotels of different statuses, partly because this area has been a traditional tourist centre due to the major Hindu pilgrimage route and as the gateway to upper Himalayas.



(Part of the voter's list reproduced here. While there were series of such slashes on a 20 page voter list-count!!)

Location-2: Kimsar

Small but centrally located village Kimsar is a useful destination for the villagers in the Taal Valley as this village where the state has its presence in the form of school, bank and hospital, the only bank in this area and the facility of a school till the 12th standard and a PHC that is run by a pharmacist. The location of the only bank in this area makes it the most visited place in the block as almost every villager is required to go there at least once in a month or even more times depending on the need. The only mode of transportation is the jeep run by the private locals and no buses ply here as the roads are not suitable for a bus journey. However, there were some buses sighted during the elections when the state presence was required in a much larger way. These buses carried the election staff, voting machines and police force to the polling booths. It appeared to me that the severe lack of transport in this area was actually negligence on the part of the state authorities towards improving the situation here. Because when the state wanted, it could move in its forces and take the help of buses but it wouldn't do so otherwise, maybe because the 7 km stretch of the road passes through the RNP and is a restricted area and the government would use a bus only on the rare occasions and not put it on the regular transportation map. But nevertheless, it could be inferred that there is a possibility of making life easier through public transport if the government wants.

Forming the Watershed Management Committee:

The first- concern as already mentioned, was the formation of GAREMA, in which the WMD successfully exploited the illiterate villagers into paying them the commission from the accounts meant for the watershed program and officially claimed that since all the money was spent by GAREMA, they have no control over it nor are responsible for its mismanagement. The governing strategy is to relegate the responsibility to the villagers about the events of the project in a superficial manner while the officials control not only the distribution of money but also the distribution of benefits to the villagers. If asked about the project expenditure, the

WMD would neatly suggest that we meet the GAREMA because they were the managing authority and not WMD. This became clear when the research team was trying to locate the reasons as to why the water-pumping system was still not functioning after 3 years of the project completion. We went through the shops from where the pump was bought to finding a mechanic in the nearby city of Dehradun who could repair the pump if something was out of order. It was then that we came to know that the pump set was an old assembled machine, painted and dumped on the villagers. When we raised this issue in the WMD office, the answer given to us was that the villagers have paid the money from their account and we have no say in this matter. While it was known to us that the pump, shop, and pipelines were all bought after the advice given by the junior engineer from WMD. He had already fixed the deal with the shopkeeper and the villagers simply picked it up from the shop and paid the money. I will come to this issue of the pump-set in more detail later.

The village of Kimsar was not new to the idea of WSD when IWDP came to the village. The earlier project by the government called Drought Prone Area Program (DPAP) was implemented in this village from the year 1994-1998. The president of GAREMA, Mr. Bist was also the President of the DPAP project in the village while the father of the secretary of GAREMA, Mr. Kandwal was then the secretary.

For most of the villagers, these projects and the bureaucrats who were appointed by WMD for implementing the project was the most immediate context for encountering the state and its agents. The first GBM in the village of Kimsar was held on the 17th December 2002 to inform the villagers about the project. The minutes of the meeting recorded by the village panchayat refer to an exposure tour and training session held in Rishikesh earlier where the project was introduced to the villagers but none in the village later recalled about such a tour except the office bearers of GAREMA. This meeting would elect the members who would form the GAREMA (Gaon/Village Resource Management Association), the apex body which would coordinate the activities of the project and formulate the rules for money management. The

meeting was conducted in the baraat ghar of the village- an assembly hall for the marriage ceremonies which also doubles up as the hall for village meetings, in the presence of Mr. Keshar Singh Aire, the Unit Officer and the sole representative of the state in this meeting. The other facilitators were also present. A typical meeting in the barat ghar brings the villagers, mostly middle-aged and older men (no women or youth- as observed in the later meetings) in interaction with the elected *pradhan* of the village, the officially appointed *panchayat mantri*, people belonging to the backward classes (living in a removed hamlet called 'nagri' in the local language, on one corner of the village) and outside agencies, like the IWDP staff or the research team as in my case. These are the spaces or the places where the people interacted and discussed about politics, corruption and current news besides the tea shops.

