Saurabh Gupta

Politics of Water Conservation

Delivering Development in Rural Rajasthan, India

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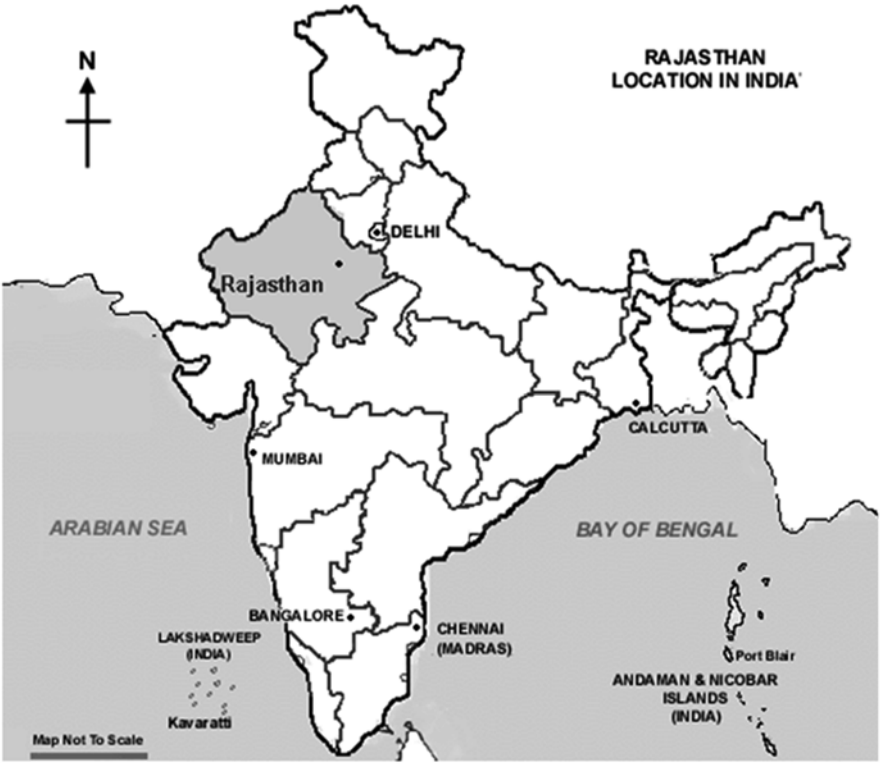
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ISLANDS
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Map Not To Scale

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Contents

Acronyms

ARAVALI	Association for Rural Advancement through Voluntary Action and Local Involvement, Jaipur
CAPART	Centre for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology
CBNRM	Community Based Natural Resource Management
CD	Community Development
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CIDA	Canada India Village Aid
CII	Confederation of Indian Industries
CIVA	Centre for Innovation in Voluntary Action
CPR	Common Property Resources
CSE	Centre for Science and Environment
CTAE	College of Technology and Agricultural Engineering
CVH	Contour Vegetative Hedge
DDP	Desert Development Programme
DFID	Department for International Development
DNRM	Decentralised Natural Resource Management
DPAP	Drought Prone Area Programme
DRDA	District Rural Development Agency
DWD&SC	Department of Watershed Development and Soil Conservation
EAS	Employment Assurance Scheme
EED	*Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst*, Germany
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FMCG	Fast Moving Consumer Goods
FPC	Forest Protection Committee
GED	Gender Environment and Development
GoR	Government of Rajasthan
GoI	Government of India
GO-NGO	Government Organised Non-Governmental Organisations
GVM	*Gram Vikas Manch*
GVK	*Gram Vikas Kosh* (Village Development Fund)

ICR	Implementation Completion Report
ICCO	Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
IIM	Indian Institute of Management
IIT	Indian Institute of Technology
IWDP	Integrated Watershed Development Project
JFM	Joint Forest Management
LKB	*Laha Ka Baas* (name of a villiage)
LS	*Lok Samiti*
MKSS	*Mazdoor Kisaan Shakti Sangathana*
NCAER	National Council of Applied Economic Research
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIE	New Institutional Economics
NRD	Natural Resource Development
NSM	New Social Movements
NWDPRA	National Watershed Development Project for Rainfed Areas
OBC	Other Backward Classes
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PAWDI	People's Action for Watershed Development Initiatives
PHC	Primary Health Care
PIA	Project Implementing Agency
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
SC	Scheduled Caste
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SPWD	Society for Promotion of Wasteland Development
ST	Scheduled Tribe
SWC	Soil and Water Conservation
TBS	*Tarun Bharat Sangh*
UC	Users Committee
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN-IAWG-WES	UN- Inter Agency Working Group on Water and Environmental Sanitation
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VDC	Village Development Committee
WB	World Bank
WCD	Women and Child Development
WDT	Watershed Development Team
WED	Women Environment and Development

Chapter 1
Introduction

This book is about the politics of development in rural India. Its key aim is to explain development governance (distribution and control of resources and power) in rural Rajasthan, the driest and the largest province in India. I address this issue by examining recent initiatives by an array of state, non-state and transnational actors to increase the availability of water, food, fuelwood and fodder through soil and water conservation or 'watershed development' in Rajasthani villages.[1] 'Watershed Development' is a term used by rural development experts to describe technical approaches to check water and soil erosion in rain-fed areas in order to increase the productivity of land, and to meet the local requirements of food, fodder and fuelwood. This includes treatment of both arable and non-arable lands in a given watershed area through a wide range of physical activities, such as drainage line treatment by building a series of loose stone check dams and other structures to prevent water and soil erosion, farm bunding, construction of small water harvesting structures or development of pasture lands.

Water is the lifeline of rural economic and social systems, especially in arid and semi-arid regions of India, where agriculture is heavily dependent upon rainfall and the means of secured irrigation are severely limited. Development strategies (in colonial and post-colonial times) have focused on ensuring the availability of water (for irrigation and drinking). However, three significant shifts in development practice and policy have taken place in the past two decades. First, the state has gradually lost its privileged position as the leading agent of development prompting a substantial expansion in the role of non-state actors in rural development.[2] Second, there has been a rise in concern for 'sustainability', 'participation', 'traditional knowledge' and 'decentralised management' of natural resources (water or pasture

[1] Watershed is an area which drains rainwater to a common point. For project purposes, generally a micro-watershed of about 500 ha is undertaken as a basic unit for treatment by the project-implementing agencies (particularly in governmental watershed projects).

[2] The state, however, remains the most powerful actor in terms of (financial and material) resources in the arena of rural development.

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lands), within academic and policy circles. Third, investments of money and resources by the state and non-state actors in rain-fed or 'ecologically fragile' regions of India have increased in the wake of limits to further increase in agricultural productivity of irrigated lands, and deliberate efforts (especially on the part of the Indian state) to reduce regional disparities in the post 'green revolution' era.

These changes have drastically altered the politics of development in rural India, as they have in large parts of the developing world where the majority of populations are dependent on rain-fed agriculture for subsistence and livelihoods.[3] Besides bringing in large sums of money and resources from diverse sources (foreign donors, national and provincial governments, private philanthropists, firms, etc.) to the villages of Rajasthan, they altered (created new or modified existing) institutional forms and practices for the governance (control and management) of common property resources, including village pastures, community forests, 'wastelands' (uncultivable lands), watershed drainages, rivers and streams, which are all very crucial for the daily sustenance of village residents. We also witness the expansion of an *assemblage* of development actors or agents — the national, provincial and local governments in India; international, national and local NGOs; international development agencies and donors; research organisations; development consultants and academics — whose common concern is securing the availability of water, fodder and fuelwood.[4] For heuristic purposes, I treat this array of actors as a 'watershed development regime', and one of the main objectives of research presented in the book is to understand the nature and power of the watershed development regime in Rajasthan, especially from the early 1990s until 2005, the period of its growth and consolidation .[5]

The various constituents of the watershed development regime have diverse interests, varying forms of power and authority and collaborative or competing

[3] See Hinchcliffe et al. (1999) for case-studies on participatory watershed development projects in Latin America, Africa, Asia and Australia.

[4] Li (2007) uses the analytical category of 'assemblage' in the context of community forest management in Indonesia. She (ibid: 263) argues that community forest management is an assemblage that 'brings together an array of agents (villagers, officials, activists, aid donors, scientists) and objectives (profit, pay, livelihoods, control, property, efficiency, sustainability and conservation)'. Likewise, we can treat 'watershed development' as an assemblage that brings together a range of state and non-state actors with diverse agendas and motives.

