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Title: Godsend, Sleight of Hand, or Just Muddling Through: Joint Management in India  
Panel: "The State of Communities: Participation, Decentralization, and Natural Resource Management"

Stream: Theory

## **Godsend, Sleight of Hand, or Just Muddling Through: Joint Management in India**

### **Introduction**

*The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests has stated [that] the "Process Plan" of the Western Ghats Forestry and Environment Project funded by ODA of the U.K. depends mainly on the [sic] JFPM and the ODA authorities have insisted for [sic] a Government Order authorizing the principles of Joint Forest Planning and Management.*

From the preamble to the Order  
issued by the Government of Karnataka  
to enable JFM (Government of Karnataka, 1993).

The early 1990s witnessed an apparent sea-change in state attitudes towards the management of common-pool natural resources in India and elsewhere. The state, hitherto controlling and managing most common-pool resources such as forests and water bodies in a paternalistic manner, appeared to finally have come around and opened its doors to the concept of "people's participation in natural resource management". In the context of forestry, within a period of 7 years following the historic 1990 directive from the Government of India, 17 states had issued orders enabling "Joint Forest Management" (JFM)<sup>1</sup>. Several states had, with bilateral/multilateral funding, initiated special "forest sector projects" with JFM as the stated cornerstone in all of

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<sup>1</sup> Actual acronyms vary from state to state; JFM is the most common one.

them. Seminars, workshops, and training programs on JFM abounded. During the same period<sup>2</sup>, the irrigation sector saw a similar, albeit less pervasive and publicized, transition in state policies towards not only tanks and lift irrigation management ("minor" irrigation) but even in the "core" area of canal irrigation ("major" irrigation). Phrases like PIM (participatory irrigation management) or the more explicit IMT (irrigation management transfer) have attained the same status in irrigation management fora as that of JFM in forestry. They are the new buzzwords, the essential components of all sectoral reform programmes or development projects. "Joint management", "co-management", or "shared management" are, it seems, the shape of things to come in public policy on natural resource management in general (Swallow and Bromley, 1994, quoted in Saxena, 1997; Ballabh, 1998).

Although funding agencies and provincial governments jump onto the new bandwagon, the picture on the ground is rather confusing. After the initial hype, progress has in many cases been rather tardy. In other cases, joint management has resulted in peculiarly lop-sided and not very sustainable outcomes. There is also a fear among certain activists that joint management is a means of co-opting the struggle for decentralized management of resources. These fears and perceptions are accordingly prompting a re-examination of the premises and precepts of joint management in different ways. One approach looks at the institutional design of joint management programmes and their fit with the resources, communities, and agencies involved. Another focuses on the deconstruction of the concept of "community" in community management.

A third approach would be to examine one's assumptions regarding the state itself. Starting with the question "*Why are so many states promoting local participation and decentralization?*", one could take a closer look at the state's motivations and compulsions, factors that might be responsible for the recalcitrant implementation of decentralization programmes.<sup>3</sup> This paper an attempt to explore "the game behind the rules" rather than the "rules of the game" of participatory resource management. In the next section, I outline the analytical framework I use, and then flesh it out in subsequent sections using examples from the forestry and irrigation

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<sup>2</sup> The watershed date for this transformation in the irrigation sector is less clear-cut than in the case of forestry with its "July 1990 directive"; it is probably closer to 1992, when the Planning Commission's Committee on Pricing of Irrigation Water submitted a report advocating a "substantial reduction in the sphere of responsibility of the government and the encouragement of user groups to take over maintenance, management of water allocations, and collection of water rates". In any case, these dates are only symbolic, the apparently radical shifts concealing the gradual accumulation of various pressures and perceptions in favour of such a shift.

<sup>3</sup> To my mind, these approaches are complementary, possibly slightly overlapping, rather than mutually exclusive. The first ("institutionalist") discourse assumes that the state is a neutral actor open to all possible formulations--an assumption based not so much on naivete as on the need for focussed discussion on one particular aspect of the problem. It may include the deconstruction of the "community" into meaningfully distinct stake-holders (Lélé, 1998; Lélé *et al.*, 1997).

sectors in different provinces<sup>4</sup> in India where participatory or joint management has been initiated.