Large number of people clustered in small groups in a small hall and debated about the mismanagement of IWDP funds in the later meetings when the issue was in a way 'reopened' after the arrival of the research team in the village. The idea behind enumerating the minutes of the meeting is to present a sense of the 'texture of relations' between state officials and the local people. The origins of corruption in the project could be located here.

It was agreed in this meeting that the *gram pradhan* would be the honorary guardian of GAREMA and a resolution was passed.¹⁵

Resolution-1:

GAREMA was proposed to be formed of the following office bearers and members:

Post	Name	Proposed By	Seconded By
<i>President</i>	Rajpal Singh Bist	Ummed Singh	Anusuya Prasad
		Him Singh	Bhopal Singh

A resolution was passed that the amount of money received for the project would be saved in a national or grameen bank, with the signatures of the President and the Secretary. The funds would be withdrawn and managed by the joint signatures of the President and the secretary.

Attended By:

1. Keshar Singh Aire, Unit Officer-IWDP, Unit-Kimsaar
2. Bina Thapliyal, Facilitator
3. Sita Dabraal- Facilitator
4. Urmila Rauthan- Facilitator
5. Other villagers- total number 25+/- 2.

As already mentioned, Mr. Bist was also the president of the DPAP and was now appointed to lead GAREMA. Bist in his interview told us how the project proceeded and why it was so difficult to do the work in this village.

Interview- Rajpal Bist and Birendra Bandhu: Presidents of GAREMA

Q: Why did the people not participate in the program?

A: The people did not deposit the 'revolving fund' in time and were confined just to the labour work on daily wages. The participation of the villagers could not be achieved as it should have been. And the different works done under the IWDP were not guarded or taken good care of by the people.

For example, the plantations which were done could not flourish as the watchmen did not pay any attention to it and it was destroyed. Still some plantations which were given to the private lands are secure as they were protected from the animals and care was taken. Later the plantations were found to be burned down.

Q: How long did the project last in this village?

A: For about two years, from the day of the first meeting of the IWDP in our village.

Q: Was there any problems that you faced dealing with the government staff?

A: We had to pay a commission of 30% to the project staff from the funds meant for the project.

Q: How did the system work?

A: It was all done through the cheques. If they sent one lakh rupees, it was deposited in our account and when we withdrew the money, out of the total amount we were forced to pay 30% to them on the spot.

Q: Once you withdrew the money, you would carry 30,000 to their office?

A: They would follow us to the bank and wouldn't leave us till we paid the money. They would be hanging around the bank till we paid!

Q: They already knew when the money was deposited in your account?

A: Of course they knew about it. They knew about every penny that came to our account. It was them who sent the money to the bank, so there was no question of them not knowing. Measurements were taken by them and then the money was sent accordingly.

A2: They would say that if you don't pay us the said amount, we will reduce your measurement (of the work done), we will send a 'recovery' team to your village, and your project would be failed, you won't get any further budget. We were willing to pay as the villagers then wanted to get as much work as possible for the village. They threatened that they would stop the work if we don't pay the appropriate commission.

It has happened in many villages in this area. Wherever the villagers refused to pay their commission, the work was stopped and at the same time where the payments were made well, as in one village, the work amount has crossed even one crore rupees. But we haven't paid more than 30%, we only paid what was left after the work done and just as much as we could.

Q: Maybe that's why the work didn't run its full course of 5 years?

A: Yes, that's why they didn't work here for long. (It's a fact!). We later formed an informal union of the presidents and secretaries of the nearby villages which scared them a little bit. In

this union most of the guys were like us (this man was the reporter for the local newspapers, so in a position to bring it to the public notice if they wanted) and therefore we were saved from their extra-demands. Since some of us are connected to the local minister (MLA) they felt threatened that we would file a complain and so we were not forced to pay all the time. At times we paid 10% or just 20% also. That's why they finished the work faster here and left quickly. They said that we don't have any more funds and the time for the project is also running out so we have to finish the project faster and they left.

