Working Paper

No. 440

CONTESTED MODERNITIES IN AN INDIGENOUS DOMAIN:

Community self-management of forest in post-independence Meghalaya, a state of India

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April 2007

* ISS MA Research Paper Award winner for the academic year 2005-2006.

ISSN 0921-0210

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS 5

ABSTRACT 6

1. INTRODUCTION: RESEARCH ISSUES 7

    1.1 Community control of Forest and its contradictions 7

    1.2 Meghalaya: the 'promised' land of community forest management? 9

2 FRAMEWORK, METHODOLOGY AND DATA 11

    2.1 Deconstructing nature: discourse analysis and actor based approach-actor network and discourse coalition 12

    2.2 Sources for data 13

    2.3 Limitations of research 14

    2.4 Organization of chapters 14

3 CLASSIFYING THE DISCOURSES ON FOREST IN THE CONTEXT OF STATE AND COMMUNITY 15

    3.1. Post-independence Meghalya: the three discourses of indigeneity, modernity and state development 15

    3.2 Indigeneity discourse: the initial years 20

    3.3 The discourse on modernity and the blue print of development 20

    3.4 State development discourse: aligning with the Meta-narrative 21

4 THE BLUE PRINT FOR DEVELOPMENT: INSTITUTIONS, COMMUNITY AND GENDER IN MEGHALAYA 23

    4.1 District Councils: indigenous institutions or entry points for State formation in community space? 23

    4.2 Forests under district council: command and control 24

    4.3 Working of modernity in the tribal self management 'zone' of forest: market, privatisation and erosion of indigenous forms of resource control 26

    4.4 The 'king' charcoal 27

    4.5 Privatization of community land and differentiation 27

    4.6 Privatization and State formation in gender spaces 29

5 UNPACKING POLICY DISCOURSE ON COMMUNITY SELF-MANAGEMENT OF FOREST IN MEGHALAYA 31

5.1. The politics of State resource control- de-legitimizing community management 32

5.2 Resource control through legislation 35

5.3 The new initiative of Joint Forest Management in Meghalaya: empowering State or community? 36

5.4 Wild life management: responsibility without power 38

5.5 Globalization of forest: carbon finance and new subjectivities 39

6 CONCLUSION: CRISIS NARRATIVE AND COUNTER NARRATIVE 40

REFERENCES 43

ACRONYMS

ADC	Autonomous District Council
ANT	Actor Network Theory
BNHS	Bombay Natural History Society
CEM	Chief Executive Member
CPR	Common Property Resource
DSDR	Draft State Development Report
EM	Executive Member
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FSI	Forest Survey of India
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
JFM	Joint Forest Management
JFMC	Joint Forest Management Committee
KHADC	Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council
MIPF	Meghalaya Indigenous People's Forum
MIDC	Meghalaya Industrial Development Corporation
MFP	Minor Forest Produce
NABARD	National Agriculture Bank for Rural Development
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
NRM	Natural Resource Management
SoER	State of the Environment Report
SoFR	State of the Forest Report
WDPSCA	Watershed Development in Shifting-Cultivation Areas

ABSTRACT

The study examines the fate of community forestry in the real-world context of pressures through the state and from the market, by using a combination of discourse analysis, actor analysis and net-work analysis. It deals with the views and interactions of a wide range of groups, including attention to important divisions of genders and class. It identifies and characterises eight relevant discourses, and examines, including from interviews, how these have been used by diverse users in diverse contexts; including how actors may manoeuvre within and between discourses. Overall the study shows the eight discourses at work, in alliance, in conflict and in evolution.

CONTESTED MODERNITIES IN AN INDIGENOUS DOMAIN: Community self-management of forest in post-independence Meghalaya, a state of India

1. INTRODUCTION: RESEARCH ISSUES

1.1 Community control of Forest and its contradictions

For most of the last century the conventional thinking was that forests could be best managed by the government. This premise was based on a narrative that saw community as an obstacle to efficient and rational resource use. Conservation required the protection of forests and since the members of local communities needed the forest for fuel wood and fodder, they exploited it without restraint leading to degradation and depletion of resources. This view of the Tragedy of the Commons popularized by Hardin (1968) was bolstered by the fact that the population in many of these areas had grown and the depletion was squarely blamed on population pressure. Thus a thinking emerged that even though the people had conserved their natural resource in an 'ecotopian' past, in the modern times, the way to conservation was through strong State[1] intervention.

However, the inadequacy of this top down exclusionist environmental control leading to continuous degradation, fiscal crisis of the States in the wake of the debt crises of the late 1970s and the early 1980s,the collapse of State socialism, the subsequent hegemonic status of a neo liberal orthodoxy and the availability of international aid funds for participatory governance, have all led policy makers, practitioners and donors to turn to communities to improve the management of 'their' natural resources. (Agrawal 2005:205). With more than fifty countries having one form of partnership or the other with the communities in the forestry sector alone (Agrawal and Gibson 2001:1-2), communities have become the focus of conservationist policy.

Efforts to include people in the management of forest have also received attention in India. An innovative approach in the 1990s is the protection of forest by the local community in return for free usufruct of minor forest produce (MFP). This concept called Joint Forest Management (JFM) has been extended to many states and has the support of the donors like the Word Bank who want the community to "control natural resources through rights to ownership, access, management, or usufruct" (World Bank 2000)

A host of studies on forestry also celebrate communities and demonstrate that common property regimes have the potential to manage public goods efficiently (Ostrom 1990 and McKean 2000 in Agrawal, 2005:207). Though

[1] The word 'State' (in capital letters) has been used as a generic term, while 'state'(in small letters) indicates a federal unit or a province of India through out this essay.

successful in their objective at least theoretically, the sustainability of community management within the political economy of modern States, linking environmental and political forces to social change, has mostly been neglected in such studies. It is only recently that a group of scholars from diverse academic and institutional backgrounds, known as political ecologists, have begun to examine such linkages in parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America (Blackie and Brookfield 1987). Correspondingly a body of work that may be termed Third World Political Ecology has emerged locating issues like community management of natural resources, in the wider context of State policies and global capitalism and brings to the fore inherent ambiguities and contradictions between the project of community management and the political economy of the modern States. It points out for instance, that the State's vision of modernization and progress usually entails industrialization, commercialization of agriculture or extraction of natural resources whilst the conventional, subsistence based natural resource management based on communal forms is mostly out of step with this mode of development. As Walker (1989:32) notes, there is an inherent, continuing potential for conflict between the State's roles as developer and as protector and steward of the natural environment. Sivaramakrishnan (1999:5) points out that at the operational level, the State has several internal hierarchies-central, provincial and local. State making refers to the ideological and organizational power of the central government to penetrate society, exact compliance and invoke commitment, which creates tension between these hierarchies, especially central direction and local autonomy.

Besides the considerations of political economy of the State, there is a political economy of truth within State institutions (Watts 1983), which is often overlooked. Thus, even the effects of participatory measures proposed by the community advocates to roll back State power and strengthen community need to be considered carefully. These measures have the capacity to further strengthen the State's territorialization project and provide various other opportunities (e.g. through bureaucratic expansion, donor funding, international legitimating) for the intensification of the rule. One possibility of intensified rule arises directly from the nexus of power and knowledge (Escobar 1984 in Agrawal and Gibson 2001:166).The State, for instance may appear to be supporting community management explicitly, but in practice community forestry may bear many of the hallmarks of scientific forestry wherein technical and productivity aspects rather than social considerations are emphasized. This element is related to what is called political technology. First introduced by Foucault (1980:91), it refers to the fact that political problems may often be removed from the realm of political discourse and recast in the neutral language of science. Through this depoliticization process, the problem can be reformulated and presented as neutral. By depoliticizing, community forestry as a technical, neutral management issue, the State policy design may offer straight forward technical solutions that do not require engagement with often uncomfortable issues of power and equity.

Having highlighted some of the problems and contradictions associated with the community management of forest, this paper further tries to explore the sustainability of community forestry within the wider context of present

day State and market and to examine whether it is a realistic project within the discourse on modernity.

Against this generic background the paper will look at the community management of forest in Meghalaya, a North eastern state of India. Meghalaya offers a very good opportunity where people are legally in control of forests, but the State is trying to 'develop' and 'scientifically manage' forests which in the process are being taken away from communities whose lives and livelihoods they have supported for centuries.

1.2 Meghalaya: the 'promised' land of community forest management?

Meghalaya is a small, mountainous, state in the North eastern India, having a population of about two million, with 85% population belonging to indigenous[2] matrilineal tribes-Khais, Jaintia and Garo, inhabiting three distinct geographical regions of the state, Khsi Hills, Garo Hills and Jaintia Hills.

The Forest Survey of India (FSI) has estimated about 70% of the geographical area in Meghalaya - 16,839 sq km out of a total 22,429 sq km- as the actual forest cover in 2003 (FSI 2003). Out of this, 5,681 sq km is dense forest cover with a crown cover of more than 40%, and 9,903 sq km is open forest cover with tree density ranging from 10 to 40%. Out of the total forest cover only 1027 sq km (6%) is under the control of state forest department. (Ibid. 2003)

Forest management in Meghalaya after independence has long been described as exceptional because the Indian Constitution provides for control over almost all forests in the region to the indigenous people, unlike the rest of India where the central forest department owns most of the forest and manages it through state forest departments. Thus community forest management needs to be interpreted quite differently than it is in other parts of India, as it reflects community ownership and control over forest, while the initiatives like Joint Forest Management of peninsular India operate in a context where communities possess limited privileges to protect and manage State owned forest lands.

1.2.1 History-ing community control on forest in Meghalaya

Before the British conquest in the first half of nineteenth century, in Meghalya, then a part of Bengal Presidency under Assam, traditional institutions of the three tribes known variously as 'Syiem', 'Lyngdoh', 'Sirdar', 'Doloi' and 'Nokma' looked after the affairs of the community. These tribes had several clans. Though there was no established system of land revenue administration collected through custom of tribute, the Khasi and the Jaintia operated a three-tier system of administration. The village consisting of all adult males of the

[2] The terms 'Indigenous' and 'Tribe' have been used interchangeably in this paper.

village at the bottom; commune- group of villages at the middle and state,[3] comprising of several communes at the highest, each having a chief. According to various historical accounts there were twenty-five such states .The head of the state was called Syiem. While the Garos just had a village council. (Karna 2002:132). These traditional institutions had a complex system of regulation of natural resources, which treated both land and forest as part of a single holistic ecosystem. Though decision making in the traditional institutions vested in the hands of the male adult members and the customary community forest management was not equitable , they had a comprehensive rights regime. The regime granted rights not only over land/forest use to the community but also defined rights to trees, fruits and right to collect fuel wood. The customs defined the users, the user's participation, their role in decision-making, their rights of access and rights to use resources. There were regulations to control the over-exploitation of forests, for example though every permanent resident of a village was permitted to collect dried branches and twigs for domestic fuel wood, a person could collect only once in a day. The boundary land adjacent to the community forests could not be used for cultivation. Religious sanctions were also used to conserve forests, as these forests, currently known as Sacred Groves, were believed to be inherited by the deities of the Khasis and Jaintias. (Sarma 2003:171-121, Nongktnirh 2004:47-60).