### **Analytical Framework**

One approach in the literature to explaining the phenomenon of increasing state interest in joint resource management chooses to focus on proximate factors explaining agency behaviour. Thus, Thompson (1995) identifies four reasons:

- a) the simple pressure of a fiscal crisis, possibly exacerbated by structural adjustment/economic liberalization policies,
- b) pressure from donor agencies for greater accountability and transparency,
- c) the recognition of the failure of past approaches by state agencies, and
- d) the demonstration effect of successful pilot efforts by non-governmental organizations or other government agencies in other sectors.

I would call this the "apolitical organizational theory" approach, which does not go into the ideology of the state or the political economy of its links with other actors. The state here is identified with (or reduced to) its bureaucratic arm, and the implicit model is of "rational organizations capable of learning how to perform their jobs better" (cases a, c and d above), perhaps with donor agencies providing the necessary trigger for change (case b).

On the other hand, Agrawal's characterization of the problem in the introduction to this panel is fundamentally skeptical of the state's motives and genuineness in promoting participation and decentralization. He wonders "Why should states, whose central *raison d'etre* is the accumulation of authority, material resources, and legitimacy, be interested in decentralizing and devolving real power?". Anybody who has interacted with or observed at close quarters the functioning of the Indian state, the bureaucratic apparatus of which remains significantly unchanged from colonial times, is sure to share this skepticism. Would the forest department, the country's largest landowner<sup>5</sup>, be really willing to hand over forest areas for villagers to manage, and be satisfied with just a monitoring and technical advisory role? Will the provincial governments, who complain of insufficient devolution of powers from the central government, be willing to similarly devolve some of their powers to the district or lower levels, i.e., to the Panchayati Raj institutions as they are called in India?

This skepticism is so deep-rooted amongst many of us activist-researchers that official programmes which claim to involve local communities are at the very least not taken seriously, and often are looked at with outright suspicion--that they might be new ways of further state agendas at the expense of local communities. After all, the argument goes, which state would supervise its own dissolution? And yet we find that many provincial governments are embracing and adopting these programmes. Herein lies the paradox that demands explanation.

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<sup>4</sup> Although sub-national politico-administrative entities in India are called "states", I shall use to term "provinces" in order to avoid confusing them with the term "state" as used in political science discourses.

<sup>5</sup> The forest departments of all provinces together control 23% of India's land area.

This "skeptical political science" approach is based on a set of assumptions: a) that the proposed or ongoing participatory management programmes and policies involve a substantial devolution (if not complete handover) of state power, b) that "the state" is by nature always interested in accumulating power and resources, and, given its exclusive focus on the state, c) that the state is the only autonomous actor in the picture.

I propose a more plural and comprehensive framework that enables one to resolve the apparent paradox resulting from the "skeptical political science" approach without making the simplistic assumptions of the "apolitical organizational theory" one. This framework

- 1) clarifies the actual nature of the decentralization/devolution involved in joint management programmes,
- 2) allows for some rational, survival-oriented behaviour by the state, but also
- 3) deconstructs the state into at least two semi-independent constituents, viz., its political arm and the bureaucracy<sup>6</sup>, and incorporates the political economy of each,
- 4) recognizes the existence of a host of other semi-autonomous actors, particularly international donor agencies on the one hand and NGOs and academia on the other that influence the state from outside.

In what follows, I shall use the term "state" initially without disaggregation while discussing points 1 and 2 above, or when I do not see a divergence between its constituents in a particular case.

### **Nature of participation and devolution**

Before we set about explaining this so-called shift in state attitudes towards participation and decentralization in natural resource management, it is worth asking whether ongoing state programmes and initiatives can really be said to represent such a shift. Even at the rhetorical level, one distinction between the pre-1990 period and now is immediately visible: while academics and activists had clamoured for *community management* of natural resources, what has actually been adopted now is *joint management*. Whatever the reasons for its occurrence,<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Further de-construction is possible: the bureaucracy into senior (all-India services) officers and junior (state-cadre) line staff, the government itself into provincial and central governments, and so on. I find the simple two-way categorization sufficient for the purposes of this paper.