Q: Who were these guys? Are they from the WMD (Jalagam)?

A: In the IWDP, there were appointed officers from different departments, from 7-8 different governmental offices on deputation. The IWDP brought together officers from minor-irrigation, soil-conservation, forest department, agriculture department and others. (There were special bribes made at the WMD office in Dehradun for getting a deputation in the IWDP projects.)

Q: Were there people from the soil-conservation department also?

A: Yes, the officials who looked after the construction of check-dams etc. were from the soil-conservation department.

Q: The one which has its office in Dehradun?

A: Yes, The ADE (Assistant Design Engineer) etc was from this department. There were also people from the civil forest department.

Q: So, is the rate of commission fixed at 30% in every village?

A: Yes, it could also be more than 30%. But this was the minimum rate. They used to tell us that there are so many expenses that we have to incur and we get the funds after so many difficulties. They said, the money has to travel up to the highest level- 'top to bottom everyone gets a cut or in-fact bottom to the top'.

Q: What were the other highlights of the project in Kimsar?

A: We have a water problem in this village as the water source is far below the village plain level. So, we demanded a pumping set for the village and finally we were able to get it and have installed the pump.

While we were putting the pumping project, the villagers were very excited that they would be able to get the water in their houses. But this pumpset is a diesel run machine and now people do not pay the money for it. There are two problems, one is that we need someone to operate the machine everyday and second is the cost of the diesel. Then this operator could start the machine and pump the water to the tanks and then it could be supplied to the houses. But the villagers are unable to bear the costs. So, inspite of everything being in place, the project has remained dysfunctional.

Q: You mean, there is just the requirement of the diesel to run the pump?

A: Yes, and with the diesel we can pump the water to the storage tank made in the village. And from there, the water could be supplied to the villages from door-to-door through the laid-out pipelines.

Initially, we took 150 INR advance from the villagers, saying that only those who pay this amount would be provided with the pipelines till their house. Accordingly we laid out the pipelines and then people demanded that we should run the motor with this money that they paid. So we ran the machine for about one month and then the money was over. There were also some maintenance costs that we had to undertake.

A: In this village, there are around 70 families out of which around 55 families have already taken the pipeline connection.

Q: So, each family has to pay around 150 INR per month?

A: yes, but there would be the cost of one operator who would run this machine. But people are not in a position to pay this amount also on a monthly basis.

Q: Coming back to the issue of commission payment, I am wondering how you manage to do the work in an amount reduced by 30%.

A: It works in a way where we have to adjust the working days of the laborers. We show the same number of laborers who work. For example, if 10 people work for 4 days, we show 10 people working for 8 days on the Muster, this is how we cover that 30% paid in the commission. Otherwise we would be in trouble and so would they be. This is the actual practice.

There are certain rates which are fixed. The rates of the labour or of the stones or the transportation charges in these areas are fixed. There may be cases where we may not pay the transportation but we have to show it to cover the commission.

Q: Then how do you manage the deficit in the funds created by the commission amount?

A: Say for example, they give us the rate of 50 INR per meter. We go to the labor and get him to agree that he would do the job at 25-30 INR per meter. If he is ready the work gets done.

A2: We actually sub-contract the work. We make contractors and give them the work. For example, we tell the contractors, that you have to make this wall that costs 100 INR; will you do it in 40 INR? He would say, yes I will make it. Even when we pay him 40 INR he would make good daily wage at the end of the day.

A1: Suppose we have made the boundary walls for the forestation. Let's say that the wall costs us 30 Rs per meter. We sub-contract it to the labor at 20 Rs per meter. At the rate of 20 Rs/ meter also, he is making 150-200 Rs every day. And if we keep him on the daily wage, he would charge 80 Rs and do the work only worth 50 Rs. But if we give the work to him on contract basis, instead of 80 Rs, he would try to make 150 Rs for himself in the day. He would then work more and do more than on a daily wage basis.