In 1765 the British East India Company was given the grant of revenue for the Bengal Presidency. But attempts to extend their territorial control were challenged by a series of tribal raids in late 18th century and early19th century. Nevertheless, as the traditional heads were later made subordinate to the British rule and were to pay tribute to the British, a new discourse of frontiers emerged which emphasized the uniqueness of this area and the administrative practices that emerged were based on non-interference and exclusion. The North east was termed as 'backward tract' or 'excluded area' (Gassah 1997:3-40) to underline administrative exceptionalism. Efforts to preserve these 'tribal republics' and their natural habitat came to distinguish the administration of this region from the rest of India. However, the policy was guided by the exigencies of the State and not by a desire to protect tribal culture, became evident when large tracts of forest of Meghalaya in Garo Hills having good proportion of Teak (*Tectona grandis*) and Sal (*Shorea robusta*) i.e. commercially important timber were taken over by the State and declared as Reserve, between 1883-1995, in line with the rest of India, despite protest by the Garos (Kumar 2005:2944)

On the eve of India's independence from British rule in 1947, the North east witnessed considerable unrest, as the indigenous people were apprehensive that an 'integrationist' policy may adversely impact their way of life. It was necessary to allay such fears to create legitimacy for the post –independent,

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[3] I am conscious of the limitations of the terms like 'village' 'commune' and 'state' in the context of pre-capitalist societies, as they tend to oversimplify the institutional arrangements but in absence of better alternative I have used these terms more to explain than in their strict sense.

nascent Indian nation. Accordingly framers of the Indian Constitution recognized the necessity of a separate political and administrative structure for the hill areas of the region. It is against this background that the Sixth Schedule was inserted in the Constitution of India to provide the legal framework for the protection of the tribal people of the North eastern hills. This provided for the establishment of the Autonomous District Council (ADC), an elected body of the indigenous people, based on adult suffrage.ADCs were constituted for the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District and the Garo Hills District 1952 and later for Jaintia Hills, who were entrusted with the powers to protect tribal culture and customs and manage natural resources, while customary laws remained intact (Gasah 1997).

1.2.2 The contemporary scenario

Thus forest management in Meghalaya continued to be exceptional along with most of North east India because of community control and offers a classic case of community management undisrupted by colonialism, where 'communities in the state of nature' manage their resources sustainably and harmoniously. But paradoxically Meghalaya is also often cited as a 'failed' case of community forest management. Though accurate deforestation figures for 1970s and 1980s are not available, Meghalaya has estimated to have lost a large part of its forests in the last few decades (Government of Meghalaya 2006a: 11-12). More important, there is a drastic fall in the quality of cover as dense forests are reducing and open forest increasing (Ray Duttta and Alam 2002:83). This forced the Apex court of the country to ban logging in Meghalaya in 1996, along with other parts of India (Nongbri 2001).

If the largely held view is that the major reason for deforestation in other parts of the country is coercive conservation (command and control regime of the State) and community management is seen as a solution, this theory does not seem to hold good in Meghalaya.

The indigenous community has predictably been blamed for the state of affairs, providing support for the 'tragedy of commons' ,discourse which reframes the issue of deforestation by endorsing more administrative intervention, State control and questioning those who celebrate community.

These narratives and practices have serious policy implication and if not challenged have the potential to dislodge the community, making way for tighter State control over forest. The idea behind the research is to place the issue of community control in the larger context of State and market, with a view to ascertain how both nature and social- political structures determine each other and shape access to natural resources.

2 FRAMEWORK, METHODOLOGY AND DATA

In this paper I have tried to develop a framework of understanding for the making and unmaking of community control over the natural resources. In doing so I have tried to avoid the pitfalls of economic reductionism i.e. equating social action with capitalist development as such an approach not

only neglects ecological factors but also devalues the role and importance of the State and various actors including those 'without power'. Though most probably the study will confirm the class bound functions of the discourses going beyond economics will paint a richer picture.

I have tried to show that discourses on modernity are deeply rooted within the very basis of productive relations and that they exist in their own right not merely as an ideology but also as legitimacy for power.

Hence identifying the discourses, inside and outside the policy arena, which impact on community resource management shows how the discourses and practices opposed to community control have assumed a superior position in opposition to those that support community control.

This process will be analyzed using the two tools of discourse analyses and actor based approach.

2.1 Deconstructing nature: discourse analysis and actor based approach-actor network and discourse coalition

Discourse is a shared way of apprehending the world-the way we define, interpret and address a particular, event, phenomenon or text. There could be several discourses depending on interest and power. Each discourse rests on assumptions, judgments and contestations that provide the basic terms for analyses and debates and has its own problem-solving device.

The discourse analysis will primarily consist of texts- looking at the text as a socially functioning document and disentangling the argument with attention to what is implicit.

In the context of our proposed research one can see the changing meaning of forest through discourses. Forests have emerged as an area of contention, heated debates and disputes. Different discourses on forest management have emerged, assigning varied roles to State and community. It will be useful to see their differences-what they stand for, how powerful they are and how they influence public policy.

The concept of discourse owes much to Michel Foucault and Foucauldians are committed to the idea that individuals are for the most part subject to the discourses in which they move and thus are not able to make comparative assessment and choices across different discourses. (Dryzek 1997:1-20) But as Dryzek argues, while discourses are powerful they are not permanent or impenetrable. A variety of discourses may exist sometime complementing each other, but often competing, accommodating, appropriating and modifying each other. Again, discourse is not all that matters and powerful actors who see established or emerging discourses as threatening can attempt to override them or perhaps more often than simply resisting them they may try to cloak themselves in a suitable language. Alternatively actors can sponsor discourses more conducive to their own interests. The influence of a particular discourse may also be limited, intentionally if several competing interests are to be harmonized and prioritized and if the interested party has enough power to silence one discourse. To illustrate, given the multiplicity of functions that a government has to perform-foremost ensuring continued

economic growth, environmental policies may not be liked by corporations and thus can be relegated to an insignificant place (Ibid. : 10).

Lastly the impact of discourse can be felt in the policies of the government in several ways. For instance beyond affecting institutions, discourses can become embedded in the institutions. In such a case while the discourse can be institutional software, formal rules constitute institutional hardware. (Ibid.: 18-19).

It is admittedly difficult to separate discourse analysis from the analysis of different actors and their motivations, interests and agency, since discourses and agendas are often inextricably linked together. Indeed, the different (hidden) agendas produce very distinct discourses or, as 'one person's profit may be another's toxic dump' (Paulson 2003: 271)

But analyses of only local phenomena are insufficient to explain interactions at the local level. Local interaction takes place within the context of large social-political and economic forces and thus local interaction may also prompt responses from macro level actors. Mahanty (2000:51-57) talks about possible alliances between local and macro level actors, using Actor Network Theory (ANT). Particular actors are important only in relation to the broader network of which they are a part. Thus the ability to create networks and enlist other actors is crucial. The actors, as post-structuralist approach highlights and I argue, are capable of agency beyond the confines of their instructions in which they are enmeshed (Giddens 1984 in Mahanty 2000:57) and they often form a discourse coalition. Discourse coalitions are defined as the ensemble of 1) a set of story lines 2) the actors who utter these story lines and 3) the practices in which this discursive activity is based. Story lines are the discursive cement that keeps a discourse coalition together. Discourse-coalitions are formed if previously independent practices are being actively related to one another and if a common discourse is created in which several practices get a meaning in a common political project (Hajer 1995:40-72).

The relative strength of the discourses or coalition of discourses depends on institutionalization. We speak of discourse institutionalization if a given discourse is translated into institutional arrangements and concrete policies. If these two conditions are satisfied, a discourse can be said to be hegemonic in a given domain (Ibid.).

2.2 Sources for data

My research is mostly based on texts, historical as well as contemporary ones and in a small measure on interviews. For locating and analyzing different discourses and actors Government documents (both central and state) and District Council papers, were extensively used, such as State of the Forest Report (SoFR) brought out by Forest Survey of India (FSI), the Tribal Bill of Government of India, Meghalaya government's Planning papers, Budget, Legislation on forest, its Industrial policy, documents on JFM initiative in the state, District Council legislation. The two recent documents – State of the Environment Report (SoER), 2005, and Draft State Development Report (DSDR) for Meghalaya, 2006 – were particularly useful. I also referred to a

number of books on Meghalaya and North east and the largest circulating English daily, The Shillong Times.

This was followed by interviews, which were carried out for triangulation purposes.

For interviews, I identified the following actors- state government, district councils, traditional, indigenous institutions, field level forest functionaries, JFMCs, and shifting cultivators. At least one representative from each of the actors was interviewed.

The area of my interview was confined to Khasi Hill Autonomous District Council (KHADC), which has three districts-East Khasi Hills, West Khasi Hills and Ri-Bhoi. Within KHADC the Districts of East Khasi Hill, which includes Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya, and Ri-Bhoi were covered. The representatives of state, district council and traditional institutions are based in Shillong and they were interviewed there, while interviews of JFMC and shifting cultivators were conducted in Undu and Umshoma villages respectively, about 70 kms west of Shillong in Ri-Bhoi district.

The interviews were mostly unstructured and one question led to another. Ultimately they became narratives wherein the respondents came out with their story line and data for my research flew automatically. Most of the information gathered has found expression in main text and/or in the Boxes.

2.3 Limitations of research

The research covers a small geographical area with its own unique characteristics The practice of community control over natural resources, although significant, originating under certain uncommon historical circumstances, is perhaps too exceptional to carry any universal significance.

Also, in the essay though I have emphasized the need for a strong counter narrative to the existing meta- narratives of modernity, I have not developed them comprehensively. Thus my research is more of a reflection than demonstration-the one, which tries to discover, rather prescribe.

Lastly, I cannot of course pretend to have approached the theme without prejudices and preconceptions about modernity. But the method adopted for research has placed my preconceptions under some controls.

2.4 Organization of chapters

In the Second chapter analytical framework, methodology, sources of data and scheme of organizing the research -paper have been elaborated.

The Third chapter presents an analysis of discourses on forest in India and their implication for community control and indigeneity, locating dominant discourses in Meghalaya.

The Fourth chapter analyses the impact of the domination of discourse of modernity on the district councils and on collective resource management in Meghalaya, with special attention to gender.

The focus of Fifth chapter is on articulation of community forestry in policy texts and its practice.