[5] More on 'development regimes' later in the book, but for now, the definition by David Ludden can be instructive. Ludden (2005: 4042) offers the following definition: 'A development regime is an institutional configuration of effective power over human behaviour, and that also has legitimate authority to make decisions that affect the wealth and well-being of whole populations. It includes an official state apparatus but also much more. A development regime includes institutions of education, research, media, technology, science and intellectual influence that constitute a development policy mainstream.' It is in this sense that I use the concept of 'development regime'. However, I highlight the *heterogeneous* nature of development regimes in the contemporary times and also include non-state agents of development as integral part of the development regimes. In Rajasthan, the Department of Watershed Development and Soil Conservation was formed in the early 1990s, and the entire watershed-related activities were delegated to rural local bodies in 2004–2005.

agendas. In the process of water conservation and watershed development projects, the agents of development (holders of money, knowledge and authority) interact with the recipients of development — differently positioned rural social groups divided along the lines of caste, class and gender. While rainwater harvesting practices and governance of village commons for collective sustenance have been going on for centuries in several parts of rain-fed regions of India, 'watershed development' as a 'scientific' approach for a 'comprehensive' treatment of a given watershed area through a mix of soil and water conservation techniques (contour bunds, drainage line treatment, enclosures, check dams, etc.) is a fairly recent phenomenon.

Most NGOs that are involved in improving the productivity of private and common lands (for crop, fodder and fuelwood) and increasing the availability of water by preventing run-off use the term 'watershed development' to denote their project activities. However, some grassroots and activist organisations engaged in building small water harvesting structures consciously refrain from employing the term 'watershed development' to describe their activities, because they claim that their approach is not based on 'technical' or 'expert' knowledge and that they promote 'traditional knowledge' in their rainwater harvesting activities. This indicates that naming the programme itself is a way to signal affirmation of mainstream expertise-driven interventions, or conversely to maintain an outsider status with respect to the mainstream. It also shows the internal tensions and heterogeneity within development regimes in recent times.

The motive and rationale for undertaking watershed development activities by different agents varies considerably even though they are all concerned with better availability of water for food, fodder and fuelwood in the countryside. While the prime concern for the Ministry of Agriculture (of the Government of India) is an increase in the crop yield of rain-fed areas, for the Ministry of Rural Development, it is tackling rural poverty in dry lands by generating employment opportunities. For international agencies (like the World Bank), 'sustainable development' of 'eco-fragile' regions is the main motive to sponsor watershed projects, but for certain grassroots and activist organisations, people's control over local resources is the driving force for supporting such programmes.

Being quintessentially a land treatment activity, watershed development work is inherently biased towards those who have larger stocks of land and cattle. Undoubtedly, increase in groundwater level or fodder favours those with initially higher endowments in absolute terms, and individual cultivators are generally more interested in the activities which can ensure them direct benefits through increase in crop yield (such as farm-bunding to prevent erosion of topsoil or lift irrigation from anicuts or wells). However, watershed development activities offer something for everyone, irrespective of their initial endowments of land and cattle. The gain for landless or near-landless people is primarily residual in the form of wage employment

during these physical activities, and investments on private as well as common lands.[6]

We can witness conflict as well as cooperation *within* a given village over watershed initiative. The main reasons for conflict are control of resources and funds in a given watershed project and on the priority of activities to be undertaken (e.g. possible site of new water harvesting structures, development of common pasture lands or field bunds on private lands). Village residents also cooperate with each other in undertaking construction activities for individual or collective benefits. There can also be conflicts *between* villages over the use and control of newly developed common resources. Further, various rural social groups negotiate with different elements of the development regime to attract project funds for their villages, and various members of the development regime cooperate, negotiate or compete with each other in the arena of water conservation and watershed development.

The politics of rural development is animated by the *interplay* between the various elements of a development regime and their interactions with local communities. Rather than seeing development as determined by a relatively monolithic and stable discursive formation (see Ferguson 1990) that produces inevitable outcomes, I propose to treat watershed interventions as more fluid and indeterminate 'fields of action' because they are characterised by complex processes of cooperation, competition, negotiations, contests and conflict between different stake holders, as shown by Li (2007), Dwivedi (2001) and Moore (1999), among others. Treating watershed interventions as 'fields' helps us to understand the nature and effectiveness of social power deployed through state, non-state and local systems of hegemony, domination and control in the context of natural resources. It also enables us to address the 'how' of development governance problems, and to interrogate the local features of state power.

The power of the watershed development regime to govern natural resources in rain-fed areas has expanded since the early 1990s, both in terms of increasing funds and resources and the diversity of elements within its fold. The critical feature of a watershed development regime is 'the will to govern and not simply coerce' (Li 2007: 287).[7] One of my main tasks in this book is to elucidate the process or the manner in which the watershed development regime functions in rural Rajasthan. Conventionally, state-centred studies of rural development have paid little attention to *heterogeneous* development regimes comprising diverse elements with varying forms of power, cooperating and competing with each other for control of resources and authority. Because the state no longer has a monopoly on expertise and governance, we need to look beyond 'the state' at the range of parties that attempt to govern, including NGOs and donor agencies with their teams of expert consultants, social reformers, scientists and research institutions (Li 2005). As the nation-state's control over development is diluted, development discourse has lost the coherence

[6] In certain cases enclosures of village pasture lands can be detrimental for the (poorer) people who only have small animals like goats and sheep that are generally grazed in open land.

[7] More on development governance and the influence of Gramsci and Foucault on the studies of rural development in the next section and in Chap. 2 of this book.

that it had when 'trapped in national policy debates' (Ludden 2005: 253). Such heterogeneity of development regimes and incoherence of development discourse leads me to analyse the interests, agendas and roles of the prominent members of the watershed development regime, and the prospects of 'partnerships' between its various elements. It is through this lens that I explain changes in institutional forms and practices that govern (control and manage) local natural resources in Rajasthani villages, especially in the last two decades.

The heterogeneity of development regimes as well as rural communities raises further questions: How do development agents operate in their fields of action and how have their strategies changed in the last two decades? How do differently positioned rural social groups cooperate, negotiate or compete with each other and interact with a variety of development agents to increase their livelihood chances? How do watershed development interventions help in reproducing or altering the existing relations of power and dominance within rural communities? Indeed, how does the 'field' of watershed development itself change over this period?

I address these questions on the basis of three detailed case studies of the most powerful and prominent elements of Rajasthan's watershed development regime. Besides the Department of Watershed Development and Soil Conservation (DWD&SC) of Rajasthan, which received a large part of funds for its watershed activities from the Government of India, I have selected the two largest and most prominent NGOs/grassroots organisations in Rajasthan working in the field of water harvesting and watershed development. One of them is a Gandhian activist organisation called Tarun Bharat Sangh (hereafter TBS) that has received international recognition for reviving the so-called traditional rainwater harvesting systems in Alwar district of Rajasthan. The other, which I shall call Gram Vikas Manch (hereafter GVM), is a renowned service delivery organisation dedicated to the principles of social justice and equity, working in Udaipur district.[8] The World Bank has played an instrumental role in funding and setting up the government watershed department in Rajasthan, while a range of international development agencies and donors, academics, film-makers, journalists, etc. have linkages with both GVM and TBS.

These three organisations (DWD&SC, GVM and TBS) are the units of analysis for the field research entailed in this study. The research questions that I have mentioned above are addressed in relation to the specific contexts of these agencies as they evolved, changed and operated over the last two decades or so in their attempts to improve the lives and livelihoods of people dependent on natural resources for sustenance in Rajasthani villages. It is through the study of these agencies (their agendas, programmes and ways of functioning) that the issues related to development governance in rural Rajasthan – exercise of power at different levels by various

[8] Pseudonyms have been used to maintain the anonymity of respondents who requested so. The TBS is based in Alwar district of north Rajasthan, and GVM is based in Udaipur district of south Rajasthan. Both these districts (Alwar and Udaipur) share similar agro-climatic conditions and are marked by the Aravalli hill ranges which run across the state of Rajasthan from the south-west to the north-east.

stakeholders (for the control of resources and authority), dynamics of institutional forms and practices (that mediate and regulate distribution and access to resources) and micro-politics of development (complex processes of negotiation, competition, conflict, etc.) – are examined in this book.

What is the significance of the questions that I have raised above of development governance with regard to natural resources? Firstly, these questions bring the issues of the power centre stage in analysing development interventions in the countryside. Our understanding of governance and control of common lands and natural resources is generally limited to an interrogation of state–versus–non-state authority systems (see Kerr 2002; Shah 1999). Contemporary social theoretical accounts of power and development governance suggest that this dichotomy should not remain the central axis of concern in studies on natural resource development (see Li 2005; Robbins 1998; Sinha 2003). Rather, power needs to be seen as 'diffused throughout civil society as well as being embodied in the coercive apparatuses of the state' (Gramsci, cited in Simon 1982).[9] This notion of power makes redundant the *dichotomous* relationship between the state and civil society organisations that is prevalent in mainstream development literature and allows us to expand the scope of development regimes to incorporate a variety of non-state and transnational actors, although there remain internal tensions between the diverse elements (cf. Li 2005; Sinha 2008).[10]

Second, these questions explore the *dynamism* of institutional forms and practices and pay attention to the *politics* of natural resource development (see Cleaver 2002; Mosse 2003). This is important because mainstream approaches to the understanding of natural resource management and common property resources, dominated by new institutionalism and its offshoots – 'participatory' and 'social capital' approaches – have largely undermined or ignored the issues of power and politics.[11] Their focus is mainly on game-theoretic models (which do not take into account the social, political or cultural contexts of resource use), and they over-emphasise

[9] Gramsci suggests that the social relations of civil society (which are different from that of 'political society' or the state) are also relations of power (quoted in Simon 1982: 27).