<sup>7</sup> There are several reasons for this. First, the natural inertia of the state against any radical change. Second, there appears to have been a feeling of "better-something-than-nothing" amongst the proponents of decentralized management and a shortage of staying power in their long-drawn out battle with foot-dragging state agencies. A clear case of this last (based upon this author's personal experience) is the manner in which the activists' federation in Karnataka province (FEVORD-K) lost the war of nerves with the Karnataka Forest Department in drafting the structure of JFM in that province during 1990-93. Third, in the context of forestry at least, the most popularized example of "successful participatory management" is the Arabari experiment in West Bengal, which is definitely a case of joint management, and one initiated by the bureaucracy itself. The more bottom-up and autonomous cases of community management of forests from the tribal areas of Gujarat or Orissa were, unfortunately, not publicized anywhere as much. Finally, the

the difference is more than just terminological. The proponents of community management visualized the state's role as simply that of outlining the broad setup (*gram sabha*--the entire adult population of the village--to elect a managing committee), drawing initial boundaries, handing over the control of all natural resources within these boundaries to this setup, and subsequently only intervening in inter-village conflicts or providing extra police support on demand (Agarwal and Narain, 1989; Ravindranath and Gadgil, 1990). In other words, they envisaged the creation of "village republics" with very substantial autonomy from the state apparatus.

The joint management programmes actually adopted by the provinces have never approached this level of devolution of control and integration across resources. First of all, they adopt a sectoral approach, with some sectors lagging far behind others in initiating participatory management. The negative fallout of this is particularly noticeable in the case of forests: while foresters try to persuade villagers to participate in protecting and regenerating the forest, villagers may put higher priority on getting loans, irrigation facilities, or some other inputs for agricultural development so that they can reduce their dependence on forests for income.

Second, the approach is also spatially partial, i.e., decentralization of resource ownership or control is limited to only part of the resource, the part which is physically in poorest condition, or socially/logistically the most difficult to manage for the particular department. Thus, in the case of JFM, the programmes are usually restricted to "degraded" forests<sup>8</sup>, or more aggressively pursued in Protected Forests than in Reserve Forests (the latter category invariably containing the richer forests). Similarly, PIM programmes only apply to the management of tertiary and feeder canals that have historically been managed by the farmers in many areas in any case; control of the main canal system is retained by the irrigation departments in all provinces (Brewer *et al.*, 1997). State water management agencies are also more enthusiastic about handing over the management of village tanks and public tube-wells or open wells--resources that represent relatively little state investment and whose management involves heavy transaction costs.

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proponents of the pure community management model failed to address adequately the serious conceptual problems with this model, viz., the cross-boundary asymmetric externalities in resource management (including the pure public good aspects of forests; see Lélé, 1998), and the factors--traditional and modern--that militate against the easy formation and equitable operation of communitarian structures (Saxena, 1997, quoting Swallow and Bromley). Clearly, there are situations in which pure community management is not feasible, and co-management between agencies operating at a larger scale and local scale community groups is essential, as in the case of large irrigation systems.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., in Karnataka's JFM programme, this is defined as forest with less than 25% canopy cover. In the heavily forested areas, such land may constitute less than 10-20% of the total forest area that is actually used by villagers. Yet, the department refuses to give communities control over the remaining ("good") forests, arguing that communities cannot be trusted with these forests, at least right now, and that such forests can be transferred only after the communities have "proved" their capabilities and environment-friendliness on degraded lands.

Third, and perhaps most important, the participation envisaged is more in execution than in planning, the structures more puppetish than autonomous. Village Forest Committees usually have a forest department person as ex-officio secretary. They can generally be recognized and de-recognized only by the Forest Departments. Villagers' management plans can be vetoed by the department, but departmental plans often cannot be obtained, let alone vetoed, by the communities. Each harvest--even if part of an approved management plan--still requires departmental permission; if delays in processing these applications leads to the loss of the harvest (such as the drying up of bamboo), there is no penalty for the department. Even in the case of canal irrigation, where the timing and volume of water releases is critical to the farmers being able to benefit from the arrangement, only two provincial governments (Maharashtra and Gujarat) have expressed a willingness to enter into contracts with the Water Users Association whereby the irrigation department is committed to providing a certain amount of water at a certain time. In the case of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, joint irrigation management means essentially the setting up of joint management committees (JMCs) for the airing of farmers' views and concerns, without the decisions of the JMCs being binding on the department. In other words, the entire exercise is one of obtaining community participation in certain tasks, and community input into decision-making, but the input can be ignored. This is not decentralization or devolution. It is joint *management*, i.e., participation of the state in day-to-day management of the resource. And this is not just the *de facto* situation; even at the ideological level there is clear insistence on continued state presence, control, ownership and final veto powers in most aspects.