In the Sixth and last chapter I move towards a conclusion consolidating the essence of arguments, gathered from various chapters to reiterate the inefficacy of community self-management in the light of powerful modernity discourses.

3 CLASSIFYING THE DISCOURSES ON FOREST IN THE CONTEXT OF STATE AND COMMUNITY

The meaning of Forest encompasses many objectives – commercial, rural development (poverty alleviation, employment creation, empowerment of marginalized groups), tourism, conservation and carbon sink to mitigate global climate change. Conflicts often arise between these objectives. The way one thinks about these basic concepts and objectives concerning the natural resources can change quite dramatically overtime and these have consequences for the politics and policies of control and management.

In Box 1 drawing mostly on Dryzek's (1997) typology of discourse analysis, I have tried to identify several discourses on forest management in India with special reference to Meghalaya that influence forest policies and practices, focusing on their implications for the State and the community, how they visualize community's role in the management of forest and kind of politics surrounding, shaping and shaped by these discourses.

3.1. Post-independence Meghalya: the three discourses of indigeneity, modernity and state development

Two contrasting discourses can be located- first, the discourse on indigeneity which emphasizes collective rights in land and natural resources, favoring traditional community land management systems as an alternative to private and State ownership regimes and the second, discourse on modernity, which shares the vision of the metropolitan-secular view of nature and its economistic and material uses for the nation, based on extraction of natural resources and expansion of modern nation State and the forces of globalization to the community space. I will argue that in Meghalaya the metropolitan-secular discourse has established domination over the indigeneity discourse. My main focus will be on Meghalaya's own development discourse that emerged with the creation of a separate state in 1972 to demonstrate how the supporters of this discourse have played second fiddle to metropolitan-secular vision of development, weakening the community control narrative.

BOX 1
The discourses on forest and their effect

Discourse and books/studies/ official documents applying it	**Basic premise of the discourse**	**Actors**	**Carriers**	**Chronology and heydays**	**Effects on government policies/institutions**	**Effect on forest dwellers**
Colonial. A host of historians of modern India, like Fuchs (1965), Singh (1966) Gough (1974), Dhanagre (1977) Sarkar (1983)	Colonial concern for revenue and timber led to enclosure of forest, severely restricting the access to people.	Colonial State and its allies like landlords, the forest dwellers.	Historians, post independent Government, school and college textbooks, and also civil society groups opposing those policies of the post-independent government, which tend to promote centralization.	The decades following independence (1947), especially 1960s onwards. The discourse is invoked frequently even now either to create legitimacy for the actions of the Government or oppose them.	Several forest legislations, which were to be implemented by the central and state forest departments.	Exclusion from resource use, marginalization and poverty.
2.New-colonial. Studies like Guha (1983), Guha (1991), Buchy (1996) Rangarajan (1996) Sivaramakrishnan (1999) Grove, (1998), Agrawal (2005)	Colonial State was not a monolith. Complexity of ecology, region and sheer variety of livelihoods meant that colonial policies were not the same everywhere and thus its impact was also varied.	Different organs of the government like forest, revenue departments and district administration having different priorities, the regional elites and differentiated community.	Mostly academicians, a group of historians that emerged in 1980s, known as sub-alternists who assign more agency to the South Asian peasantry, advocacy groups supporting social movements and more recently post-modernists.	It emerged in 1980s.With the research agenda of sub-alternists and post modernists expanding in time and span this discourse is now increasingly getting currency.	The government of those days followed different policies at different places depending on the local circumstances ranging from absolute command and control to autonomy through semi-autonomy.	The forest dwellers were not merely objects of colonial policy but had agency, which enabled them to exert some control over natural resources. But on the whole forest communities lost.

BOX 1 (continued)

Discourse and books/studies/ official documents applying it	Basic premise of the discourse	Actors	Carriers	Chronology and heydays	Effects on government policies/institutions	Effect on forest dwellers
3.Meropolitan-secular or modernity through industrial-ization Government of India,'s Second Five Year Plan papers 1956 and the Mahalnobis docu-ment (industrialize or perish),followed by Industrial policy, reflected in various Five Year Plans.	If the nation has to modernize it must industrialize. In this promethean view of nature forests are merely a source of industrial raw material which should be exploited to the full, if needed by excluding the local community. Its recent and more sophisticated version is sus-tainable development, which claims to harmonize ecology and industry through judicious use of resources.	Post-independent Indian government, industrialists, developed industrialized countries.	Government officials, middle class, national media, multi –national corporations.	The discourse enjoyed supremacy since independence. Immediately after independence a narrative on indigeneity and since 1980s the discourse on environmentalism has posed some challenge to it but it has remained strong.	Pro-industrial policies based on extraction of natural resources, little or no concern for the environment.	Curtailment of customary rights, at times displacement, migration, marginalization due to non-recognition of subsistence claims.
4.Deep ecologist. The writings of the erst-while Indian princes, starting early 1950s that used to maintain their hunting preserves.	Preservation and protection of wilderness in unspoilt form is of utmost importance. Given current levels of excessive stress imposed by humans, respect for nature and its diversity need to be addressed.	Some forest department officials, global, national and local conservationists.	Wilderness conservationist- a small but influential, usually urban middle class group, ex-princes.	It emerged in 1950s and became powerful in late 70s,supported by govern-ment 's concern for conservation and con-tinues to exert consider-able influence inside and out side policy arena.	Creation of large networks of national parks, legislations to protect wild-life and conserve forest.	Constriction of community space in many tribal areas seriously affecting livelihood, increased man-animal conflict in some cases.
5.Social ecologist. The studies backing common property resources (CPR) Jodha (1986),Brara (1987).Recent Tribal Bill of the central Tribal Affairs ministry.	The forests originally belonged to the forest community, who used them sustainably as a common resource, but were taken away by the State.	Some government organizations like Tribal Affairs Ministry, social movements, and traditional indigenous institutions.	Civil society groups, NGOs indigenous leaders, a group of global activists seeking partner for 'global eco-village' project and also international donors, like World Bank.	This discourse was particularly powerful after independence, but was weakened by metropolitan-secular discourse. Of late, backed by international donors and some organizations within the government, it is getting currency.	Constitutional provisions like 5th and 6th Schedules which give autonomy to indigenous institutions and recognize indigenous claim over natural resources	Community control over natural resources at least in legal-jural terms.

BOX 1 (continued)

Discourse and books/studies/ official documents applying it	Basic premise of the discourse	Actors	Carriers	Chronology and heydays	Effects on government policies/institutions	Effect on forest dwellers
6. The administrative rationalist. The National Forest Policy, 1952,which has undergone many amendments to accommodate changing concerns, but upholds the fundamental concept of its predecessor- the colonial forest policy of 1894 of State-ownership of forest	It is a Statist discourse, which keeps shifting depending upon the exigencies of the State policy but always within the framework that State is the owner of the forest. Its initial premise was that unbridled use of natural resources due to open access and growth of population leads to deforestation. Hence natural resources should be controlled and managed scientifically by the government (forest department). Initially the predominant discourse was forest for progress-extraction of resources for industrialization but as a strong environmental discourse emerged, the theme of forest conservation through State became predominant Realizing the futility of this top heavy approach, in more recent times attempt to enlist peoples' participation can be seen.	The government (central and state forest departments) and since 1990s Joint Forest Management Committees.	Government agencies.	It has always existed in one form or the other, shifting its story line from time to time.	The forest department continued the centralized administration of the forest through the colonial Forest Act for many years, bringing some amendments. However, due to recent initiatives like JFM, forest administration is somewhat decentralized. But it continues to be the biggest landlord controlling vast chunk of forest either as reserved or protected area.	Exclusion of the forest dwellers from the negotiated use of forest, during both the phases of supporting industry and conservation. Though JFM has brought some hope for them.

BOX 1 (continued)

Discourse and books/studies/ official documents applying it	Basic premise of the discourse	Actors	Carriers	Chronology and heydays	Effects on government policies/institutions	Effect on forest dwellers
7. The indigeneity supporters. Elwin (1960), Nehru's Panchsheel or Five principles of Tribal autonomy, plethora of writings in vernacular, regional languages, especially North-east from time to time.	Tribal people are autochthones who have primary claim over the natural resource. While it emphasizes on cultural features that confirm the uniqueness of the tribal people, its main focus is on political issues like autonomy and self-determination. In a way it is the political counter-part of social ecology.	National government initially, civil society groups, regional and local governments, indigenous institutions and their leaders, global activist groups.	The Indian government immediately after independence, NGOs, student unions of the frontier states, the state governments (though inconsistently).	After independence the central government concerned about consolidating its position and legitimacy in the frontier areas, specially North east India, which were not "integrated" during the British rule, itself advocated and carried this discourse but as security concerns became paramount and a standard vision of development emerged, the discourse on indigeneity weakened.	Creation of hill states like Meghalaya inhabited by indigenous people, special acts to protect tribal interests, creation of institutions like Autonomous District Councils.	Theoretically free access to forest and its produce and also ownership of resources in some cases.
8. The state's (Meghalaya) development narrative. Policy papers of government of Meghalaya.	The state has a vision of development, which aligns it with the national agenda. It wants to catch up with other developed States through modern industries, mining, and means of communication, commercialized agriculture, education, and health. The ethnic identities, ancient ties to places and livelihood practices are often presented as problems in its documents. It shares many common elements with development discourse including equating industrialization with progress.	Politicians at the state level, civil servants, national, sub-national industrialists.	Media, emerging middle class in the state.	Since the creation of the state of Meghalaya in 1972 it has grown from strength to strength.	Pro industrial policies based on extraction of natural resources, weakening of indigenous institutions like Autonomous District Council	More State control over natural resources and hence weakening of community control.

Source: Dryzek, 1997 and Gadgil and Guha, 1995.

3.2 Indigeneity discourse: the initial years

As we saw earlier, the creation of ADCs were culmination of a discourse on indigeneity that originated in the colonial period wherein the tribal areas were mostly protected enclaves. ADCs backed by the central government envisaged an arrangement wherein tribal people could supposedly pursue customary practices including kinship and clan based rules of land allocation. The discourse on indigeneity remained powerful in the 1950s and was re-enforced by India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru through his policy of 'Panchsheel' or five principles of tribal autonomy. Elaborating it Nehru in 1958 said,

> People (tribes) should develop along the line of their own genius and we should avoid imposing any thing on them. (…………..). Tribal right in land and forest should be protected. We should try to train and build a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will, no doubt, are needed, especially in the beginning. But we should avoid introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory. We should not over administer these areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes. We should rather work through but not in rivalry to, their own social and cultural institutions. (Elwin 1963:138)

But as Meghalaya was still a part of Assam and indigenous people resented the fact that the politics, administration, trade and commerce had predominance of the plainsman from Assam, resulting into series of agitations in 1960s; ultimately the indigenous state of Meghalaya was created in 1972.Thus 1972 appears to be a watershed year for the indigeneity discourse.