[10] Sinha (2008) uses the term 'trans-national development regime' in order to highlight the elements of 'transnationality' in community development programmes in British India and in the decades of the 1950s and 1960s in independent India. Through this, Sinha (ibid) provides a new window to the understanding of community development programmes, and also expands the scope of the development regime to include not just the state but also transnational actors (such as missionaries and foundations). However, it is worth noting that transnational actors or institutions are important but are only one group amongst the array of other actors (local NGOs and grassroots organisations) involved in contemporary developmental interventions. Goldman (1996: 167), in the context of the World Bank's environmental regulatory policies, argues that the World Bank has been able to 'enlist scores of social actors and institutions to help generate a "new development regime" that is coherently *green* as well as *neoliberal*'. I prefer to highlight the *heterogeneous* nature of development regimes and suggest that *coherence* is not a necessary feature of the contemporary development regimes in India; they are *polyvocal* and in a state of flux.

[11] 'New institutional' approaches are *managerial* in nature, and their main focus is on 'efficient' management of natural resources (say in a particular watershed area), either by the input of proper technology or by creating the 'right' institutional design or 'rules of the game' (following Ostrom 1990).

cooperation between various actors in the so-called community-based natural resource management. I problematise 'community-based natural resource management' in the context of water conservation interventions of select NGOs by analysing the social, political and cultural cohesions and divisions of these arrangements. In this way, I engage directly with 'difficult questions in the local political economy and power relations' (Robbins 1998: 413) and highlight the *overlapping* (old with new, state with non-state) institutional terrain of development in Rajasthan marked by struggles between various stakeholders to control and govern natural resources.[12]

Third, this study deals directly with the questions of power and control but does not see development as determined by a monolithic and stable discursive formation (cf. Moore 1999; Rossi 2004). By taking into account the *interplay* between the various elements of the watershed development regime (which results in plurality of discourses) and to the micro-politics of development (complex processes of negotiation, competition or cooperation.), this study avoids discursive determinism. Some prominent critical accounts of international development (e.g. Ferguson 1990) and post-development literature[13] fail to adequately address this interplay between the various actors involved in rural development interventions. In contrast, my study draws attention to the politics of contingency and contestation in the context of water conservation and watershed development in Rajasthan.

Apart from these possible theoretical contributions that I have outlined above, a study on water conservation and watershed development is important for another reason. Studies of agrarian change in the 40 years since independence have been preoccupied with the green revolution, with new technologies, with farm size and with the political economy of state intervention in infrastructurally better-equipped regions. Peripheral regions (western semi-arid plains and hills) have for the most part been ignored by the scholars of agrarian politics, and watershed initiatives of state and non-state agents in Rajasthan, the largest state in India with a very strong presence of civil society actors, have largely remained unaddressed in development literature.

Recently, some scholars have made a fresh beginning in the study of watershed development and management initiatives to learn, modify and enhance our understanding of theories and concepts in sociology and politics of development. For example, Krishna (2002) and D'Silva and Pai (2003) have used the case of watershed development to analyse the concept of 'social capital'; Baumann and Sinha

[12] Robbins (1998: 145) suggests the centrality of common resources to village life, and the divisiveness of their management politics has resulted in the promulgation of various management and authority systems to govern these lands in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence eras. Each successive legal system imposed over the years has resulted in the mixing of institutional forms under which these lands are governed today. Forms of authority and control realised in norms, rules and contracts are malleable and subject to rapid political and economic changes. The tussle between the state bureaucracy and rural local bodies currently marks the institutional terrain in rural Rajasthan.

[13] Based on post-modern and/or anti-modern theories of development (discussed in detail in Chap. 2 of the book).

(2000) to advance the concept of 'political capital'; Chhotray (2011) to study the practice of 'decentralisation'; Mosse (2005) to enhance our knowledge of international aid policy and practice and Baviskar (2007) to study the process of 'depoliticisation', in the contexts of different provinces of India. There is a considerable scope to further explore the role and agenda of different stakeholders involved in watershed development and management, and to comprehend and explain the ways in which they influence the processes of social and political change in rural Rajasthan.

My primary interest in watershed programmes is to treat watershed development initiatives as an important case to understand the larger politics of development in rural Rajasthan. The aim is not to determine the most 'successful', 'efficient' or 'equitable' system of resource use because 'efficiency', 'success' and 'equity' in watershed development are not absolute parameters but are socially and politically constructed, and in turn have social and political effects. This study looks both at the process of construction and the effects. Moreover, the study takes us beyond the narrow analytical consideration of evaluating the success or failure of particular watershed interventions. Instead, making use of multi-sited ethnography of water conservation activities of different agencies, it explains the 'how' of development delivery in rural Rajasthan.

This book is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 2 provides a critical analysis of the mainstream theoretical tradition (new institutionalism and its offshoots – social capital, participatory and 'synergy' approaches) and the main alternative theoretical traditions (new traditionalist and anti/post-development positions) to understand issues related to use of and access to natural resources in particular and the power of development in general. Chapter 3 is a background chapter providing a selective analysis of historical context and agrarian relations that are relevant to the understanding of contemporary watershed development interventions and their effects on local politics, social relations of land and water use, state–civil society relations, livelihood and relations of caste, gender, etc. The first two chapters provide the theoretical background and historical context to comprehend the watershed interventions of DWD&SC, GVM and TBS, which are presented in the next three chapters of the book. Chapter 4 discusses the emergence of a new apparatus in the form of DWD&SC in the early 1990s. I discuss the changes in the policy guidelines for watershed development over the last decade or so and analyse some of the projects implemented by DWD&SC. Finally, I show the tensions within DWD&SC owing to recent policy changes in favour of democratic decentralisation in the state.

In Chap. 5, I present the case study of Gram Vikas Manch. After providing a brief background of Udaipur, I discuss the genesis of GVM and its organisational structure. I evaluate the changing role of GVM from *demanding* development to *delivering* development since the early 1990s and present narratives from some villages to demonstrate how GVM operates in its field of action. I critically examine the recent watershed interventions of GVM and highlight its micro-politics. Finally, I explain the relationship of GVM with the wider development regime.

Chapter 6 is on TBS, where presenting some background information on Alwar, I discuss the genesis of TBS, its ideology, agenda and activities. I test its claims of

being ‘alternative’, promoting ‘traditional knowledge’ of rainwater harvesting, ‘drought-proofing’ Alwar villages and enhancing community self-reliance. On the basis of narratives from select villages, I critically appreciate the role played by TBS in popularising rainwater harvesting, and highlight instances of cooperation and conflicts between rural social groups and TBS. The chapter also explains the relationship of TBS with the state, donors and other agents. Chapter 7 revisits the debates and theoretical issues discussed in Chap. 1 and analyses them on the basis of empirical evidence presented in Chaps. 4, 5 and 6 respectively. I present my main findings in the form of notes on the *heterogeneous* nature of development regimes, overlapping institutional terrain, limitations of depoliticisation thesis, participation, partnership and ‘synergy’, gender and equity, community and social capital and new leaders and development actors. The concluding section of the chapter presents a summary of the overall arguments in relation to the politics of water conservation and watershed development.

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Chapter 2
Understanding the Politics of Watershed Development

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part discusses the mainstream approaches to the management and development of natural resources and common property resources in rural areas. These approaches based on collective action by resource users, 'participation' of rural communities in development projects, enhancement of 'social capital' within a group of resource users, and partnership between the state and civil society organisations, I contend, conceal relations of power and inequality. Their underlying feature is *cooperation*, and they frequently underplay *conflict* and resistance in natural resource use and development (intra-village, inter-village, between village communities and the state/market, *and* between rural social groups and the non-state development agents). This is important for my purpose because watershed projects (especially those sponsored by the international donors, such as the World Bank) are heavily influenced by mainstream development thinking.

The second part discusses the main alternative theoretical traditions to understanding and analysing issues related to rural development and natural resources development in particular. I discuss, very briefly, the main propositions of 'new-traditionalism' (or neo-populist ideas) and argue that they also neglect conflicts within a given community over governance of local natural resources. I challenge their unbridled faith in 'traditional practices' and 'local knowledge', and highlight the reproduction of binary opposites (e.g. 'traditional' and 'modern') in their narratives. Some other alternative approaches, I suggest, address the shortcomings of new-institutionalism and new-traditionalism by treating *conflict* over resources as central, by paying attention to the divisive nature of institutions, and by analysing the distribution of power (within rural communities, *and* between rural social groups and the development regime). I broadly refer to some of these approaches as 'post-development', which can be best defined as a mix of Foucauldian insights into the normalising effects of power, discourses of authenticity emanating from

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non-metropolitan locations, and affirmations of solidarity with social movements and cultural practices judged as lying outside development's colonising power (Gupta and Sinha 2008: 271). I conduct a review of the theoretical literature to critically appreciate the contributions of these various approaches to the understanding of the power of development discourse[1] and *dispositif*[2] in its specificity, and conflicts over the control and distribution of natural resources.