Fourth, there are at least a few examples where the so-called attitudinal change is only at the level of rhetoric, and that the practices on the ground are as top-down as before. An example of this, which curiously co-exists with all the noise and hoopla of joint forest management, is the Government of India's "Eco-development Project", being implemented in seven national parks with funding from the World Bank through the Global Environmental Facility. The World Bank's Staff Appraisal Report claims that the project has "two main thrusts: improvement of protected area management and *involvement of local people*" (quoted in Karlsson, 1998, emphasis mine). But all evidence points to the exact opposite, viz., that the project is being used as an excuse to severely curtail the activities of and evict or gradually push out the communities living in these areas (Karlsson, 1998; Cheria, 1995).

In short, at least part of the answer to the question as to why states are devolving power or giving away control is simply that *they are not*, that joint management is not the same as decentralization or devolution of power. This is reinforced when one looks at the poor record of the Indian state in the case where it was explicitly asked to decentralize governance in general, viz., in the implementation of the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Indian Constitution, which made it imperative on individual provinces to pass legislation to set up local self-governments in rural areas (73rd) and urban areas (74th). While the Amendments were themselves not without flaws, the provincial governments passed laws in which the new institutions are only decentralized implementation agencies of plans conceived and funded in a top-down manner (Mukherji, 1993).

And yet, this is only part of the answer. Like the apocryphal half-full-half-empty cup, there is room to argue that even the limited amount of decentralization, opening up and sharing is significant and its dynamics and drivers worth understanding. I would adopt this position for three reasons. First, while none of the cases of JFM or PIM in India are anywhere close to the "ideal type" of village republics mentioned earlier, there is no doubt that participatory or at least joint management of some sort is here to stay. Notwithstanding the cases of outright chicanery mentioned above, there are a number of examples where joint management of some form has actually been accepted by the state in actual practice. JFM in West Bengal, even after discounting for media hype, is firmly rooted and expanding, and has yielded substantial tangible benefits to local communities. An independent assessment of JFM in Andhra Pradesh says that, for all its limitations, the JFM process in the state is now irreversible (Bharati, 1997). The forest minister of Orissa has gone on record favouring expansion of JFM.

Second, there is significant variation across the country and across sectors in state attitudes towards joint management. Karnataka (even five years after passing of executive orders enabling JFM and the operation of a large bilaterally funded project) is only nominally functioning (Saxena *et al.*, 1997). While PIM in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh is rapidly catching on, that in Tamil Nadu and Kerala is lagging far behind, even though Tamil Nadu boasts of perhaps the largest number of successful pilot programmes on community-managed irrigation (Brewer *et al.*, 1997). On the other hand, although the irrigation sector was a relatively late starter in the participatory management game, it appears to have gone further than the forest sector, in that at least in some places there has been an actual irrigation management *transfer*, i.e., the complete handover of control over certain physical assets. Irrigation Acts have actually been modified in some provinces (Raju, 1998); the provincial Forest Act has not been modified in a single case, not even in West Bengal. These differences are worthy of explanation in and of themselves.

Third, the ongoing adoption of JFM can be seen as a foot in the door, a beginning towards greater participation, transparency, and accountability of natural resource management activities, and so understanding its triggers, dynamics and limitations can help better focus efforts of those who would like to see much greater levels of decentralization and participation. In other words, if the state's attitudes towards community participation are a continuum that ranges in theory from *hostile* at one extreme through *manipulative*, *neutral/passive*, and *incremental* to *fully supportive* at the other extreme (Midgely, 1986, further modified by this author), then even an actual range from hostile to incremental needs explanation, and this explanation can provide a means for moving towards the fully supportive mode.

### **Economic and political survival of the state**

"Rational-state" formulations can take many forms, depending upon the nature of rationality one attributes to the state. The most generous assumption would be that of a strong state committed to efficient, just, and sustainable social development, and experimenting with different approaches to reach its goals. In this model, after 40 years or so of experimentation with its standard top-down approach to governance and resource management, the state is now realizing

its limitations and the potential of the participatory approach. While there may be some random variation, eventually all states will learn and adopt this approach.

Certainly the bureaucracy would today have us believe this committed-state-open-to-learning model. As Jeffery *et al.* (1998) say, "one of the main difficulties in understanding how forest departments are responding to the new initiatives is that it is hard to find a forest official who is not in favour of the participatory rhetoric in public". Perhaps there is a some genuine shift in bureaucrats' perceptions, some recognition of the repeated failures to achieve stated goals, of the colossal waste involved and often additional social misery created, some willingness to experiment with alternative approaches. It must also be kept in mind that the most publicized example of JFM, viz., the Arabari experiment in Midnapore district in West Bengal, was a purely *bureaucrat-led innovation* called the Arabari Socio-Economic Project, which has involved very significant investments by the forest department in employment generation (Tiwari, 1998). The results have been dramatic enough for foresters from other states visiting this site to exclaim that "after a three-day visit to Arabari, I was a changed man" (reported in Jeffery *et al.*, 1998).