3.3 The discourse on modernity and the blue print of development

Immediately after independence and along with the indigeneity discourse, a multifaceted development narrative on the North east emerged. The use of the rich natural resources was seen as a response to the needs of the growing national economy, which could be achieved by integration with the rest of the country. At the same time, the emerging pan –Indian discourse of blue print of development saw the exclusiveness, isolation and inaccessibility of North east as a major problem. The North east was described as a land locked region in need of conventional development trajectory- planning and allocation of funds to departments such as road construction and industries and inflow of capital from the entrepreneurs of industrialized regions (Baruah 2005:33-58). Once the presence of industry was defined as progress its absence by definition became a mark of backwardness and a vision of the future which incorporated more industries and the displacement of the local resource use regime by national and global resource use regimes was taken for granted (Ibid.) This image of Meghalaya carried a rather different vision of its future than Sixth Schedule or 'Panchsheel'. The third major factor, which shaped the development discourse in the region, was India's security concerns. The region is linked to the rest of India only by a narrow strip of land some 20 kilometer wide and it has borders with Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan and China. The

security concerns became more paramount after India's war with China in 1962. Thus an infrastructure of State institutions was thought to be necessary to reinforce among the people of the region the sense that they were part of Pan-India national community (Ibid.).

Therefore, the imperative to extend State's presence, dictated by trilogy of extraction of natural resources, compulsions of conventional development and national security, determined the choice made in every other policy area. The interest of the people of the area, the potential choices between alternative development strategies, the respect for the indigeneity and indigenous control over natural resources all became secondary to above exigencies (Ibid.).

In the circumstances the only hope for the indigeneity discourse was Meghalaya's own development discourse, which emerged after the creation of an independent state. But if it was expected that an indigenous state would defend community control it was to be belied as Meghalaya continued to follow the conventional, Pan-Indian path of development albeit more speedily.

3.4 State development discourse: aligning with the Meta-narrative

In his inaugural speech to celebrate Meghalaya's statehood in 1972, its first Governor B.K. Nehru charted a road map for the future development, which demonstrates how the project of modernization was being shaped. He focused on pedagogy of development, followed in rest of India that underlined that people of Meghalaya were lagging 'behind their brethren in other parts of the country' and highlighted the need for conventional development strategy.

Clearly the local people were seen as backward and in need of general integration into modern mainstream development, for which settled agriculture, infrastructure, developed means of communication, extraction of natural resources and industries were seen as solution. It also indicated a new representation of forest from subsistence to commercial (Government of Meghalaya 1972).

Meghalaya's official developmentalist texts that followed are no different as they continue to see its hilly terrain, unfavorable climate condition, geographical isolation, lack of infrastructure and smallness as major problems and industrialization and 'infrastructure' as solution. However they add two more 'hurdles' to development- sparse population and ethnic identity. (Government of Meghalaya 2004:12- 43).

The Pan-India yardstick of development-road network is still assigned a major place in the official documents. A recent government document laments that total road length in the state is 7886 km. with a road density of 36 km per 100 sq. km. as on March 31st 2005, which is lower than the national average. It proposes to add more kilometers of road construction. (Government of Meghalaya 2006-07:8)

Another official document (Government of Meghalaya 2004:3-4) expresses satisfaction that the state has seen a record increase in the number of registered vehicles from 3,831 to 73,382 – a ratio of one vehicle for every 32 persons in 2002 as against 1:264 in 1972 – a sign of "development".

Therefore a standard development meta-narrative has made inroads in Meghalaya. The overwhelming dependence on central government for funds and centralization of decision-making process in bringing about planned development, the fact that most of the development projects are designed far away and do not take into consideration the local reality and easy flow of money for implementing exogenously formulated development schemes, are conventionally held responsible for the development path chosen by Meghalaya (Banerjee and Kar 1999:61). But the fact that the prime mover of these projects are elected representatives of Meghalya or its middle class shows that discourse on development has assumed hegemonic proportion at least among policy makers and politicians

Underdevelopment "is not simply a self evident ground reality about a place or a people. It is, as post-structuralism would argue, discursively constituted (Escobar 1995 in Baruah 2005:35). The discourse generated by developmentalist institutions constructs places and peoples as under-developed, creating a structure of knowledge around that object that makes the case for development self-evident (Ferguson1990 in Ibid. 2005: 35).

In the case of Meghalaya a structure of knowledge has been created that sees its topography and population as major problems and also suggests a standardized, Pan-India development strategy as solution. Meghalay's own development discourse, rather an alternate development strategy or a counter-narrative, reframing its 'negative attributes' differently, has become a part of the development meta-narrative. This is strikingly different from the indigenous discourse reflected in Meghalya Indigenous People's Forum's assertion that 'state should not adopt industrialization for sake of industrialization, as land to the tribal is more precious than coal and lime stones……….we should develop our state according to our own genius' (The Shillong Times, November 5,2006).

To conclude, while both the central and regional planning authorities have acknowledged the specificity of the North east, they have failed to adopt a suitable alternative strategy, which could develop the region without disturbing its ecological balance and the identity of the people, overlooking indigenous discourse. Instead the conventional development strategy has been followed. It is only natural that with the opening of the Indian economy, the Meghalaya government is projecting itself as an investor friendly place, where the abundant natural resources are made the major selling point. For instance a document of the Department of Industries, Meghalaya states "with its rich and vast minerals, water and forest resources, Meghalaya offers tremendous opportunities for investment" (quoted in Karlsson 2003:19-20). Development in this vision is to be achieved through further extraction of the "untapped resources" including forest with active support of the state. Such policies are damaging indigenous institutions and weakening community control over natural resources, as we will see in the next chapter.

4 THE BLUE PRINT FOR DEVELOPMENT: INSTITUTIONS, COMMUNITY AND GENDER IN MEGHALAYA

In this chapter I will show the practice of the discursive domination of the modernity discourse i.e. extension of the State and market in the community space. I will attempt to demonstrate how co-opted by the State, the indigenous institutions like district councils which were supposed to be a major source of strength for the 'community control' have in contrast become advocates of metropolitan-secular typology of development, even as communal institutions based on matrilineal land relations are breaking up, accelerated by a process of privatization of community resources.

4.1 District Councils: indigenous institutions or entry points for State formation in community space?

As mentioned earlier formal, elected body of autonomous district council was created to represent indigenous people. It has thirty members out of which twenty-nine are elected by the tribal population on the basis of adult suffrage and one member is nominated by the Governor of Meghalaya. The term of the council is five years and it is headed by the Chief Executive Member (CEM) and two Executive Members (EM) to be elected from amongst the elected members. The councils have wide ranging powers to make laws in respect of subjects like land regulation and management of forest. A separate civil service exists for the councils under their full administrative control. (Karna 2002: 128-129). Commenting on the formation of ADCs, Baruah (2005) rightly observes that an explicit policy of marginalizing the tribal people in their own habitats, dismantling the institutions of tribal autonomy established in colonial times would have been politically unwise at a time of discontent among North eastern people. "Therefore it was necessary to find a middle ground that would enable the penetration of Pan-Indian institutions and at the same time allay the fears of the people of this sparsely populated area. Building on the elementary State apparatus of Sixth Schedule was a good way to ensure both the penetration of the State and the creation of local stakeholders in the Pan-Indian dispensation through ADCs" (Ibid.. 2005:40). It is not surprising therefore that 'modern, elected institution of ADCs were given authority over the traditional institutions based on hereditary and local customs. In fact in this new arrangement traditional chiefs were made subordinate officials of the ADCs, liable to be dismissed on charges like insubordination (Gassah 1999:211-212)

The 'compliance' of ADCs to the territorialization project was achieved in a number of ways. The first was their financial dependence on state and central government because they lacked resources to run their huge establishment.

Their 'obedience' was further ensured by way of the supremacy of state legislation. In Meghalaya even though the ADCs had authority to make laws on the subjects allotted to them, after the formation of Meghalaya the power of ADC has been severely curtailed as the state legislature in Meghalaya can make laws, if it so desires, on subjects allotted to the district council, and if there is

any conflict between the state law and the district council law, the state law will prevail.

While these 'disciplinary procedures' were important to align ADCs to Pan-Indian development discourse, the role of hegemonic development discourse in the shaping of the ADCs should not be overlooked. It is interesting to see how the ADCs became governmentalized localities that carried the state version of development and opened new territorial and administrative spaces in which new regulatory communities were to function. As I have mentioned they were different from the tribute paying headman and ADCs themselves became micro States, part of a new regime of control that sought to create fresh political economic relationship between central government, state and subjects and were knit together by the thread of State power (see Agrawal, 2005 on creation of governmentalized localities). Thus it is natural that ADCs share the all-India discourse of modernity that equates development with industrialization, infrastructure and exploitation of natural resources of the region for the 'progress'.. They spend a major portion of budget on road and construction (District Council papers 2006d).The national and state political parties participate actively in the elections to the District Councils and fierce political battles are waged to capture power. (Phira 1991:8)

As a corollary the ADCs have become State like institutions, with all three wings of governance mainly Legislature, Executive and Judiciary. In practice also they have behaved like mini States. They are generous in voting and sanctioning liberal salaries to its members. In some district councils, the amount budgeted for traveling allowances for the members of the Executive Committee is more than the amount provided for agricultural development. Similarly the expenditure on establishment is also heavy. Most of the district councils are over-staffed. They resemble the secretariat of Meghalaya government. (Venkata Rao 1983:181).

Their State like functioning is defended by own members. The CEM, KHADC whom I interviewed justified the functioning of the District Council as a micro State 'because the multitude of complex functions it is supposed to perform and for the sake of transparency, accountability and continuity'. That KHADC sees like the State was also reflected in the thinking of its EM in-charge of Forest whose paramount concern was revenue generation through forest and increasing the control of ADC over forests(Box 2). In fact under the ADC a new form of representation of forest based on its commercial exploitation and as a source of revenue has emerged, contrary to the popular view of forest as a source of subsistence and safety net for the community. The issue is not how the forest should be managed, but how much revenue it can generate.

4.2 Forests under district council: command and control

The legislation for management and control of forest by district council passed in 1958 recognizes various categories of forests based on customary usages and practices but at the same time vests all powers of management and control of these forests in the district council. Despite various amendments overtime, it mentions nothing about the community management and its elaborate

regulatory provisions are limited to the registration of forests, the removal of forest produce, the felling of trees and controlling transportation of timber. It provides for thirty-three revenue and check stations to collect revenue and works out an elaborate classification and schedule of rates of royalty for different kinds of timber and minor forest produce (Government of Meghalaya 1958).