In the end, I refer to some recent studies on power relations in rural development interventions (or 'new directions' in post-development), which take us beyond discursive determinism, present a more nuanced understanding on the nature and power of development regimes, and pay attention to the 'politics of contingency and contestation' (Moore 1999: 673). I argue that serious attention to the *heterogeneous* nature of development regimes, *overlapping* institutional terrain, and *multiple* discourses can enhance our understanding of the politics of development in the countryside and issues related to natural resource development.

2.2 Natural Resources and Institutions

Much of the academic literature and the mainstream policy formulations regarding the management of natural resources, especially in the decades of 1980s and 1990s (and to large extent, currently), are influenced by the 'new-institutional approaches' such as the Common Property Resources (CPR) theories, the origins of which are rooted in the postulates of the New Institutional Economics (NIE).[3] Basically, NIE is an attempt to incorporate a theory of institutions into economics, and it demonstrates that neither 'state' nor 'market' is necessarily the best way to organise the provision of goods and services (Toye 1995). Institutions can be understood as composed of formal rules (like laws or regulations), informal constraints (like norms, conventions, values), and the enforcement characteristics of both. Bates (in Harriss et al 1995: 4) summarises the core logic of neo-institutionalism in the following words: 'Rational individuals, confronted with the limitations of individually rational behaviour, create institutions that, by introducing new incentives or by imposing new constraints, enable them to transcend these limitations'. The structure of politics determines the choice of institutions (ibid). Yet, this fact is rarely appreciated in the conventional NIE.

[1] To avoid a long discussion of the meaning of 'discourse', I will consider it as 'practice and theory' (Moore and Schmitz 1995). I borrow their idea of 'discourse' as concrete or material activity which transforms the real world and the modes of thought that inform this action at the same time as they arise out of it.

[2] Development apparatus can be described as an ensemble of discursive and material elements. Brigg (2002: 427) describes *dispositif* as discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions and so on—and the system of relations established between these elements.

[3] A detailed discussion on NIE is beyond the scope of this research. See North (1990); for a comprehensive critique of NIE, see Harriss et al. (1995).

2.2.1 *Rules, Games and Common-Pool Resources*

The teachings of NIE have been used to understand the problems related to management of common property resources by several scholars (e.g. Ostrom 1990; Ostrom et al. 1994; Wade 1994; Bromley and Cernea 1989). The central concern of these 'new-institutional' thinkers is to advance the idea that total state control or complete privatisation are not the only solutions available, or for that matter not even the best way to avert the 'tragedy of the commons'.[4] They also challenge the argument expressed by Olson (1965) that it is very difficult for individuals to act voluntarily for their collective welfare.[5]

Taking recourse to game theory, Ostrom (1990) demonstrates that successful governance of 'common-pool resources' is possible without either central regulation or privatisation.[6] This, argues Ostrom, can be achieved locally by the members of a community themselves through cooperation, and by devising institutional arrangements and resource sharing mechanisms, in which the actual monitoring and enforcements of the rules can be left to the users of the resources. But, why are some communities able to govern their common resources successfully and others not? Ostrom (ibid) suggests that it is because there are factors both external and internal to a given group, which facilitate or hinder their efforts. Internal factors include the inability of the members of the community to communicate with each other, to develop trust, and sense that they can share a common future. Powerful individuals within a community, who stand to gain from the present situation, can also block the efforts of those who want to change the rules of the game (Ostrom 1990: 21). Ostrom suggests that these kinds of groups require '*some form* of external assistance' in order to change the rules (ibid, emphasis mine). 'Political entrepreneurs' or those who aim to get some direct personal benefits can help such communities to mobilise towards collective action (ibid). External factors include the lack of autonomy (from the state) available to the group to change institutional arrangement.[7]

Broadly speaking, the main arguments of neo-institutionalists concerned with the problem of management of natural resources are as follows: (a) '*crafting*' the right kind of institutions will lead to an efficient management of natural resources;

[4] The expression 'tragedy of the commons' used by Garrett Hardin (1968) symbolises the fate of all scarce common property resources used by many individuals.

[5] This view was put forward by Mancur Olson (1965). Olson (ibid: 2) writes, 'unless the number of individuals is quite small, or unless there is coercion or some other special device to make individuals act in their common interest, rational self-interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interests'.

[6] Game theory is based on applied mathematics. It could be best described as study of the ways in which strategic interactions (linked to certain structures of positive and negative incentives) among rational players produce outcomes with respect to the preferences or utilities of those players (see Ostrom 1990).

[7] On the basis of a set of studies of successful long-term use of commons, Ostrom (1990: 90) lists eight design principles for successful management of natural resources. Several international development agencies (most notably, the World Bank) have tried to create these design principles in their rural development projects in the 1990s.

(b) the communities are capable enough to innovate and devise appropriate institutional arrangements *themselves* in order to effectively and efficiently manage resources that they hold in common; (c) this exercise requires *minimal* interference by the state and governmental agencies. Therefore, the state should restrict its role in the governance of common property or common-pool resources and grant autonomy to the communities (see Bromley 1992). I keep these points in mind while analysing watershed development programmes in Rajasthan, and test these claims in different empirical situations. It is pertinent to note that watershed programmes are not concerned exclusively with common property or common-pool resource (it also involves treatment and development of private properties) but CPRs are an integral part of these programmes. Watershed programmes essentially involve tapping rainwater on common as well as private lands by building small water harvesting structures in order to recharge ground water. The recharged ground water benefits villagers differentially depending upon physical terrain and several other geographic factors.

2.2.2 New-Institutionalism Critiqued

New-institutional approaches to the study of natural resources are a welcome shift from the previously dominant 'engineering paradigm' of natural resource development, which is heavily biased towards building up physical infrastructure, and neglecting the role and agency of people dependent on natural resources. New-institutionalism emphasises the fact that the problems of natural resource management do not merely involve 'technical' issues but also economic and social institutions within which resource use takes place. New-institutional theorists advance the case of community based natural resource management (CBNRM) or decentralised natural resource management (DNRM).

However, and it will become clearer in the following paragraphs, new-institutional approaches consider the management of natural resources in isolation from the larger political, historical and cultural contexts, and therefore, tend to ignore 'location specificity' (Mosse 2003). New-institutionalists, in fact reduce a complex social and political problem of resource use into merely a micro-economic problem, which requires 'efficient' managerial or technical remedies. Further, they do not suggest any substantial method or way by which, the interests of the poorer and weaker individuals of the community are secured through endogenous institutional innovations (in the absence of interventions by external agents-state or non-state to address the issues of equity).

Sinha (1995) provides an insightful critique of the new-institutional arguments and suggests that self-interest or 'rational human behaviour' in the context of common property resources is dependent upon community's linkages with external markets. If there are no alternative options for livelihoods and sustenance in an economy with linkages with urban markets, peasants are more likely to cut the open-access forests. Further, suggests Sinha (ibid), since new-institutional theorists believe that

problems of overuse and mismanagement of resources are always *internal*, they argue that these problems can be solved in most cases by the community of individuals themselves. There are very few empirical evidences to substantiate this claim. New-institutionalists assume a supportive role of the state in the creation of new common property institutions. Such a state role, argues Sinha (ibid), cannot be 'taken for granted'. In many instances, there is a conflict in the interests of the state and the local communities over common resources. 'National' goals and needs may or may not intersect with 'local' needs and priorities, and state institutions, suggests Sinha (ibid), are rarely motivated by the same considerations as the communities are. Therefore, theories of institutional innovation must address the articulation of common property institutions with the state and market (cf. Agrawal 1999; Axelby 2007).[8]

Likewise, Mosse (2003: 17) argues that policy models advanced by new-institutionalists give local resource use arrangements an independence from state systems. New-institutional analysis, based on the micro-economics of resource use, suggests Mosse (ibid), is largely ahistorical and synchronic, and it does not deal with change at all. The new-institutional framework is also challenged for not explaining the complexity, diversity and 'ad hoc' nature of institutional formation. Cleaver (2002: 15) suggests the process of institutional evolution is '*ad hoc*, approximate and shaped by social life and culture rather than inspired by concepts of design and crafting' and provides an alternative approach to conceptualising institutions through understanding processes of *bricolage*. In the context of natural resource management in Usangu basin in Tanzania, Cleaver illustrates three aspects of institutional bricolage: the multiple identities of bricoleurs, the frequency of cross-cultural borrowing and of multi-purpose institutions, and the prevalence of arrangements of norms that foster co-operation over life courses (ibid: 11). Also, the new-institutional approaches undermine the 'diverse locations of decision making' (ibid: 19), overlapping social identities, and the mixed origins of institutions.