It is not clear, however, that this ideological shift has really permeated the general forest bureaucracy to an extent significant enough to provide the impetus for the adoption of participatory approaches. If it had, one would expect to see this adoption fairly uniformly across the entire Indian administrative landscape, not scattered and highly variable in quality as it is today. And, notwithstanding Jeffery *et al.*, this author has met a number of officials who are outright hostile to any form of people's participation.

A more limited rationality, viz., the need to survive in the face of increasing fiscal pressures, might have greater explanatory power, especially when it comes to the differences between the forest and irrigation sectors. The forest sectors has been a net contributor to state budgets, whereas the irrigation sector is one of the heaviest drains on them. It is much harder to assess what returns the forest department ought to actually generate from the land it controls, especially since it is supposed to cater to a variety of non-economic objectives (biodiversity conservation, ecosystem regulation, meeting subsistence needs of local populations, etc.). The irrigation department, on the other hand, delivers a single service with significant recurring costs (operation and maintenance or O&M), its investment decisions have traditionally been backed up by detailed benefit-cost calculations, and so it forms an easy target for criticism when the returns are not even enough to cover O&M costs. One would therefore predict that if fiscal pressures play a role at all, they would do so in the case of the irrigation sector.

This prediction is borne out by studies in each sector. As Jeffery *et al.* admit, "these pressures do not loom large even in the perspectives of senior forest officials...[and] there is no evidence that FD staffing complements have been reduced in the past 10 years". On the other hand, improved recovery of irrigation charges and reduction in administrative costs the most common motivation for PIM across all provinces (Brewer *et al.*, 1997).

The above can be described as a win-win situation: the state reduces its fiscal and administrative burden, while the farmers (even if they have to pay something more than they used to) get much

better service, without sacrificing equity (Brewer *et al.*, 1997). The same rationale also tempts the forest department in certain contexts. Even if fiscal pressures are not that severe in the forest sector, the department may find it more efficient to get villagers to patrol the forest if the concessions they have to make in return are "nominal" ones--such as setting up an institution to manage areas that were traditionally not controlled by the state anyway.

But fiscal prudence has never been the forte of the state in India, "soft budget constraints" have been the rule rather than the exception. One has to therefore invoke the other factors outlined in the framework section to explain the state's sudden willingness to lend its ear to such programmes.

### **Political calculations and ideologies**

A fundamental simplification in most analyses of the Indian state in the context of resource management has been the exclusive focus on the bureaucracy, and the further identification of state policy with the policy promoted by the particular department. Perhaps this is not entirely surprising, since the Indian bureaucracy, originally set up by the British to consolidate and systematize their rule, exerts a tremendous influence on the governance of the country, particularly when it comes to "technical" matters such as forestry and irrigation. During the colonial period, there was hardly any difference between the interests of the state and those of the bureaucracy, whether in theory or in practice.<sup>9</sup>

But a democratically elected arm of the government is at least theoretically autonomous from and in fact the boss of the bureaucracy. And political parties may come to power with specific agendas born out of their particular ideologies. Even otherwise, being products of the electoral process makes the politicians vulnerable to pressures from their vote-banks and from special interest groups. The concerns and compulsions of the politicians should therefore exert a significant influence on the spread (or lack of spread) of participatory management and decentralization, especially given that these concepts are non-technical in nature and in fact require changes in the laws of the provinces.

The experience in India appears to bear out these hypotheses. The political arm has exerted considerable positive as well as negative influence over the spread of participatory or joint management. As mentioned above, individual experiments in participatory or joint management have sometimes been initiated by bureaucrats. But the scaling up of these experiments and their conversion into legitimate "programmes" has never taken place without the backing of the political arm of the state. The Arabari experiment would have remained an experiment but for the support it received from the Left Front that came to power in West Bengal in 1977 (William Stewart, personal communication), leading to the spread of JFM in a large part of West Bengal. Similarly, the JFM concept initiated under the World Bank supported project in 1994 caught the

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<sup>9</sup> Although even here some scholars would argue that the differences between departments (such as the forest and revenue departments: Rangarajan, 1996) and between the narrow economic objectives and broader objectives of maintaining political control and stability are noteworthy.

attention of the current Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, and so in 1996 he initiated another programme (which is locally known as Chief Minister's JFM!) to bring additional areas under JFM. On the other hand, although the Agricultural Engineering Department of Tamil Nadu set up "a very large number of farmer organizations for participatory management in large irrigation systems between 1989 and 1993", the Tamil Nadu Public Works Department did not seriously consider adopting IMT till last year (Brewer *et al.*, 1997), probably due to lack of political support.