BOX 2

Discussions with two important functionaries of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council – its Chief Executive Member (CEM) and Executive Member (EM), Forest show that they share a modernist-statist discourse. The unifying theme of the interview was that both of them lamented that district council has little or no control over the forest under their jurisdiction, which are mostly under the control of clan, village or individuals.

The first was of the view that due to multitude of complex functions and modern concerns like transparency, accountability and continuity the district council has to shape itself in a State-like institution. He had the vision of modern Meghalaya with developed infrastructure, livestock and agriculture. The second started with an environmental discourse stating how large-scale deforestation has been observed through satellite. But slowly it gave way to his concern for loss of revenue to the District Council due to the Apex court's ban on logging. He is trying to compensate for this loss by actively engaging with the state and national government to get some afforestation/plantation projects. According to him the main reason for mismanagement of forest was that the District Council has no control over them.

What emerged from the interview was a suspicion about community control of forest, an obsession for revenue and desire for more control. The only hint of an indigenous discourse in the interview was when the CEM mentioned that the Khasi identity needs to be protected and for this they should increase their population.

Hajer (1995:60) makes an interesting point about discourse structuration, which happens when the credibility of actors in a given domain requires them to draw on the ideas, concepts, and categories of a given discourse. In this case the two actors derive their credibility and appear to be inspired from the predominant modernist-statist discourse.

Source: My interview of Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council members, on 3rd September 2006.

The formation of district councils in the indigeneity discourse was perceived as an autonomous institution outside or at least operating differently from the State. The State was to be persuaded to back away from or move out of communities. But as Corrigan (Corrigan, 1994 in Agrawal and Gibson, 1999:164) argues if local administrative units are set-up so that they have the (apparent) autonomy to bargain or co-operate with 'the State' or even to struggle against it, this has to be seen (paradoxically perhaps) as an arrangement internal to the structure of the State system. Territorialization is one mechanism through which State institutions attempt to assert control over rural citizens and natural resources.

In this sense the creation and functioning of ADCs can be seen as a process of State formation and creation of institutions and knowledges that systematize practices, which are often opposed to the indigenous discourse, in ways that are recognizable by existing State authority.

However, the ADCs's attempt to enhance their control over the forest, through the enactment of statutory law over powering the customary law has led to conflict. F. and K. Von Benda-Beckmann and Spiertz (in Pradhan et al 2002:6-7) have argued that at the local level one can find a mixture of several normative orders which are based on long historical tradition-customary law to new forms of self regulation, old and new state laws .This whole mixture of norms and rules called local laws (legal pluralism)while can provide adaptive responses to ecological and livelihood uncertainties, but can also generate or increase knowledge uncertainties. The situation in Meghalaya approximates to the latter. Since under customary law the traditional heads used to manage the community forest, they ignore all the rules made by the council and have their own mechanism to deal with settlement of disputes and management of forests (Dutta 2001). The conflict is escalated because customary laws are not codified and open to interpretation. On the other hand the 'modern' statutory laws of the ADCs dislike the "messy" complexities of co-incident use.

This is not to suggest that customary laws always stand to protect the indigeneity and subsistence needs of the community in Meghalaya. As the landscape of community control is changing from within new actors and decision makers, as well as new alliances and practices are emerging. These are changing the stakes of village communities and elite in forest from an orientation towards subsistence to market and often uncodified, customary laws, contrary to their role, are invoked by the traditional heads to appropriate community land for private gains, as we would see in the following sections.

4.3 Working of modernity in the tribal self management 'zone' of forest: market, privatisation and erosion of indigenous forms of resource control

The indigenous community forest is an important source of livelihood providing food, fodder, fuel but also timber, fruit and medicine in Meghalaya. With knowledge gained through the interaction with nature people have learnt how to adapt new methods of production. Shifting cultivation and horticulture are two examples of such adaptation where in tribal use the basic skills of agriculture to grow food crops and fruit plants in the forest lands (Nongbri 2001).

Nongbri shows that while rural farmers had earlier successfully integrated timber into their agricultural economy, the deployment of forest for the Pan-Indian industrial development opened the door to non-tribal businessmen who have leased forest on contract basis from clan landowners and sold or transported the timber outside the state. Catering to a larger market most of the contractors are indulging in clear felling of the forest under their lease. This has marked a turning point in the tribal economy where in a class of local contractors who besides felling tree in their own land are purchasing tree from poor farmers. Those who are rich also set up their own saw mills thus bringing the industry into the village with assistance from state owned Meghalaya Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC). While the logging ban in 1996 has checked felling of trees temporarily, deforestation has continued due to increasing extraction of charcoal from timber, of late.

4.4 The 'king' charcoal

Charcoal was an important domestic fuel consumed during the usually cold winter of Shillong (Zimba: 1978) but with the onset of industrialization its demand increased many fold and charcoal burning itself became an important industry. Charcoal was initially linked to progress as it was seen as a must for industrialization of the state. As a result a number of Ferro alloyed units have been established in the state, which need charcoal on a very large scale. Charcoal is also sent outside Meghalya . Though there is ban on logging extracting charcoal form timber is not covered by the ban and people have started making charcoal out of valuable timber. Since charcoal is mostly produced from small timber from lops, tops and branches of trees consuming about 30% of the volume of the tree, just to consume one-third volume, large number of trees are being felled. (Personal communication with state forest officials)

An environmental discourse has emerged in the last few years in the state, blaming charcoal for deforestation and pollution, mainly popularized by the media, which has led to a change in the meaning of charcoal from a substance of progress to that of retreat and government is trying to regulate its marketing and trade.

But the government's attempt to regulate charcoal is facing opposition both from within and without. Industrialists are not the only ones opposed to new regulation. Thus though a ban was imposed on export of charcoal outside the state it could not be implemented as it was resented by the indigenous charcoal dealers and the forest owners on the ground that their livelihood depends on making and trading the charcoal. The state level politicians share this perception also. For instance the Co-Chairman of the Meghalaya State Planning Board thought that the ban might affect the people of the state badly and could even lead to starvation deaths in the state (The Shillong Times, September 22, 2004).

This shows how actors having different interest have formed a strong coalition to support charcoal, which earns the title 'King' for it. It is also an indication that while discourse on industrialization has strengthened, environmental discourse, which could have checked deforestation has not been able to garner any support from the civil society, not even from those, like Khasi Students' Union, who represent an indigenous discourse opposing export of natural resources to other parts of the country.

4.5 Privatization of community land and differentiation

The most visible process of privatization is the conversion of village community land *(Ri Raid)* to clan/private land *(Ri Kyntis)* by devious means with mounting pressure on land under changed economic circumstances. The process was facilitated by the customary law that so long as an area of land was under cultivation and not allowed to lay fallow, it continued in the possession of the family which reclaimed it from the *common* land. With the ascendancy of market economy the people quickly realized that, 'as long as they plant enough

shoot to keep the forest growing, the land will remain in their possession' (Chattopadhyaya 1984:49).

BOX 3

The Syiem is the head of Mylliem, one of the Khasi states before the commencement of the constitution of India. Though these states have been put in a subordinate position after the formation of District Council they enjoy lot of authority over indigenous people. The picture, which emerged from my communication with the Syiem, was somewhat different from that of District Council. He emphasized respect and gratitude for nature and focused on traditional epistemologies and knowledge of indigenous people. He blamed industrialization and privatization not only for deforestation but also for the marginalization of people. Roads are assisting this process, by providing easy access to forest. He also believed that the local people are the sole owners of natural resources, which are being extracted through industrialization. In a way people have been compelled to sell, 'the last of wealth' (trees) for survival. For this he blamed a local powerful elite within the indigenous society. Lastly though in principle he favored cadastral survey, but was apprehensive that 'clear titles may lead to clear felling of trees' also.

Source: My interview with Syiem of Mylliem on 5th September 2006.

Due to the non-existence of any law putting a ceiling, land is being concentrated in the hands of a few rich tribal (Dasgupta 1991: 74). It s not surprising therefore that the recent Tribal Bill of central government, which stands to give ownership of forest land to the indigenous people, is opposed by certain indigenous individuals of the North-east, as such land rights in no case can exceed 2.5 hectares per nuclear family where as many tribal people here claim thousands of hectares of land. No where in these areas customary practices would have permitted such a concentration of land, but new linkages have brought with them hitherto unknown phenomena like absentee land-lord, realization of land rent, sharecropping, land mortgage, landlessness and so on (Karna 1990 in Baruah,2005:196) A recent report of the rural indebtedness in Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya describes another aspect of the emerging pattern of land differentiation "the money lender is no longer the foxy non-tribal taking advantage of the simple tribal as it used to be. Today mahajans (trader-money lenders) are as tribal as the village-folk and are as cunning as the old non-tribal money lenders of the old days (Grassroots options 2000 in Ibid. 2005:195) The related side of the privatization of clan –land is emergence of a poor group of landless people eking out their living working as agricultural labor, share-croppers or by whatever possible means (Ibid. 2005:196).

It is obvious that the egalitarian system of community ownership is being replaced by private ownership in the region (Tiwari and Singh 1995: 90-91). Privatization has also led to a loss of rights in land and thus landlessness, something that was not prevalent in the communal system of resource management.

4.6 Privatization and State formation in gender spaces

In this section I will demonstrate how the twin forces of modernity reflected in privatization and extension of State control in community spaces are changing gender relations both within and out side households, weakening the indigenous forms of natural resource management.

Khasi society is a matriarchal society where descent and inheritance is through the mother. In matrilineal systems women have have rights over ancestral property and control and knowledge of ritualistic activity, including being the spiritual head of the community. But changes are evident in the matrilineal society, as the registration of former community-owned forest as private lands is not construed as ancestral property. It comes under 'self-acquired property' a new classification in the wake of modernity, wherein the men have the right to inheritance. (Kelkar and Dev Nathan 2003:5-19).

There have been significant changes in management also. Even in the traditional system, the maternal uncle or the brother managed women's ancestral property. The direct role of the maternal uncle or brother remained intact even after the men married into other clans, because marriages were mostly within the same village. But increasingly, it is husbands who are effectively managing land, including forestland. More than land itself, it is capital that has become the key economic resource which as self-acquired property is passed on from father to son. Further the emergence of timber industry has enabled men as husbands to take control of the family's economy. Women's ownership of land is not longer an important feature of the Khasi property system, but has been reduced to a vestigial right which, however, still enable women to have a better position than being completely property-less. (Kelkar and Dev Nathan, 2003: 20).

The clash between the privatization and indigenous forms of management and the latter's resistance to modernization is evident in the new forms of mobilization in some areas of Meghalaya. Kelkar and Devanathan (2003:31) mention that among Khasis, the poorest sections of the community are mobilizing to resist the conversion of community land to private land and have in fact been able to force a change in the rule regarding allocation of community forest lands, which are now divided more or les equally among all families of the village community. However such instances are few and far between and erosion of the indigenous forms of management wherein women used to have an important role in the wake of modernity, is all- pervasive.