New-institutionalists also fail to take into account the nexus between institutions and uncertainties (ecological, livelihood, knowledge, etc.) In the context of water resources in arid and semi-arid parts of Gujarat, Mehta (2000) suggests that because of higher levels of uncertainty in ecologically fragile areas, people develop multiple livelihood strategies and invest in diverse institutional arrangements for sustenance.[9] She argues that institutions when analysed in conjunction with uncertainty are not

[8] Arun Agrawal (1999), in his study of a migrant pastoral community in western Rajasthan argues that politics is ubiquitous in the interactions of shepherds with the neighbouring landowners in the villages and with state officials (which determines their access to fodder) in their exchanges in markets and with farmers. Institutions developed by shepherds to solve livelihood problems are part of these larger spheres of their economic survival. Axelby (2007) makes a similar observation in the case of *Gaddi* shepherds in Himachal Pradesh.

[9] Mehta's point is more relevant in the light of floods in Rajasthan in 2006, especially in the desert areas. This draws our attention to the requirement of institutional arrangements not just to tackle the scarcity of water but its abundance too. New-institutional perspective to study natural resources management does not take into account the 'ad hoc' arrangements in the time of uncertainty (Mehta 2000; also see Mehta et al. 1999).

merely 'rules of the game,' but they emerge as sites of social interaction and negotiation, comprising heterogeneous actors having diverse ends (ibid: 5). The rules and restrictions can often be bent in the periods of uncertainty pertaining to ecology or livelihood.

New-institutional perspective, in spite of its evident shortcomings, is the dominant framework for natural resource development projects of various kinds, including watershed development. In three different kinds of interventions for water harvesting and watershed development in Rajasthan, I will analyse and explore the dynamics of resource management and uses, keeping in mind the shortcomings of new-institutional approaches highlighted by its critics. Why is the new-institutional perspective popular within policy circles and what solutions are advanced by its proponents for effective and efficient management of natural resources? These are the issues that I discuss next.

2.2.3 'Participation', 'Social Capital' and 'Partnership'

New-institutional arguments are widely popular within the circles of international development agencies, donor agencies, and the international financial institutions, such as the World Bank. Rather than considering resource use as a 'political' issue, for new-institutionalism resource use is considered only as an 'economic' problem of efficient management that needs formulaic solutions. The majority of development and donor agencies are always in search of formulaic solutions like the ones suggested by new-institutionalists (user groups, watershed committees, 'rule making', etc.) because it suits their agenda of implementing development projects in the 'Third World', within a set time period, and without engaging directly with the wider issues of inequalities (of knowledge, power and resources) and redistribution. Moreover, donor agencies tend to draw on academically dominant theories of the time, and new-institutionalism was the most dominant school of thought in the 1980s and 1990s.

International financial institutions such as the World Bank (WB) find support in the new-institutional ideas to advance their own agenda of privatisation, decentralisation and subsidy-cut in developing countries. New-Institutionalism as an apolitical framework supports the WB's anti-state ideology of that period. In the context of the management of natural resources like water in rural areas, the WB promotes participatory or community management of watersheds and irrigation systems through users-groups and committees. The WB models of management of natural resources are based on 'the institutional-economic rationality of rule making and monitoring' (Mosse 2003: 15). Such models are loaded with the policy dictates of minimal state interference, and organisations like the WB use these to promote their own policies of subsidy reduction, cost-recovery and to 'transfer resource management to local users in order to relieve the state of financially burdensome duties' (ibid).

The new-institutional solutions to the problem of resource management match with the neo-liberal solution of 'rolling back the state', because 'economic rationality'

is considered supreme and inevitable in both these theories. This convergence of neo-liberalism with new-institutionalism has led to three important changes in development policy: (a) shift in focus from the role of state to individuals and group of individuals (resource users or 'stocks of social capital'), (b) an explosion in the numbers of NGOs and grassroots organisations working in the field of natural resource management; and following these two, (c) innovations in 'participatory' methods and techniques for *efficient* management of natural and common-pool resources (especially, in the early 1990s), and a strong policy thrust for 'partnership' between state agencies and civil society actors (especially in the late 1990s). Below I discuss these issues because they are quite important in shaping the recent watershed interventions in Rajasthan as well as other parts of India.

2.3 'Participation' and Participatory NRD

'Participation' has become a very influential rhetoric and a mode of practice in developmental interventions for natural resource management in recent times. New-institutional propositions (coupled with innovations in rural development practice, such as 'farmer first' and 'new professionals') have now given birth to 'participatory' approaches to the management of irrigation systems, forests and watersheds, which are now quite popular not only within international development agencies and NGOs, but even the various governmental agencies (most of the programmes for natural resource management start with the prefix *participatory* or *joint*).[10] Community participation in project management is the central theme of the mainstream approaches to natural resources development, especially since the beginning of the 1990s. Participation in development projects is now an important measure of success and a key condition for donor approvals. Tools and techniques adopted to ensure people's participation in the various stages of a project include 'participatory rural appraisal' (PRA)[11] and formation of users' committees, self-help groups, etc., for efficient management of water resources, pasture-lands and forests. It is important not to confuse these participatory *techniques* with the notion of 'participation' or 'public action' (Dreze and Sen 2002), which is explicitly directed to reduce

[10] There is an underlying similarity between the mainstream participatory approaches and alternative approaches with regard to people's participation in the use and management of natural resources (neo-populist/neo-Gandhian and communitarian). However, there is an important point of departure between the two. While new-institutionalists propose 'community based natural resource management' as the most efficient system of resource management, for neo-populists, efficiency is not the primary concern but people's right over the use of their local natural resources. To put it succinctly, the difference between the two is their focus on 'efficient management' and 'local control', respectively.

[11] PRA is a technique for shared learning between 'outsiders' (development practitioners, NGO workers or government officials) and local people. It basically involves enabling villagers to make their own appraisals and plans for development. The most influential work on participatory techniques in rural development is by Robert Chambers (1994a, b, c).

inequalities of opportunities, freedom and income in the process of development. The concern for inequality in participatory natural resource management projects only remains tangential given the short life period of projects.

'Participatory' approaches for natural resource use have been severely criticised by several scholars (e.g. Mosse 1995, 2003, 2005; Cleaver 1999; Chhotray 2004) because of the restricted or partial understanding of the notions of 'community', 'local knowledge' and 'participation'.[12] 'Community', in most of these approaches, is considered to be homogeneous, and various forms of differences and discriminations (based on gender, caste, wealth, etc.) are levelled out. Indigenous knowledge or 'local knowledge', it is argued, is often shaped by 'pre-existing patronage-type relationships between the project implementing agencies (PIAs) and the village residents' (Mosse, in Cooke and Kothari 2001: 32). Participation largely remains on paper because the PIAs generally do not have sufficient time, motivation and commitment to create an environment where the existing hierarchies of knowledge and power are eliminated to ensure 'participation' in a true sense.

2.3.1 'Participatory' Watershed Development

Undoubtedly, people's participation is crucial for effective implementation of development projects and their sustenance in the long run. However, there is ambiguity in defining the concept of 'participation', and it is also very difficult to measure 'participation' in quantitative terms, which is a pressing issue for project implementing agencies that are required to quantify participation in their project reports. Considerable intellectual energies have been invested in defining what participation is, why it is necessary for effective development, and how watershed programmes can be made more participatory (e.g. see Thakur and Pattnaik 2002; Shah 2000; Hinchcliffe et al 1998; Chakravarty 1999; Samara 1999). Amita Shah (2001), assessing the watershed projects of state agencies in Gujarat, notes that participatory tool like the PRA, group formation, and collection of token contribution from the watershed communities remain superficial. She observes that people generally tend to agree even to inequitable ideas of the project implementing agencies because nobody stands to lose out and a section of society is likely to derive substantial benefits in connivance with the officials.[13]

Anil Shah (1999) argues that government implementing agencies lack orientation about the principles of participation (involving villagers in decision making), which is the most important flaw in watershed development in India. Shah (ibid)

[12] For a comprehensive critique of participatory approaches, see Cooke and Kothari (eds.), 2001. For a critical appreciation of the notion of 'tyranny', see Williams (2004).

[13] The Sukhomajri experiment in Himalayan foothills stresses that the poor wanted the rich to be included in the programmes; otherwise, they feel that rich farmers will oppose it (Chopra et al. 1990).

suggests that government watershed initiatives as envisaged in the new guidelines[14] (discussed in detail in Chap. 3) are based on the experience of NGOs who have commitment and capacity for participatory development of local resources. However, it is too ambitious an attempt to translate the experiences of NGOs into a public programme managed by a bureaucracy that is not yet willing to share or devolve its power. Supporters of GO-NGO partnership (see Farrington and Bebbington 1993) suggest that in order to make watershed projects effective, people participation is crucial, and NGOs have a comparative advantage over state agencies to ensure people's participation: NGOs work more closely with people, and NGO workers are better trained as community organisers.