The reasons for the generally indifferent or even hostile attitude of most political parties to decentralization of resource management is understandable, if one adopts the rent-seeking model of the state. It is, however, interesting to note that two other models also seem to be operating. An ideological commitment to decentralization of power, reflected in the Left Front government's radical decentralization through Panchayati Raj (much before the Constitutional Amendments were passed by the Centre), spilled over subsequently into the JFM programme. The political arm saw no contradiction between a strong state and decentralized governance (Webster, 1997). In the case of Andhra, rather than a strong ideology, it appears that the strongly populist style and history of the ruling Telugu Desam party<sup>10</sup> explains their jumping onto the JFM bandwagon, just as they are leading the PIM bandwagon and also vigorously implementing power sector reforms.<sup>11</sup> Thus, in a functioning democracy, the presumed distance and antagonism between the state and the community is incorrect in theory and at least an exaggeration in practice.

### **The Role of Donor Agencies (the Top) and NGOs and academics (the Bottom)**

Purely state-focussed formulations, whether the rent-seeking state model or the rational committed-state one, give the impression that the state is the only actor with "agency". This is a partial characterization of the political economy of the state, and in the particular context of Third World countries, ignores the looming presence and power of international donor agencies at the "top"<sup>12</sup>. It also ignores the small but significant leverage exerted today by actors at the "bottom", viz., non-governmental activist organizations and academics. The dynamics between

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<sup>10</sup> A party set up and single-handedly nurtured by an extremely popular film star, whose son-in-law is now the Chief Minister.

<sup>11</sup> Again, it is possible to argue that the real impetus comes not from a populist form of politics but from the severe fiscal crisis confronting Andhra province. However, Andhra's situation is by no means unique amongst Indian provinces, rendering this argument inadequate.

<sup>12</sup> These include the multilateral agencies--the World Bank and IMF--and bilateral agencies, such as U.K.'s ODA (now DfID), Canada's CIDA, Sweden's SIDA, Japan's OECF (now ODA), etc. I do not include here the private foundations because a) the funds they channelize are minuscule compared with those coming from the bilateral and multilateral agencies, b) they have much lesser access to government agencies, and c) they come with a more varied ideological baggage than the big donors, whose agendas are directly driven by their respective countries, or, in the case of WB-IMF, by the Northern countries in general.

these actors at the top, the bottom, and the state in between can be illustrated through the case of the Western Ghats Forestry & Environment Project that has been initiated in Karnataka province in southern India.<sup>13</sup>

During 1985-1990, the Karnataka Forest Department (KFD) had received a large grant-cum-loan for a Social Forestry (SF) Project from the World Bank and the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) of the U.K. This project had come in for severe criticisms from various circles, and even the Bank's review was quite negative. Thus, when the time came to consider the extension of the project, there was need for a serious rethink on part of both donor and recipient. The WB had already indicated that it would not consider a new loan. However, the ODA, ostensibly to redress the failures of the SF project but quite likely driven by the British government's commitment to spend 100 million pounds on "international forest conservation" (Hildyard *et al.*, 1998) agreed to consider a new grant.

Ironically, the first draft proposal submitted by KFD (KFD, 1988) reflected little new thinking on people's participation; even the proposal itself was kept confidential. It became public only because some whistle-blowers within the ODA leaked it to some NGOs in the U.K., who in turn passed them on to NGOs in Karnataka. The latter had by then already organized as a Federation of Voluntary Organizations for Rural Development-Karnataka (FEVORD-K). Facing criticism from FEVORD-K and perhaps more importantly from NGOs within the U.K., the ODA was forced to ask KFD to rewrite the proposal. Eventually, in 1990, the ODA itself sent a consultant team consisting almost entirely of British "experts" to rewrite the entire proposal "on behalf of" the KFD! This draft (KFD, 1990) was touted as a radical departure from conventional forestry projects, in that it incorporated the concept of JFM as its cornerstone. (Note that July 1990 was also when the Central government issued the directive to provincial governments to create enabling legislation for people's participation in forest management.) FEVORD-K, with the help of scientists from the Centre for Ecological Sciences, brought out a stinging critique of this draft, and shared the same with its NGO contacts in the U.K.