Besides privatization, the State intervention too has contributed to marginaization of women and thus indigenous forms of management, as it has led to the formalization. of external relations and an increase in dealing with the bureaucracy which disadvantage women. As Tiplut Nongbri points out in the context of the India's Apex Court's order on logging, 'The concept of the working plan mooted by the Supreme Court, according to which forests can be used only in accordance with centrally approved plans by the state government ignores women's role in resource generation and also intensifies men's control over them.' Since, 'experience shows that whenever women had to interact with the state machinery, they invariably fall back upon their brother, husband or son in executing their affairs' (Nongbri 2001:25).

Recently introduction of formalized village management of the economy, the setting aside of earlier fallow as village reserve forests, and the associated flow of funds into the village through projects, like the IFAD-funded North east India Natural resources Management Project, has also resulted to increase men's control over the domestic economy. Though their knowledge of the local economy is very limited and they neither play much of a role in production nor in marketing of agricultural produce, their role as community manager still enables them to exclude women from community-level decision making about natural resource management, including the management of forests (Kelkar and Dev Nathan 2003: 21). Ironically the recent state initiative like JFM, which is supposed to promote community participation in conservation has overlooked women's role in resource management and tended to exclude women from both the general body and management committee of the village. It stipulates a Joint Forest Management Committee (JFMC) which will have a general body consisting of one adult member from each household who will elect a Chairman and a Vice Chairman (not Chairperson or Vice-chairperson). The assumption that men will head both these offices only has an obvious gender bias, which is reflected in practice also. Thus the JFMC of Umsohma village, which I interviewed, had no female member. It was true for the 280 strong governing body of the village also and both the bodies had a common 'Chairman'. Explaining the reason for female exclusion, the Chairman told me that only one member from each household can participate in the general body and that slot by preference goes to the male. (Box 5: 47).

To sum up, the relationship of subjects to the environment needs to be examined in their emergence not simply as a part of larger politics by pre-existing interests but more so how the environments and the history of practices in relation to the environment transform actors and interests. The success of ADCs and community control project depended on the production of people who saw the need for community self-management, followed by a practice close to it. But the pursuits of development, industry, infrastructure and market have changed the stake of the people in the forest. Growth and modernity could perhaps have good sides if the resources were equally shared, but it has not happened. The indigenous discourse of Khasi head (Syiem) of the traditional institution clearly revealed the understanding of this process and thus blamed industrialization and privatization not only for deforestation but also for the marginalization of people (Box 3).As a consequence the discourse on indigeneity has considerably weakened. What has happened through a process of modernity is co-option of the sub-national state and autonomous units to the meta-narrative of conventional development and simultaneously a process of privatization, aided by a network of actors –well-placed indigenous people and "non-tribal exploiters from outside", which has weakened the community control.

5 UNPACKING POLICY DISCOURSE ON COMMUNITY SELF-MANAGEMENT OF FOREST IN MEGHALAYA

In the last two chapters we saw the interaction and working of two contrasting discourses, one based on metropolitan secular extraction of natural resources and the other on indigeneity and I tried to demonstrate how the first one has established domination and in practice weakened the project of community control. In this chapter we enter a specific but complex domain of locating the predominant policy discourse on forest in Meghalaya and its meaning –not only explicit but also and more importantly implicit and what its entails for community resource management. For instance the stated forest policy may be to restore forest plantation, restricting shifting cultivation as it is seen threatening forest or watersheds. Yet the policy may stand for politically more controversial action like middle class concern for the loss of forest or the government desire to get control over the land or the need to supply wood from forest plantation to the industries. Similarly notions of stability and fragility may sometimes be used to legitimise policies such as resettling villages or forbidding some agricultural practices that are thought to be detrimental such as shifting cultivation (Leach and Mearns 1996 in Jasanoff and Martello 2004:199).

In the context of Meghalaya, I will try to show how wide ranging and seemingly unconnected forest related State interventions - schemes to check shifting cultivation, forest legislation, joint forest management, carbon trading and wild life management, purportedly for the sake of conservation and efficient and scientific management of forest, have actually been prompted by the State's desire to get control of the community land and use it according to its modernist vision of development.

But before we embark on the policy discourse on community forest, we need to discuss the meaning of forest in policy documents and how inconclusive are the assessment of forest cover, to introduce the subject.

'Forest cover' in India means all lands with a tree density of more than 10%, and open forest and dense forest have a cover of respectively 10-40% and above 40%. Data on forest cover have always been a contested issue, but overall, forest cover has declined in Meghalaya between 1887 and 2001. But within this period it was subject to lot of fluctuation -decline between1987 - 1989, increase in 1991 and decline between 1999 - 2001 and increase again in 2001-2003 (FSI 2003). These fluctuations belie explanation and make an estimation of deforestation rather difficult. However the forest department argues that the reduced forest cover means increasing shifting cultivation, blaming 'primitive' practice, while the recent increase in forest cover from15, 584 sq. km. to 16,839 sq. km. during 2001-2003, is linked to the Apex court's ban on logging, providing support to coercive conservation. Whatever the true reasons are, the point for us is that both explanations of decrease and increase in forest cover localize blame, negate community's positive contribution and justify state control. A similar theme to blame community control of forest and its 'primitive' and 'unscientific' land practices for deforestation and degradation can be seen in the policy texts, with the implicit objective to extend state control.

5.1. The politics of State resource control – de-legitimizing community management

The State of Environment Report-2005 of Meghalaya which was finalized after wide ranging consultations not only with many departments of the government such as environment and forest, agriculture, industry, planning, but also academicians, and NGOs, says:

> The communities in general, the land owning clans/communities … and the management systems in place for the management of these forests are to be blamed for such a decline in quality and quality of the forests of the state, as the government do not have any interference in the management of community forests. In fact, in Meghalaya, before the intervention of the Supreme Court, there was absolutely no regulatory and controlling power of the state in relation to the land ownership, use and disposal of forest produce pertaining to the forests which are in the hands of communities and private individuals. (Government of Meghalaya 2005:47-48).

A similar disdain for community management practices is evident in the policy perception of sifting cultivation. Shifting Cultivation (Jhum Farming) is a traditional subsistence farming system that has been practiced on the steep lands of the tropical forest zones of the world for centuries. It relies on clearing forest, burning, cultivation of subsistence crops for one or two years and then abandoning the plots as weed growth and declining fertility reduces yields, moving on to another plot and allowing the forest to regenerate. The cycle of cultivation to "fallow" forest is traditionally more than 10 years.

It is still widely practiced on the hills in all the districts of Meghalaya, covering about 20% of forest in Meghalaya. Though area under shifting cultivation is said to have declined, still approximately 46600 households in Meghalaya are involved in it. (IFAD 2004: Annex-5: 1).

The practice of shifting cultivation was described as 'a rude system of culture' and 'wasteful and barbarous' in the colonial discourse. The main reason for condemning this practice was that since shifting cultivators kept moving from one place to another, they could not be subjected to either revenue assessment or control (Gadgil and Guha in Hardiman 1992: 268-275). In post independent period old epithets like 'destructive', 'degrading' 'uneconomic', and 'primitive' were frequently used in the policy document. Once the urge to control it, driven by modernity discourse to appropriate community land to use it 'rationally', gained momentum, it was referred to in more apocalyptic terms like 'suicidal'. So urgent was the desire 'to do something' that jhum was equated with diseases like cholera and malaria and termed as 'enemy number one to the forest' in official documents and debates (Mallik 2003). The discourse on shifting cultivation has not changed but the inability to reduce its incidence substantially has resulted in official explanations like 'non-availability *of other forms of employment' or 'a period of transition'* (Government of Meghalaya 2006b: 24-28).

While the shifting cultivators have traveled a long distance from 'primitive' to 'people in transition', in the policy arena, the rallying point of the official discourse is to deny recognition to shifting cultivation as a legitimate form of subsistence and resource use, based on communal form of management. In

fact in official reports lands under shifting cultivation is still termed as 'waste lands' and 'unproductive areas' (Ibid. 2006b:12) The result of such discourse is a plethora of government run schemes to take control of such land or ensure its use which suits the State's vision of development ever since independence- starting from Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) induced so-called rational land use strategies , resettlement of scattered villages in 1960s and 70s,and then a multitude of horticulture , plantation and afforestation schemes. These schemes have eroded the legitimacy of shifting cultivation as subsistence based community management, which also provided food security- a fact highlighted by shifting cultivators themselves (Box 4).

In such schemes shifting cultivators were simply employed as laborers in the process of raising plantation. The cultivation of cash crops and their marketing required different ethos and conception. Similarly the creation of settlement colonies entailed moving from one clan land to another, which was against the ethos of community management(Malik 2003). The reason the cultivator agreed to participate in these schemes was basically a survival strategy to augment their subsistence base in the face of declining yields and shrinking land.

Several studies in India have shown that traditional methods of shifting cultivation cause the lowest amount of soil erosion, even in steep hill slopes, compared with any other land clearing and tillage system (Tiwari 2005). Such research is also corroborated from studies in other developing countries, which have often revealed that many popularly established notions of environmental degradation such as deforestation and desertification may not simply be blamed on local land use or increasing population, as commonly suggested (see Leach and Mearns 1996). In fact in relation to the Machakos region of Kenya, Tiffen and Mortimore (1994) found that 'more people' might mean less erosion because the importance of local land management practices.

But the local knowledge of land management and conservation has been overlooked by the modernist state discourses and in fact a new 'crisis narrative' has emerged in Meghalaya to further de-legitimize shifting cultivation and use the land 'productively'. Thus a recent document to develop watershed management in shifting-cultivation areas talks about the global energy crisis due to depletion of fossil fuel resources and proposes a massive scheme of Jatropha (a source of bio-diesel) plantation on these 'enormous areas of unproductive, waste lands'. Alluding to its many expected out comes the report says that the bio-diesel produced through Jatropha cultivation will provide gainful employment by way of seed –collection (to shifting cultivators) and help the Industrial sector in achieving self –reliance for their energy needs (Government of Meghalaya 2006b: 12-14).

The state discourse on shifting cultivation portrayed through a series of crisis narratives is clearly driven out of its desire to get control of the community land and use it for the purposes that suit its modernist agenda, overlooking that Jhum is inseparably linked with the socio-economic and cultural aspects of the life and community ownership of the indigenous people.