Different NGOs have different ideologies and priorities; it needs to be tested empirically what their notion of 'participation' is, and what strategies they adopt to make their programmes effective. Further, there are variations in the levels of participation from village to village (due to existing inequalities within communities), and disputes and conflicts for a variety of reasons over the issue of participation (e.g. in the membership and selection of user committees) even in the programmes implemented by the same organisation, about which we have very little empirical information.

The governmental watershed projects may not have fared well in terms of effective participation by people in decision making and managing project activities, but these 'participatory' projects change the way people see or look at the state (Corbridge et al 2005).[15] The project evaluation studies on watershed do not inform us what kinds of deliberative efforts are required to ensure participation and equity in watershed programmes, and if there are any possibilities of empowerment given the persistent inequalities in rural societies. In this book, I aim to explore the possibilities and nature of participation in three different institutional settings in the context of watershed programmes in Rajasthan.

Let me now turn to the next 'solution' or policy proposition of the mainstream approaches to natural resource management, i.e. building stocks of social capital for better developmental outcomes.[16]

[14] Recommended by Hanaumantha Rao Committee in 1995, and later modified in the 'Common Principles for Watershed Development' adopted by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Rural Development in 1999.

[15] These changes cannot be captured within the life period of a project (two or three years), and therefore watershed project evaluation studies (mentioned above) cannot shed much light on these subtle changes taking place in the 'field' or terrain of development.

[16] For the notion of 'social capital' and its linkages with better developmental outcomes, see Putnam (1993, 1995).

2.3.2 *'Social Capital': A Solution to Better Developmental Outcomes?*

More recently, besides 'participation', another set of ideas known as 'social capital' has become an integral part of the rural development strategies of the international development agencies, particularly the WB and USAID. The main thrust of 'social capital' (or the bonds of trust and reciprocity) approaches is to recognise the importance of social connections in achieving 'collective good' and to treat social relations as 'capital' which can be, created, invested, tapped or transferred (Mosse 2003: 275).[17] Proponents of 'social capital' maintain that by building 'stocks of social capital', people can *themselves* enhance their economic and social security (see Uphoff 2005). Further, it is argued that investments in social capital or 'friendship', generosity, trust and reciprocity, can increase water use efficiency and efficient watershed management (Chopra 2005). However, it remains unclear how these 'friendships' can be created in a highly unequal society.

Critics argue that 'social capital' is a clever idea that suits the interest of 'global capitalism', because it represents problems that are rooted in differences of power and in class relations as purely technical matters that can be resolved outside the political arena (Harriss 2002). They also suggest that this idea is used by the proponents of neo-liberalism to advance the agenda of replacement of government by 'civil society'. Note that 'social capital' is a way to bring in social relations and cultural forms, albeit in a flawed way, to supplement new-institutionalism, which had so far been totally economistic in thinking (Baumann and Sinha 2000; Fine 2000).[18]

It can be argued that poor developmental outcomes are a result of lack of social capital or relations of trust, but extending the same logic, it implies that poor people *themselves* are responsible for their miseries. The idea of 'social capital' as the missing link in development strategies negates the fact that reduction of social and economic disparities within a village community either requires political settlements like strengthening of rural local bodies such as PRIs or the continued presence of dedicated civil society actors committed to the ideology of social justice to ensure fair distribution of resources to the weaker sections.

[17] Mosse (2003: 17) describes Putnam's idea of social capital as a hybrid model emerging from 'rational choice' and 'moral economy' (following Scott 1976) schools. He remarks that despite deep-rooted differences between these two schools, they construct strikingly similar images of community, and indigenous collective action.

[18] Baumann and Sinha (2000) argue that power relations can be treated as 'political capital', which is an asset on which people draw (or cannot draw) to pursue a range of livelihood outcomes. For a comprehensive critique of 'social capital', see Fine (2000).

2.3.3 *'Active Social Capital' and Local Leadership*

Given that there are similar stocks of 'social capital', why do some villages perform better than others? Based on his empirical study in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh villages, Krishna (2002) problematises the concept of social capital and concludes that agents who *mediate* with the state agencies on behalf of villagers play a crucial role in securing better developmental outcomes in watershed development programmes in particular and other rural development programmes in general. Krishna (ibid: 11) states that 'younger and relatively better educated leaders have arisen mostly within the last twenty years, who have made careers out of understanding the procedures and practices of state agencies, and who mediate with these agencies on behalf of fellow villagers'. He further notes that the developmental ideology of the post-colonial state has percolated down and given rise to new political alignments at the grassroots and remarks that the young development-oriented-leaders in villages use political and bureaucratic exchanges to promote economic development for the village. The villagers accord status and respect to these new leaders only so long as the leaders can maintain a steady flow of economic benefits (Krishna 2002: 12). It is pertinent to note that these new leaders are different from traditional/old leaders in the villages, who were generally upper caste males. Krishna's contribution is path breaking in terms of expanding the canvas of the study of politics of rural development. He highlights the fact that effective collective action requires mediating agents, who can grab the opportunities given by state agencies for individual and collective benefits, but he fails to include in the picture several non-state actors like the NGOs, who play a vital role in the creation of not only these new leaders (or 'new political entrepreneurs' in Krishna's words) but also in facilitating the village based collective action.[19] Not much empirical data is available on the profile and motivation of new leaders or agents of development in the countryside, and I have made an attempt here to incorporate (to a limited extent) the role of new leaders in the context of governmental as well as non-governmental developmental interventions.

The role of these new leaders is important to understand the micro-politics of development and to explain why some villages achieve better developmental outcomes than others, when offered similar opportunities by any NGO or governmental agency. Many non-state actors, at times, see themselves contesting with the state agencies, while trying to fill in the gaps left by the state development machinery. Some of these NGOs demand the delivery of services by the state agencies, and others deliver services by mobilising funds and resources (mostly from international donors). Their justification for mustering funds is largely based on the shortcomings of the state agencies (e.g. widespread corruption and lack of participatory

[19] Krishna's notion of 'new political entrepreneurs' matches closely with Ostrom's (1990) notion of 'political entrepreneurs' that facilitate collective action and aim to gain directly in the process. However, and as I will demonstrate in the book, there is a whole range of other leaders (volunteers or activist of grassroots organisation) who play a crucial role in organising rural social groups but do not have any overt political ambitions.

decision making). These are some of the issues that I have discussed in detail in Chaps. 4 and 5 of the book. Below, I present a brief discussion on another characteristic feature of mainstream approaches to natural resource development, i.e. *forging* a partnership between the state and civil society organisations.

2.3.4 Multi-Agency Partnership in NRD

The last two decades have seen a mushrooming of non-governmental organisations in the North as well as South.[20] Following the neo-liberal orthodoxy of 'rolling back the state', a large amount of money was made available to NGOs of different sorts in the decades of 1980s and 1990s by the World Bank, international donors and development agencies. Currently, the mainstream international development policy is in favour of good governance and multi-agency (inter-sectoral) partnerships. The basic rationale for this thinking is that both state and non-state agencies have their own strengths and weaknesses, and attempts should be made to encourage 'synergy' across the public-private divide (following Evans 1996, and Ostrom 1996). Charting out the strengths and weaknesses of NGO and government implementing agencies in the context of watershed development, Farrington et al (1999) suggest that NGOs are strong in social mobilisation and participatory approaches, and they can establish closer and more equal relationships with people. However, they are weak in technical competence in watershed interventions. Government agencies, it is argued (Farrington et al 1999: 164), have strong technical competence and clear lines of accountability. But they are conceptually oriented to top-down approach, lack flexibility and are overloaded with numerous programmes. Farrington et al (ibid) suggest the desirability of building coalitions of NGOs and government agencies for watershed development activities.

However, as Carney and Farrington (1998) argue, multi-agency partnerships have proved to be quite challenging to implement in the natural resource sector because state agencies have a long history of working as the sole agencies in this area. Therefore, they suggest, government procedures for co-funding activities with NGOs must be made more flexible, and forums must be established to facilitate communication and collaborative activities between partners (ibid: 91). Nevertheless, this framework of 'productive synergies' underplays the conflicting and competing agendas of different partners. Also, historically, state agencies have been reluctant to hand power to NGOs and resent the fact that they are given credit for 'success' while the state is equated with 'failure'. In later chapters, I examine the experiments of multi-agency partnership and the relationship that NGOs share with foreign donors in the context of watershed initiatives in Rajasthan.

Many shortcomings of the mainstream approaches to understanding natural resource development in particular and rural development in general have been

[20] The number of development NGOs registered in the OECD countries grew from 1,600 in 1980 to 2,970 in 1993 (Edwards and Hulme 1995: 3).

addressed in a range of alternative theoretical traditions that treat relations of power and conflict as the focus of analysis. In the remainder of this chapter, I provide a critical appraisal of some of these ideas and theories to elucidate the perspective of this study.