Simultaneously, in the state-level consultations going on for drawing up orders for enabling JFM, FEVORD-K opposed the draft structure proposed by KFD, and tabled an alternative (much more radical) draft. After heated debate, a number of points proposed by FEVORD-K<sup>14</sup> were incorporated into the draft structure at the behest of the non-forest bureaucrat (Development Commissioner) who presided over these consultations. In January 1991, an ODA "appraisal"

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<sup>13</sup> The following description is based upon the authors direct involvement in, observations of and discussions with principal actors involved in the events.

<sup>14</sup> Key ones being that a) all forest and revenue department lands be open for JFM, not just "degraded" lands, that b) no forest official should have more than observer status in the Village Forest Committee, and c) the VFCs cannot be dissolved by the orders of forest officials alone (Urs, 1991).

team visited Bangalore to take the final decision on the project, and in a meeting with NGOs and academicians, faced severe criticism again to which it was unable to give satisfactory answers.<sup>15</sup>

Yet, in April 1991, the ODA sanctioned 24 million pounds for the project with minimal changes (KFD, 1991). And the government order on JFM (Government of Karnataka, 1993), which came out only in 1993 after a prolonged standoff between ODA and KFD, reflected none of the changes adopted in the consultations with the NGOs. The order's weaknesses (Lélé, 1995) combined with the KFD's and the government's limited interest in JFM have resulted in tardy initiation of JFM and a number of lacunae even where it has occurred (Saxena *et al.*, 1997).

Why did the ODA approve the project and not browbeat the KFD into further modifying the project? And why did the NGOs let the government and ODA get away it, just when it appeared that the latter were giving significant weight to NGO opinion (witness the repeated consultations)? While a full-fledged political economy of international environmental aid and an analysis of the sociology of NGOs is not the purpose of this paper, some insight into the agendas of actors who wield significant influence over state policy is useful. On the one hand, the ODA's primary objective was to somehow make a grant (to make the British government look like a generous donor), and when the KFD dug its heels in at further changes, the ODA could not call its bluff (underlining again the fiscally safe position of the forest department). Nor are the ODA's hands themselves clean: it had (like most bilateral and multilateral donors) built in a substantial "return-aid" component: the return flow of aid through very heavy allocations for foreign consultants, monitoring, and training of Indian foresters in the U.K. This vested interest on the part of ODA makes a mockery of what otherwise appear to be somewhat sincere efforts on its part to at least try and ensure some efficiency and accountability in project implementation through repeated internal reviews, funding of an independent external review by recognized experts acceptable to the NGOs, and an attempt to involve NGOs in project design for the phase 2 of the project.<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, the NGOs appear to have suffered from a combination of loss through attrition and internal conflicts over strategy. The forestry and environment component of FEVORD-K was always weak, and when the final KFD-ODA negotiations got prolonged,

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<sup>15</sup> For instance, it was pointed out that although JFM was talked of as the cornerstone of the project, and though it was being said that initiating JFM would be a challenging task because it involved a fundamental re-orientation of attitudes of KFD personnel, and although JFM experience from West Bengal had shown tremendous potential for regeneration of forests simply through protection, yet 70% of the project budget was allocated for plantation activities, with most of the plantations being of fast-growing exotics. The proposal was also criticized for including a training component wherein forest officials would be sent to the U.K. for training in socially-oriented and ecologically sound forest management, when there were facilities and scientists to provide this kind of training in India itself.

<sup>16</sup> *Individual* junior- and middle-level bureaucrats/ technocrats in international aid agencies usually hold some idealistic notions, and they are able to practice them at someone else's expense, at least up to a point where they think they are making a difference without actually upsetting the apple-cart.

FEVORD-K may have lost its momentum. But it is also clear that there was an internal conflict within FEVORD-K over what strategy to pursue in the face of a limited change in project elements, a conflict that may have been sharpened by carrots dangled by KFD/ODA. One faction felt that since JFM had basically been accepted by KFD, it would be better to work grab the opportunity and work with local communities to extract maximum benefits from it. And ODA had expressed a strong interest in "institutionalizing the NGO role" in the project by providing financial support for NGOs to play the role of facilitators between local communities and KFD in the JFM process. Another faction, however, felt that the JFM proposed was fundamentally flawed, that the larger problems with the project remained, and that taking financial support from KFD/ODA would seriously compromise the NGOs. Indeed, the conflict over whether to take financial support from KFD at the risk of co-optation or to stay independent at the risk of getting marginalized got further exacerbated when the project expanded to the next district of Shimoga.