The holistic integration of shifting cultivation with community management however explains its survival, despite large-scale reclaiming of such lands by plantation and afforestation schemes and privatization of

community land. Thus more than 10% of the state's population of about two million still practice-shifting cultivation. Though official reports claim that area of land annually under shifting cultivation has reduced from76 thousand hectare in 1971to 41 thousand hectares in 2001(Government of Meghalaya 2006 b: 27-28) and frame it as a measure of 'success' in dealing with the 'primitive' practice, an alternative framing, which sees reduction in the area under shifting cultivation in terms of non-availability of land as a consequence of privatization of community land or enclosures created by afforestation and plantations, has not been done either by the state or the civil society. Such frames, however were found in the indigenous discourse of the 'illiterate' shifting cultivators, of Undu village in the course of my interaction with them who saw reduced area under shifting cultivation not as a 'success' but as a social process, effecting and caused by the circumstances, such as privatization and state intervention. They also had a sense of history and a long-term view of the resources in the past when land was available in the plenty and the village headman was more generous with land.

BOX 4

I interviewed shifting cultivators in Undu village under Ri-Bhoi District, where 60 house holds practice shifting cultivation, popularly known as 'Jhum', and cultivators as 'Jhumias'. The interview brought to the focus the clash between the discourse on modernity and an indigenous discourse contesting it. Jhumias lamented that area under shifting cultivation is shrinking as more and more land is either privatized or has been covered under various government run aforestation/plantation schemes. They also justified jhum because it provides food security and certain cereals and vegetables, which are unique to their food habit, are grown on jhum land only. Thus the environmental discourse on shifting cultivation shared by the government officials which mostly 'aborealises' shifting cultivators or understand shifting cultivation related land - degradation in terms of carrying capacity or population, did not match with the perspective of shifting cultivators who blamed decreasing access due to conversion of village commons to other usages. .

It was also evident that in the wake of strong development interventions, condemning shifting cultivation, the shifting cultivators have taken recourse to certain non-confrontationist everyday modes to work the system to their advantage like following a 'dual' economy of shifting cultivation and settled agriculture, the second one basically to show the officials that they are 'modernizing', participating in the various government projects as 'beneficiaries' and sticking to the community land to assert their claim on it to avoid its possible privatization . Some cases of splitting the family to migrate to urban locations as daily wage earners were also noticed. Lastly the impression I got was that if the number of jhum households has come down as claimed by various official/academic reports, it is mainly because the community lands available for shifting cultivation have shrunken either because of privatization or the government initiated plantation and afforestation schemes.

Source: My interview of shifting cultivators in Undu village on 10th September 2006.

Similarly rather than blaming population for reduced Jhum cycle, a typical state discourse, the 'illiterate' shifting cultivators stressed on contested use and social institutions that shape the rules and rights of resource use (Box 4).

The resistance to the state development discourse by shifting cultivators was not only evident in their narratives but also in every day modes of response to 'development' interventions in the village.(Box 4).

To conclude, as a consequence of the policies to extend state control and create new enclosures to check shifting cultivation, the subjectivities of the Jhumias are getting reconstituted-settled agriculturist, plantation worker, 'beneficiary', and factory labor, to illustrate a few such subjectivities. These subjectivities aiming at changing the subsistence base of the Jhumias have nevertheless provided new forms of engagement, which have been used by them as a survival as well as risk avoidance strategy and more important to work the system to their advantage, as James Scott (1985) would have said. The rejection of a standardized notion of development by shifting cultivators through every day modes of resistance shows that the discourse on modernity is not always hegemonic, at least in the community spaces. But the statist discourses ignore such responses and continue to see shifting-cultivation and cultivators pejoratively.

Such negative portrayal of community and its modes of resource management, resulting in practice of state control is not limited to shifting cultivation, but has resulted in a variety of state practices, both coercive and persuasive that impinge on community space and extend state management and control on natural resources, some of them, ironically in the garb of people's participation. Such interventions in Meghalaya are summed up below.

5.2 Resource control through legislation

There is a clear trend towards an increasing role of the state in regulating forestry, irrespective of the ownership and land pattern in Meghalaya, as we would see.

On the eve of independence Meghalya was governed by the Assam Forest regulation 1891, based on the Indian Forest Act of 1878, which extended to State owned forest areas only. After the attainment of statehood, the first land use legislation was the Meghalaya Forest Regulation (Application and Amendment) Act, 1973, which is largely an extension of the Assam Forest Regulation of 1891. In 1979, the Meghalaya Forest (Ejectment of Unauthorized Persons from Reserve Forest) Rules were framed empowering the state forest department to expel any person from Reserves. Thus these interventions remained limited to state controlled forest areas only. But a shift was visible in 1980s extending its control to the community forest, which was perhaps caused by the increasing national concern for conservation. The Meghalaya Forest (Removal of Timber Regulation) Act of 1981 provided that any removal of timber could be made only upon a license granted by a state government authority. In 1982 a post of conservator of forest was created having jurisdiction over whole of Meghalaya. In 1991the Meghalaya Forest Authority Act, was passed which provided for constitution of an authority to exert a unified control over forests in the state "to prevent indiscriminate felling of trees". The authority was vested in the Chief Minister, the Minister-in-Charge of Forests and Environment, and ADC representatives (Tiwari 2005:49-53).

Attempts are now being made 'to stream-line the administration of the forest and forest land' under a single umbrella christened as 'unified control and management of the forests' of District Councils and the state forests department (Ibid. 2005:52).

Meanwhile the intervention of the Apex court has also added a new dimension to the state control as now it is compulsory to have Working Schemes, a short-term plan, for all the forest areas held by community, which is to be approved by the forest department. (Ray Dutta and Alam 2002:78).

A 'persuasive' way to enter community space is the existing policy to 'green' the 'barren' areas, which are under the constitutional jurisdiction of the District Councils, through afforestation programmes. Its more recent and sophisticated version is Joint Forest Management.

5.3 The new initiative of Joint Forest Management in Meghalaya: empowering State or community?

The JFM approach provides communities with a share of timber and non-timber forest products from public lands in return for forest protection and it has been extended to most of the states in India. Though JFM has allowed communities to gain some rights and responsibilities for state forest, it has little relevance for the North east, where communities have historically controlled their forest resources. Entering into sharing agreements with the state forest departments decreases their authority and resources, rather than enlarge them. (Poffenberger 2006: x-ix) and thus it weakens indigenous forms of resource management. Nevertheless the state of Meghalaya adopted the JFM in September 2003. This is applicable across the entire state and especially to areas under clan and village ownership. Work has started which includes the 'entry point activities', creation of nurseries as well as advance work for the creation of plantation (Government of Meghalaya 2006 a : 174-175).

The document on JFM in Meghalaya starts with a typical crisis narrative of degradation of forest and eco-systems due to unsustainable biotic pressure to justify it. While its objectives talk about active participation of local communities in afforestation and conservation, it has several features that clash with the indigeneity and its subsistence based management practices.

For instance in formulating the JFM approach, the forest department in Meghalaya tried to give some credence to the villagers own forest use practices and thus one of the objectives of JFM is 'to ensure proper synergy between the technical expertise and infrastructure of the forest and environment department and traditional knowledge and untapped human resource of local tribal communities to ensure conservation (Government of Meghalaya 2003:146). Nevertheless the acknowledgement of traditional knowledge does not undermine the need for the project and procedures, educate villagers and monitor their activities so that to introduce 'scientific' management as evident below.

JFMCs have been burdened with lengthy procedures and thick dossiers which are difficult to comprehend. The list of records and registers to be maintained will illustrate the complexity of paper works and procedures. There

are at least eight documents which are to be maintained – register of Membership for the General Body, minute books, separately for the General Body and Executive Committee, cash book, register of the usufructs shared between members, register of the fine(s)/penalty imposed on the members and collected, register of the plot(s)/tract(s) of land under the JFM, register of other activities undertaken by/through the JFMC and any other record prescribed and relevant to the project. The list is followed by a detailed procedure. (Government of Meghalaya 2003). One can argue that the forest department has a vested interest in creating more and more paper work and even more complex procedures as these bloat department's importance rendering them indispensable in the functioning of JFMCs, while leaving the community powerless.

BOX 5

I interviewed JFMC members in Umsohma village. The Chairman of both the Governing Body and Executive Committee, is a 'timber contractor turned conservationist'. The strength of the general body is 280, which has no female representation. Explaining the reason for female exclusion, the Chairman said that only one member from each household can participate in the general body and that slot by preference goes to the male.

About 30 hectares of the area is to be covered by plantation under JFM in the village, out of which 20 hectares is in private land, as vacant village land is difficult to find now a days. Asked as to why private forest owners are allowing themselves to be controlled by Forest Department, the Member Secretary explained that the private owners are seeing this as an opportunity for plantation of trees free of cost. He had another interesting explanation – if the owners cannot demonstrate that they are continuously using this land it will revert back to the village common. Plantation will strengthen individual claim over the land thus.

Confronted with the question as to what benefits JFM will bring, the Chairman told me that he has been educated by the Forest Department about the environmental services that the forest provides and he appreciates the value of conservation and will not fell tree. But this conservation ethic appeared to be tutored and basically meant for a particular kind of audience. Conservation is a façade became evident when I saw that plantations were mostly species of commercial value –Poma,Sal and Gamari. All eyes are set on timber – money for people and royalty for forest department. The superiority of commerce over subsistence was also evident in the Minor Forest Produce (MFP) where the clear preference was for broom grass plantation (Meghalaya is a leading exporter of broom) while other MFPs like gums, resins, edible wild fruits and tubers or medicinal plants had no presence.

Source: My interview of the JFMC members in Umsohma village on 8th September 2006.

In practice also JFM seems to threaten tribal social fabric. This was evident during interviews in the JFM of Umsohma village, which clearly showed that JFM works in the interest of the rich, promoting commercial forestry and threatening subsistence based community forestry. The focus of JFMC in the village was on timber plantation , which mostly involves the rich, a common finding in studies on JFM in other parts of the country (Jeffery and Sundar,1999;Khare et al 2000). This also happened because the members of the local forest committees were less poor than the poorest and had a vested interest in supporting the forest department because of their own vested

interest in the forest timber. In fact the chairman of the JFMC was himself a timber contractor. Plantations were mostly of commercial value to the exclusion of MFPs, commonly consumed by the village people (Box 5).

The practice of JFM weakening community forestry and facilitating privatization was also evident in the selection of plots for plantation, which were mostly private rather than communal. The private land owners however preferred JFM, not out of any concern for conservation, but to assert their individual claim on land, 'free of cost' as according to the local custom, if the land remains fallow for certain period, it reverts back to village common (Box 5).

Thus despite its avowed claim to promote participation and conservation, in effect JFM seems not only to extend State control to community space but also promote privatization.

5.4 Wild life management: responsibility without power

In India a select group of naturalists have been in the forefront of wilderness conservation by making these areas out of bound for the human population and they share a common ground with the forest department, looking to extend State control. This resulted in the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 creating a massive network of parks and sanctuaries, extinguishing all community rights such as collecting of minor forest produce in the parks while severely restricting them in sanctuaries. The Act is operative in Meghalaya also.