2.4 Alternative Theoretical Traditions

Since the early 1970s, mainstream development discourse (which was predominantly based on the 'engineering paradigm' at that time) has come under heavy criticism from a range of ideas and theoretical propositions emerging from the 'post-modern' turn in social sciences, the rise of new social movements (including the feminist movement in the west) and a resurgence of populism in academic discourses.[21] 'Community', 'traditions' and local practices, which were earlier considered as obstacles to growth and modernisation, as a result of these critiques, now came to be regarded as central to development thinking. The focus of development discourse by the early 1980s shifted from big to small, 'national' to 'local', modern technology to 'appropriate technology' and 'community development' to people's participation. Apart from the critiques of modernity, and a resurgence of faith in 'community', feminist and Marxist critiques of issues related to environment and development further undermined the mainstream development approaches for perpetuating income and gender-based inequalities in the process of development and growth.

More recently (in the early 1990s), the Foucauldian turn in development literature gave rise to a flurry of writings that attempted to incorporate his notion of power and his methodology of discourse analysis to understand and explain the process of international development (following Ferguson 1990). Authors like Escobar (1995) and Sachs (1992) see development as a powerful discourse to control and discipline the populations of developing countries. Foucauldian critique meshed with the communitarian, anti-modern and 'new social movement' critiques in the decades of 1980s and 1990s, and consolidated into the position called 'post-development'. Currently, post-development is the most prominent alternative theoretical tradition to the mainstream, to understand, explain and analyse development processes: its most important contribution is to highlight the existing hierarchies of knowledge and power and to challenge the mainstream development agenda for negating the issues of power and politics in development discourse and practice. In

[21] Most influential works include Schumacher's (1973) *Small is beautiful* (his notion of 'appropriate technology') and Lipton's (1977) *Why poor people stay poor: a study of urban bias in world development*. Another important work, which brought normative roots of peasant politics as the centre of study, is James Scott's (1976) *The Moral Economy of the Peasants.* 'Moral economy', according to Scott (ibid: 3) is peasants' notion of economic justice and *their* working definition of exploitation. In India, grassroots movements for local control of natural resources led by neo-Gandhians in different parts of the country (e.g. *Chipko* movement in Uttaranchal) played a key role in the resurgence of agrarian populism.

the rest of this chapter, I provide a critical appreciation of various alternative theoretical positions on issues related to control and access to natural resources.[22] In this literature review, I also identify the themes pertinent to my case studies in the chapters to follow.

2.4.1 'New-Traditionalism': Celebration of 'Traditions' and 'Community'

Neo-populist (communitarian) or "new-traditionalist" discourse (Sinha et al 1998) on environment and development in the context of India presents the pre-colonial past as a time when natural resources were managed by village communities on a sustainable basis. The interference of the colonial and post-colonial state, especially in controlling natural resources, is seen as the main cause of the decline of traditional institutions for the management of water, forests and common pastures. Neo-populist discourse is anti-modern in its tone and celebrates 'traditional practices' and 'local knowledge'. Post-colonial development policies are often criticised for alienating people from their local resources and for destroying local institutions and 'community-feeling'. I suggest that these claims are not false, but true only in a particular way, and cannot be generalised for all communities or societies. Presented below is a critical appreciation of some prominent anti-modern, neo-populist and communitarian ideas and propositions.

A prominent anti-modernist (and eco-feminist) thinker, Vandana Shiva (who is also closely associated with TBS, one of my case studies in this book) argues that the 'western' agenda of development has 'stripped nature of her creative power' and transformed it into 'dead and manipulable matter' (Shiva 1992: 206). 'Resource', suggests Shiva, originally implied life: nature's power of self-regeneration. The rise of industrialism and colonialism commoditised 'natural resources' as they merely become those parts of nature that were required as inputs for industrial production and colonial trade through the use of human skills and technology (ibid). Shiva maintains that the Western worldview, based on modern science, is responsible for the 'desacralisation' of nature (this argument is often taken by neo-traditionalist social activists and NGOs to obtain a high moral ground for their cause of environmental protection, as we shall see later in this book while discussing TBS).

However, in putting forward their arguments 'new-traditionalists' end up in futile 'romanticisation' of pre-modern times. For Shiva (ibid), the local communities are innocent; with limited needs, and respect for nature. I do not suggest that these descriptions of pre-colonial life by anti-modern thinkers are not true, but it does not make sense to return to this era due to changes in the wider political economy. It is

[22] Note that watershed development projects are not simply restricted to issues related to management of natural resources, but these projects are also one of the largest rural development projects in the rain-fed areas of India, and thus important determinants of the politics of development in the countryside.

evident that rampant industrialisation in modern times has put a strain on natural resources, but this current pressure is also due to the increase in the number of people who are dependent on them. Furthermore, 'new-traditionalist' accounts do not appreciate the conflicts within pre-modern communities and the role of power in accessing nature in pre-modern times.

On watershed projects, several eco-feminists (like Shiva) argue that women must be encouraged to participate in these projects because they have a natural inclination for nature conservation. They emphasise women's role primarily as conservationists. Other feminist environmentalists such as Jackson (1993) argue that women's participation in the projects is necessary in order to ameliorate their position in highly patriarchal rural societies. Commenting on gender and the development interface in watershed project villages, where the majority of agricultural activities are for subsistence, Shah (2000) suggests that it is more realistic to focus first on the livelihood enhancement, which in turn may involve a special role for women and preferential attention to women's needs such as better availability of fuel-wood and fodder. She maintains that unless environmental programmes directly address the issues concerning a household's livelihood, women are not likely to play an effective role in developmental or conservation projects. This line of thinking rejects the sole focus on 'conservation' and placing women at the centre of nature conservation programmes. Instead it suggests that the key issue for the majority of women in villages in rain-fed areas is wage employment, which is quite a different matter from environmental concerns (Shah 2000: 90). I have kept these various viewpoints on gender and development in mind while analysing my case studies later in this book.

In some recent ethnographic accounts and oral histories on village commons (e.g. Gold and Gujar 2002), people's shared sense of *zimmedari* (literally, moral responsibility) is accounted for by the successful preservation of commons during feudal times in Rajasthan (which ended with the independence of India in 1947) in spite of widespread poverty, indebtedness and exploitation. This point is particularly important to comprehend and analyse the water conservation initiatives of organisations like the TBS (discussed in Chap. 5) which equate 'traditional' and past with harmony and abundance, in the context of water resources and forests. Many grassroots organisations working in the field of natural resource development aim to revive the lost 'community-feeling' and a sense of 'moral responsibility'. How they do it, and with what success, is one of my concerns in this book.

2.4.2 'Traditional Wisdom' and 'Indigenous Technology'

During the past two decades, a powerful narrative of the decline of traditional water harvesting systems based on indigenous knowledge and technology has taken roots in development discourse (see Agarwal and Narayan 1997). This narrative suggests that it is crucial to revive the *traditional* water harvesting systems to meet the requirements of sustainable development for future and that rise of modern Indian

state is responsible for the decline of traditional institutions for the management of common resources (Mosse 2003: 10). In much of the neo-populist discourse, technological change in agriculture is also seen as something that is detrimental to 'community-feeling' and ultimately negative for traditional institutions and practices. Appadurai (1990) argues that technological changes (such as the introduction of electrified tube-wells) as well as commercialisation of agriculture have led to individualism and breaking down of community ties. Appadurai (ibid: 185) opposes any 'technical calculus of welfare which operates on criteria that are external to the moral or cultural values of the community'. It is true that commercialisation of agriculture places the poorer farmers at risk, but this proposition neglects the possibility that modern or 'alien' (western) technology can be constructively used by these farmers in order to reduce the risks in a highly monetised world. High-yield varieties of seeds, e.g. can boost the productivity of small farmers.

Not only are the boundaries between the 'traditional' and 'modern' more fuzzy than understood by the critiques of modern science, 'anti-modern' discourses also fail to take into account the ever changing nature of the 'traditional' itself. Both new-institutional and new-traditional schools ultimately construct the same image of 'community' and indigenous collective action, albeit with different intentions (Mosse 2003). While instrumental rationality is the driving force for the rational choice school, communitarians or neo-populists are motivated by local control of resources. However, both see community as a homogeneous entity opposed to a centralised state. I will demonstrate later in the book that several grassroots organisations while using the so-called 'modern' technology (e.g. concrete anicuts for rainwater harvesting) publicise their activities as a revival of 'traditional' systems for creating a niche for themselves in the watershed development regime.

More recently, and as I have argued above in this chapter, the Foucauldian turn in development literature in the early 1990s, radically shifted the tone and tenor of debates on development (from alternative development to 'alternative to development'). Authors inspired by Foucault see development as a powerful discourse with normalising tendencies, and development apparatus (or *dispositif*) as an 'anti-politics' machine. In the rest of this chapter, I critically appreciate the arguments of some key authors of the 'post-development' school.