For example, in the forestation there is a need for digging pits to plant trees. If we get 2 Rs per pit from the WMD, we tell the laborers that they have to dig the pits at Rs 1 per pit. Then the

laborer tries to dig 100s of pits. And if we put him on the fixed wage of 80 Rs./ day, he wouldn't dig more than 50 pits.

This is the fact, somewhere something is wrong. The system is wrong somewhere or the other.

Q: And the other thing that you do is maintain the register for 8 days when the work is done for 4?

A: We are forced to do it otherwise how can we cover up for the commission paid which has no record. Where shall we show it? We have to do it. Whatever amount we have paid in 'black' that we have to make into 'white'/ legal

And we don't pay; the village doesn't get any work at all. Then the villagers shout at us that the neighboring village has got so much work through projects and why is our village not getting any. There are many types of problems that we face.

And the other thing that was the main money spinning enterprise was the 'Exposure tours'.

The department made enormous amounts of money through these tours. Someday they are going to Pantnagar, next day to somewhere else, third day to Jaipur and so on. This was the most corrupt practice in this entire project. No doubt some people went to these places but it was totally illogical and out of place.

Developing the Theory:

Does constant reference to the chief minister's office or the central government in the first case, makes the state absent from the local villages or is it so ubiquitous that it is apparently not there? Gupta argues that this lack of attention to the state in ethnographic works may be due to a methodology that privileges face-to-face contact and spatial proximity with the actor¹⁶. In his paper on the 'discourse of corruption', Gupta tries to do an 'ethnography of state by examining the discourses of corruption in contemporary India. Studying the state ethnologically' he says, 'involves both the analysis of everyday practices and the *discursive*

¹⁶ Gupta, A (1995): ,Blurred boundaries- the discourse of corruption, the culture of politics and the imagined state'; American Ethnologist 22 (2): 375, American Anthropological Association.

construction' of the state in public culture. Such an approach raises fundamental substantive and methodological questions. Substantively, it allows the state to be disaggregated by focusing on different bureaucracies without prejudging their unity or coherence. It also enables one to problematize the relationship between the translocality of the 'state' and necessarily localized offices, institutions, and practices.

Methodologically, it raises concerns about how one applies ethnographic methods when the aim is to understand the workings of a trans-local institution that is made visible in the localized practices. What is the epistemological status of the object of analysis? What is the appropriate mode of gathering data, and what is the relevant scale of analysis? ¹⁷

Ashis Nandy argues that the conventional distinction between the state and the civil society and the scholarship based on it may not be the right category for the analysis of the state in India. His point is that the cultural configuration of the 'state-civil society' arises from the specific historical experience of the European society and may not be the right tool to study the Indian condition. He refers to the 'imperialism of categories' to define any efforts that wish to understand the Indian situation within this framework. Gupta in agreement with his argument uses the 'analysis of the discourse of corruption to question the utility of 'state-civil society' configuration in explaining the Indian situation. The discourse of corruption turned out to be a key arena through which the state, citizens and other organizations, including developmental aggregations come to be imagined. Instead of treating corruption as a dysfunctional aspect of state organizations, Gupta sees it as a mechanism through which the state itself is discursively constructed, suggesting that the struggle for hegemony is built into the very construction of the state.¹⁸This kind of work derives its support from a fast growing body of creative work that is pointing the way to a richer analysis of the state. (For e.g. Corbridge et.al 2005, Ferguson 1990)

¹⁷ See also: Nader, Laura (1972) , 'Up the Anthropologist- Perspectives gained from studying Up' in 'Reinventing Anthropology' Dell Hymes, ed. Pp 284-311. New York, Pantheon Books.

¹⁸ Gupta: 'It rejects the reification of the state inherent both in the vanguardist movements that seek to overthrow the state and reformist movements that seek to work within it'.