Thus despite the powers given to the ADCs under Schedule Six areas, they have not been given the power to make laws with regard to the protection of wildlife. As such they cannot set up any protected areas such as National Parks and Sanctuaries for the protection of wildlife, which remains the prerogative of central government (Dutta, 2001:21-25). Accordingly two national parks and three sanctuaries have been set up under the control of forest department. But the NRM regime, which has emerged, tends to focus on specific natural resources, like forest or wild life as isolated ecosystems. In practice it has posed serious problems for the wildlife management.

Meghalaya has a sizeable number of elephant populations. These are not contained within the protected area network under direct control of the state government. In fact a significant population resides out side the protected area net work which move from one forest block to other, enhancing elephant-human conflict (Government of Meghalya 2006c).Both the state and conservationists assert that the main hurdle for wildlife management in Meghalaya is that most of the forest is under community management. They allude to the study conducted by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), an organization of wilderness conservationists in 1980s, to assess the extent of damage caused by elephants, and also to suggest solutions (Dutta 2001:21-25).

The BNHS report pointed out that the single most important cause for the man-animal conflict is because most of the forest in Meghalaya is under the control of the District Council. The forest department has little or no control over what happens in these forests.

The report suggested that the only way to remove the elephant problem is by the Forest Department taking over all the forest area in Garo Hills and managing it in a scientific way. This will allow the elephants to use the forests without conflict with man (Ibid. 2001).

Thus the increase in man-animal conflict in Meghalaya has become an apologia for extending control over community forest, wherein the forest department has found a useful ally in conservationists. This shows that though wilderness is a concept that by definition runs contrary to modernity and politics, it is in reality a product of both (Kosek in Peets and Watts 1996:127), which can be used for coercive conservation.

5.5 Globalization of forest: carbon finance and new subjectivities

India ratified the global convention on climate change – Kyoto Protocol – in 2002, which envisages a market-based regime where India will trade its carbon emission with the developed countries, in lieu of 'clean' technologies. The World Bank is one of the facilitators of carbon-trading regime.

In March-2006 the South Asia Environment and Social Development Unit of The World Bank prepared a paper for further discussion entitled 'Carbon Finance and the Forest Sector in North east India' (Meijer and Damania 2006). It looks at the potential for carbon trading in northeast region based on its forest resources and concludes that conversion of marginal farms to forest via carbon trading provides the greatest potential to increase rural incomes and generate simultaneous environmental benefit. It makes an elaborate calculation as to how permanent pastures grazing lands, culturable waste land, fallow lands, all of which have 'low returns' should be converted to forest. But there is no mention about indigenous people and the negotiated use of landscape by the community and their spiritual and social dependence on the natural resources. Thus it treats afforestation basically as constructing empty spaces, which are to be harnessed to fight climate change.

The role of forest in carbon sequestration, impact and trade and its potential for Meghalaya is now widely discussed and has found place in official documents of the state (Government of Meghalaya 2006a: 165-171).

Thus emission trading in Meghalaya, as and when it becomes operational will convert the forests into carbon sinks and further weaken community control, where in "local" will be transformed into social anonymity or at best, in this case, into an idealized "global carbon worker." (Shiva 1993 in Jasanoff and Martello 2004:113).

I sum up this chapter by referring to Hajer (1995:54-55) who says that to deconstruct a policy discourse it is interesting to observe how seemingly technical positions conceal normative commitments. I have tried to demonstrate that the hidden normative position in afore mentioned across-the-board practices is appropriation of community forest to bring it under state control, for which a variety of technical positions for 'better, scientific and productive' management of forest have been assumed, in opposition to indigeneity. These positions are not only de-legitimizing indigenous forms of

management but also creating new and hitherto unknown subjectivities for the indigenous people.

6 CONCLUSION: CRISIS NARRATIVE AND COUNTER NARRATIVE

In this paper I have tried to show that just after India' independence indigeneity was the most significant frame in Meghalaya and it found expression both in discourse and practice of various actors-central government, civil society groups and indigenous people of the state. However as the new actors and concerns entered, the significance of issue within the frame of modernity gained momentum, both nationally and locally. Indeed the example of Meghalaya indicates that among politicians, civil servants and the middle class at large the modernity has not only gained currency but hegemonised the discourse, by displacing issues in the frame of idigeneity and community self-management of forest.

I have also demonstrated that the presumption of the superiority of modern discourse and of community as poor land managers have provided the basis for the construction of a set of crisis and 'degradation narratives', which while deriding community control over forest have rationalized state intervention to achieve 'progress' and 'development'.

Yet the claim that the forest administration can protect the forest can also be contested. There is evidence for instance of degradation of reserved forest under the state control due to unregulated logging like the illegal felling in two reserved forests in southern Garo Hills in the 1990s where an independent commission found that about 45 000 trees had been illegally cut inside the reserves. The Commission further points to a "systemic collapse" of the forest administration as the main factor behind the illegal felling (Dutta 1997:107-108, quoted in Karlsson, 2003).

However, as evident in my paper, the struggles between narratives in the policy arena and outside, has resulted in an on-going constriction of community space. It has happened at two levels: first there is a process of privatisation whereby land and resources are being transferred from communal ownership to private ownership reminding us of enclosures in England from 15th to 19 century and second there is State appropriation and territorialization of community spaces. In 18th century Western Europe social conflicts rose because of private appropriation of forest while in the colonial ecological history of India, the communal management of woodland had to resist the State. In Meghalaya the community management is threatened by both, private as well as by State appropriation, though both have their root in modernity. Thus the varied and seemingly unconnected activities like privatisation of land, creation of wildlife sanctuary, JFM afforestation programmes or state plantations to control jhum are a product of dual appropriation, but single process of modernity project.

At the same time it is also evident that the hegemony of the discourse on modernity is still challenged by the indigenous discourse in community domain-criticism of industrialisation by Meghalya Indigenous People's Forum,

non-confrontationist resistance that shifting cultivators have taken recourse, to contest government's modernization schemes; mobilisation of poor in some Khasi areas to protest against privatisation of village commons and the assertion of the headman(Syiem) of traditional institution that Indigenous people knowledge of natural resources and conservation must be recognised an valued-all mentioned in this paper- are few such instances-, an indication that discourse on modernity is not completely hegemonic. There are few more manifestations of indigeneity worth mentioning.

In the East Khasi Hills of Meghalaya, the villagers of Maphlang are building on four hundred year old sacred forest traditions, by ordaining new forests in eighteen villages. (Poffenberger 2006:6), Karlsoon (in Cederlof and Sivaramakrishnan 2005: 191) observes that of late the Khasis' increased interest in preserving their sacred forests is an example of assertions of indigenousness.

Expressions of indigeneity can be seen in some of the contemporary social movements also in Meghalaya, for instance, giving indigenous names to important places, whose names were changed by the colonial administration – a struggle over geographic names through which indigeneity is expressed. The powerful Khasi Students' Union, which has been a carrier of indigeneity discourse is demanding that the name of the world famous site, Cherrapunjee, which experiences the highest rainfall in the world and known as 'Wettest place on planet Earth' should be restored to Sohra, its original name as 'Sohra was forcibly erased (during colonial rule) ignoring very sentiments of the local people, … which was an insult towards the forefathers of ours who have sacrificed and fought for setting up and building this very important, now world famous Sohra' (Memorandum,September1 7, 2006) .

But what is emerging in Meghalya is a political case, focussing on the rights of the indigenous people and perhaps more prominently an articulation focused on the loss of unique tribal identity but its material counter part- a critique of conventional development strategy or opposition to diminishing community control has not emerged. For instance a broad-based discourse of kinship and moral community-a counter narrative- to persuade those who have cleared or inherited large land holdings to recognized that their kin and neighbours also have needs and according to some interpretations of tradition, rights to land on which to base their livelihood, that would have saved the community self –management project, has not found expression. This has perhaps something to do with the field of power within which the meta-narrative of modernity is operating. However it has not precluded the emergence of new alliances that 'support' indigeneity, as the following suggests.

While I was doing this paper I had the opportunity to attend a workshop arranged by National Agriculture Bank for Rural Development (NABARD) in Shillong to understand the land tenure system in Meghalaya so that their rural credit network could be expanded. A number of NGOs and community leaders were taking part in the deliberation. As the workshop preceded it became evident that the bank was looking for a property regime with clear title and legal backing to make people credit worthy. I could not hold myself from commenting that the tone and tenor of the discussion was contrary to the spirit of community ownership. But to my dismay none of the community leaders or NGOs vouched for me .To me this was an indication of weakness

of community self-management project. But as I was pondering over the relevance of indigenous discourse devoid of community control over natural sources, the following day an international workshop was held in Shillong , romancing the eco-conservation practices of indigenous people and underlining that survival of forest based indigenous people of North east India was linked to the survival of ecology and cultural diversity of the globe. The work-shop indicated emergence of a recent 'global' strategy that links indigeneity with international issues and organizations in Meghalaya- a 'new middle ground' between the first world and indigenous people, that Conklin and Graham (1995:695-710) talk about in the context of Amazonian Indians. A 'shared idiom of solidarity between forest and city people, which derives its sustenance from exoticism, naturalness and harmony with nature' is apparently finding its way in Meghalaya .Of late there has been a trend to high light the beneficial role of such advocacy coalitions in assisting grass root struggles in developing countries. Bryant and Bailey (1997:190) term such coalitions as 'natural alliance' against State and trans- national corporations. But these views overlook how more powerful agendas may be imposed on less powerful local activists and such alliance may in fact represent innate tendencies for control within Western cultures-a project which appears to be a replica of modernity, based on a symbolic representations that define indigeneity in ways that contradict the realities of many indigenous people's lives. As such success of such projects to strengthen indigeneity is doubtful.

Much recent environmental debates have suggested that social movements perform a crucial role in communicating local environmental knowledge to policy process. Escobar (Esobar 1996 in Jasanoff and Martello 2004:195) remarked: "We need new narratives of life and cultures(….). They will arise from the meditations that local culture are able to effect(….). This is a collective task that perhaps only social movements are in a position to advance". Such social movements have not emerged in Meghalaya. In their absence the prospect of survival of community control along side the discourses on modernity does not appear to be too bright. On the other hand modernity and consequent State extension in the community space has brought to the fore contradictions, which have not only weakened indigeneity, but also displaced it in some cases.

How do we frame such contradictions between modernity and indigenous projects in Meghalaya? Are the contradictions contingent on the fact that the frame of modernity is much more pervasive, where as claims about idigeneity are salient only to a much smaller segment of Indian society? Are they (contradictions) a natural outcome of the compulsions of modernity to deal with the different sections of the society to legitimise its power? Or the issue is simply that modernity cannot accommodate indigenous /local realities?

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