While a number of factors combined to make Karnataka's experiment with JFM still-born<sup>17</sup>, one observes significant commonalities at least in donor behaviour and bureaucratic response with other provinces and sectors. Donors operate in a very dictatorial and know-all fashion, but they are ultimately as or more desperate to give the money<sup>18</sup>--and lots of it--as the recipients are to take it. The donors' overtly progressive agendas mask a strong economic interest in return flows of aid and perhaps the environmental priorities of the donor country, and they are willing (indeed keen) to buy out the opposition by providing hefty allocations for infrastructure and consultancies to retired bureaucrats even when the projects are supposedly "process oriented". Indeed, it would not be wrong to say that when JFM hit the headlines (courtesy the Ford Foundation's support for analyzing and publicizing the Arabari experiment), the bilateral/multi-lateral donors grabbed it with both hands and jockeyed with each other to consummate projects incorporating this rhetoric with different provincial governments. Not surprisingly, the World Bank appears to have muscled out many of the bilateral donors, and it has now "captured" six provinces (Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and is negotiating with Kerala). And bureaucrats are willing to question the credentials of foreign academics lecturing to them on matters peculiar to Indian/Third World situations, but only after having gone to the foreign country for the so-called training programmes (Marlene Buchy, personal communication).

In the irrigation sector, given the greater fiscal pressures on the bureaucracy, the donors seem to be even more dominant. As Brewer *et al.* put it, "outside finance has been very

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<sup>17</sup> Karnataka is a province where the top bureaucracy has been significantly hostile to JFM, where the department (as the owner-manager of a very substantial and lucrative forest area) is powerful enough to insulate itself significantly from fiscal pressures, and where the provincial governments have historically had centralizing tendencies and have been indifferent to participatory approaches, and where there is no significant vote bank of forest-dependent poor and a significant vote-bank of "forest-exploiting" rich landlords--arecanut farmers and coffee planters--who have historically enjoyed very substantial individual privileges and are afraid of any communitarian takeover.

<sup>18</sup> For political and, when it comes to the Bank, simple financial reasons.

important..outside advice seems not to have been equally influential". Yet they attribute the imposition of Tamil Nadu-style joint management committees onto Orissa (although Orissa's irrigation sector is historically organized on lines similar to Bihar's) largely to the fact that both the Orissa and the Tamil Nadu proposals were prepared by the same World Bank consultants! In other words, advice is acceptable if it comes with a hefty grant.

Clearly, while the process of structural adjustment and the hardening of budget constraints that comes along with it have made states more pliable to donor pressures. Donors in turn appear to lend some legitimacy to inputs and interventions from non-governmental actors, but they are ultimately constrained by their internal agendas, primary among them being the need to make grants/loans. The bureaucratic arm of the state walks the tight-rope between wanting to retain control and wanting to get lucrative projects, while adopting the rhetoric of "the need to change with times" and keeping the few committed officers satisfied. The political arm appears to be sitting on the fence; in the absence of a strong ideological commitment, it will only jump onto the community participation bandwagon when it sees some scope for making electoral capital out of it. Independent NGOs and academics, operating in what is still a very open society by any standards, wield some influence on the policies of the state either by establishing strong personal (intellectual) relationships with bureaucrats or (more rarely) by building bridges with progressive politicians.

### **Concluding remarks**

The main attempt in this paper has been to chalk out a middle path between one extreme of taking state pronouncements of radical ideological shifts too literally and the other of characterizing the state, the only actor presume to have some agency, as a monolithic rent-seeking turf-maximizing entity. I presented evidence from two sectors across several provinces in India in favour of a richer framework that differentiates between participation and devolution, between joint management and decentralization, and then explains the range of state responses to the concept of community participation as being the outcome of the compulsions and motivations of several different actors inside and outside the "state". I would argue that in a country like India with a well-entrenched democratic setup and a vibrant civil society, the rent-seeking model of the state has a limited life-span. The process of liberalization and structural adjustment has temporarily shifted the balance of power towards the international donor agencies and also given greater legitimacy to the non-governmental sector. But the political arm of the democratic state and its constituencies will not remain bypassed for long. Whether that it does that consciously through a West Bengal-type internalization of the decentralization agenda or take the populist--and necessary haphazard--route as in Andhra Pradesh remains to be seen.

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