‘Very little rich ethnographic evidence documents what lower-level officials actually do in the name of the state. Research on the state, with its focus on large scale structures and major policies, has failed to illuminate the quotidian practices (Bourdieu 1977) of bureaucrats that tell us about the effects of the state on the everyday lives of rural people. Surprisingly, little research has been conducted in the small towns in India, where a large number of state officials, constituting the broad base of the bureaucratic pyramid, live and work- the village level workers, *panchayat mantries* (government employees at the village level who report to the higher officials in the state capital about the activities of the local *panchayats*), land-record keepers, elementary school teachers, staff of the civil hospital and so on. This is the site where the majority of people in a rural and agricultural country like India come into contact with ‘the state’ and this is where many of their images of the state are forged’.¹⁹

Although research into the practices of local state officials is necessary, it is not by itself sufficient to comprehend how the state comes to be constructed and represented.

Corbridge argues that the poor rural people encounter the state on an everyday basis and their image of the state is informed by the series of projects and ideas that are circulated by the government and the broader development community but these encounters are not the only ways by which the state is felt or understood. The discursive construction of the state is also informed to a large extent by the public media like radios and TV and the newspaper, the widely distributed cultural text.

Exploring the discursive construction of the state also requires attention to the transnational processes and the changes taking place in the international political economy and development practices. For instance, the new liberalization policies being followed by the Congress government in India after 1990s could only be understood in the context of an

¹⁹ Gupta, A: *ibid*

international discourse of 'efficiency' being promoted by the IMF and the collapse of former Soviet Union, one of India's most important strategic and economic partners.²⁰

The point is to note that the discursive construction of the state needs to take into account its constitution through a complex set of spatially intersecting representations and practices and we need to pay attention to the multiple-y mediated contexts through which the state comes to be constructed.

Conclusion:

The main argument in this paper is that the governing strategy of the WSD projects is depoliticized in the sense that the state theoretically devolves the power of management to the village committee, however the state managers retain, in many instances, arms-length control over crucial social processes whilst simultaneously benefiting from the distancing effects of depoliticization, thereby shrugging all responsibilities of dysfunction in the project, which is directed to the village committee while it continues to use its presence in seeking rent, which may be one of the main causes that the project doesn't perform its said functions of water conservation and the local population never attains empowerment to undertake or even participate in its own development. As a form of politics it seeks to change market expectations regarding the effectiveness and credibility of policy making in addition to shielding the government from the consequences of unpopular policies. Moreover, it is a process cloaked in the language of inclusiveness, democratization and empowerment. Popular perceptions of the restructuring of the development configuration are often couched in the terms of 'rolling back the state'.

A useful analogy, borrowed from Osborne and Gäbler (1992)²¹ is that new management of the development projects separates 'steering from rowing' (steering being the proper activity of the central implementing agency, WMD or the mother NGO). In brief, steering agencies (such as WMD or the mother NGO) increasingly, both directly and indirectly, regulate local

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ Reinventing Government'

'rowing' agencies (such as WUAs, local bodies) by setting policy goals for rowing agencies to achieve, fixing budgets within which 'rowing agencies' must operate, awarding contracts to competing rowing agencies, appointing the 'right' people to head these 'rowing agencies'.

The governing mechanism in the field is such that the state devolves responsibility for unpopular policies to the people and the projects by the way of their implementation further increase the gap between the rich and the poor, sharing the benefits of the project with a chosen few, who acquire the purchasing power to participate in the market economy. The gap between the have and have not-s further increases in the rural areas also, which earlier was confined to the big cities.

This is the governing mechanism by which unequal distribution of wealth is perpetuated. Here people are theoretically responsible for the failed project, while the government teams up with the elites of the village to share the benefits which were meant more for the rural poor and finally the tax-payers of the entire country end up paying the loan borrowed from the international banks which was an investment in development not made and hence the overall progress of the country suffers. It weighs down the government exchequer.

Following Pareto's classification of the society, the state agents here could be equated with the 'governing' elite, the village headmen could be seen as the 'non-governing elites and the rest as non-elites. He argues that in most societies the same individuals occupied the high positions in the hierarchy of power as in the hierarchy of wealth. 'The so called upper classes are also the richest.'