2.5 Post-development: The End of Development?

In his editorial introduction to 'The Development Dictionary', a pioneering collection of 'post' and anti-modern writings, Wolfgang Sachs (1992: 1) declares the demise of development. He observed that 'delusion, disappointments, failures and crimes' that have accompanied development since its inception soon after the Second World War indicate that development 'did not work' (ibid). It is suggested that grassroots movements are novel forms of collective action that imagine beyond or *against* development. I argue that this view of development as a destructive force, and grassroots movements (which are often equated with 'local' in

post-development theories) as lying outside development's colonising domain, is *simplistic*. Challenging the binary opposition between the 'local' and the 'global' in the context of Chipko movement (a grassroots movement for forest protection in Uttaranchal in India), Sinha (2003: 288) suggests that the 'local is not a space of splendid isolation but a product of specific articulations'. He (ibid: 307) notes that new social movements operate within the parameters of the development project, and the opposition offered by Chipko movement is targeted towards the non-fulfilment of state objectives of development and not the objectives of development themselves. This point will become clear when I discuss non-state interventions for watershed development later in this book.

Several other scholars have questioned the tendency of post-development thinkers to view development as westernisation or destruction of local cultures. Ziai (2004) suggests that the power of development discourse is only seen as disciplinary conditioning in post-development arguments and it leaves little or no room for autonomous actions of individual actors in the developing countries. They are depicted merely as 'victims of development' (Esteva 1991), which is a passive representation of the negotiating capacities of a variety of actors. Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal (2003) maintain that there is a common denominator in the works of post-development thinkers like Escobar (1995), Esteva and Prakash (1998) and Sachs (1992): they see the origin of development in global North and fail to appreciate that there are multiple sources of development ideas and 'polyvocal and polylocal' nature of development performances.

2.5.1 The Power of Discourse and 'Depoliticisation' of Development

In empirical situations, how the discourse of development promotes certain interventions with real consequences is aptly demonstrated by Ferguson (1990) in his anthropological study of a rural development project in Lesotho in particular, and of the 'development industry' in general. Ferguson (ibid) highlights the complex relationship between 'the intentionality of the planning and the strategic intelligibility of outcomes'. He suggests that intentional plans are important but not in the way they are imagined by the planners (ibid: 20). The main instrumental effect of development projects is the formation of the "anti-politics" machine (ibid: 256). Failed development projects are replicated again and again because they serve an important strategic purpose: the suspension of politics and the expansion of bureaucratic power, argues Ferguson (ibid).

Ferguson's 'depoliticisation' thesis is quite significant because it suggests that development projects perpetuate a certain kind of discourse, and their outcomes are very often different from those initially planned. These unintended outcomes nevertheless serve some strategic purposes like expansion of bureaucratic power and repudiation of certain political struggles. However, Ferguson has presumed that

expansion of bureaucratic power is necessarily and invariably harmful for poor, who would have been better off in its absence. Ferguson has demonstrated in detail the process of expansion of bureaucratic power through the agricultural and livestock development project in Lesotho, but has not aptly shown how the development project is ultimately harmful for the poor people of that region. Later in the book, I will illustrate the process of bureaucratisation in the context of watershed interventions and evaluate whether the spread of bureaucracy is necessarily detrimental for the poor.

The circumstances producing the 'anti-politics' machine in India are noticeably different from those that Ferguson encountered in Lesotho. In India, as Chhotray (2007: 1040) notes that a discourse of depoliticisation has accompanied development planning from the start, and the more interesting question is to examine *how* depoliticisation continues to work as a discourse. From the study of state-led watershed projects in Andhra Pradesh, Chhotray argues that depoliticisation of development in India does not occur in an uncomplicated sense and that the debate over local institutions is greatly coloured by the interests of key actors responsible for programme implementation (ibid: 1051).[23] I aim to explore this issue further in the context of Rajasthan where I also take into account the roles and agendas of a range of non-state actors over a larger span of time.

Recent works on 'post-development' such as that of Brigg (2002) and Kamat (2002) indicates that it is more useful to address the shortcomings of post-development than to dismiss its potential. Brigg (2002) argues that an in-depth understanding of Foucault's notion of power can help us comprehend the operation of power in international development projects sponsored by agencies such as the World Bank.[24] In the context of the developmental interventions of NGOs and civil society actors in India, Kamat (2002), using a neo-Gramscian framework, suggests that grassroots organisations reproduce the development hegemony of the state, and thus lack autonomy from the state.[25] By disciplining individuals in the 'fetishisation of modern technology' (through the use of fertilisers, hybrid cows, cattle feed) and bourgeois values (such as a respect for the law of the land), Kamat (ibid: 162) argues that NGOs help to stabilise the liberal democratic capitalist order. Through

[23] Chhotray (2007: 1053) argues that depoliticisation in watershed projects involves the prevalence of 'technocratic strategies' to curtail the use of project spaces for subaltern politics. She rightly notes that 'it is useful to remember that the eventual success of pro-poor policies must be considered not only over a single project cycle, nor even a single generation, but over several generations.'

[24] Brigg (2002: 423) writes that 'Foucault draws a heuristic distinction between sovereign power and a new form of power, which he terms 'bio-power'. The former which is associated with the reign of the king or monarch (and in our times with the judiciary and the rule of law), operates by 'deduction', by taking away and appropriation, by 'seizure: of things, time, bodies and ultimately life itself' (Foucault: 1981: 136). […] Bio-power is 'a power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impending them, making them submit, or destroying them' (ibid).

[25] Implicit within her argument is that the 'social class which is active at the grassroots is not the same as the social class which is active at the state policy and planning; nevertheless, they constitute a relatively unified social bloc in the reproduction of dominant ideologies' (Kamat 2002: 3).

development apparatus, indirect colonisation comes to replace direct colonisation and the discourse of depoliticisation prevails (ibid).

Along the same lines, but in the context of a governmental watershed project, Baviskar (2007) demonstrates how a development project 'scripts its own success'. Writing about the Rajiv Gandhi Mission for Watershed Management, a government programme in Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh, Baviskar (ibid) tries to delineate 'how state hegemony emerges as an unauthored process that includes the reproduction and reinvention of government, and non-government institutions, including the academy'.[26] I test the claims regarding the operation of power in development interventions (Brigg 2002), 'indirect colonisation' (Kamat 2002) and production of 'success story' (Baviskar 2007) in the context of watershed projects of the DWD&SC, TBS and GVM.

2.5.2 Development as Arena of Contest and Negotiation

Interestingly, other approaches drawing on Foucault and Gramsci read the power of development in a more open-ended and indeterminate way. Roseberry's (1994) reading of 'hegemony process' insists that 'hegemony' is not a stable situation as described by Kamat, but it is always a claim to leadership and power, an 'incomplete, negotiated and contested claim at best' (Gupta and Sinha 2008). Similarly, Li (1999: 297) suggests that 'development programmes may become a politically charged arena in which relations of rule are reworked and reassessed'. Development, argues Li (1999), does not simply involve resistance on the part of its 'targets', but also negotiation and collaboration. Salskov-Iversen et al (2000) acknowledge the power of 'trans-national' discourses, but insist that the 'local' as a site, at which the power of these discourses get actualised is neither inert nor a blank slate.

Likewise, Moore (1999) highlights the *micro-politics* of agrarian struggle and suggests that development is a site of contestation, where history is shaped by heterogeneous groups struggling for their livelihood. Rather than rejecting "development", argues Moore (ibid), competing groups invoke the same vocabulary of progress and development to make claims upon the state, and at times challenge the state through acts of resistance.[27] This is very much evident in the case of TBS (discussed in Chap. 5 of the book).

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[26] Baviskar (2007) describes the way in which the state in Madhya Pradesh reinvents itself as social movement to gain legitimacy for its acts of subversion and projects an environment-friendly image of the government in front of donor agencies and metropolitan audience. She claims that watershed mission is an avenue for senior bureaucrats to rise to prominence and accuses the metropolitan NGOs like the CSE to collaborate with the chief minister of MP in constructing 'environmental utopias'. She maintains that the need to show 'success' and offer prescriptions 'is a pressure often felt by NGOs whose funding is linked to their ability to produce narratives of progress'.

[27] Further, we need to remember that within Foucault's own writing, systems of power/knowledge are not abstract and all-encompassing, but 'grounded and evolving, thus providing space within themselves for alternative discourses and knowledge to emerge' (Williams 2004: 566).

Recent anthropological studies of development have consistently shown that so-called project beneficiaries and marginalised groups resort to a 'multiplicity of strategies and forms of negotiation or resistance' in order to maximise their gains from a development project (Rossi 2004: 4; also see Long 1989; Grillo and Stirrat 1997). Challenging the theoretical framework taken by Ferguson (1990), which is laden with discursive determinism, and which negates any active role for human agency, Rossi (ibid) argues that actors, particularly 'recipients' have a room for manoeuvre in development projects. Accepting that development is a powerful discourse, Rossi (ibid: 22) maintains that 'Foucault's theory of power does not always provide a satisfactory answer for two orders of questions that are central to the field of development: the relationship between different categories of actors and a particular kind of discourse; and the strategies and negotiations for the control of discourses as practised by differently positioned groups'. In line with Rossi (ibid), I have made an attempt to analyse the interplay between the various elements of the watershed development regime in the context of Rajasthan *and* their relationship with differently positioned rural social groups and communities.

2.6 Conclusion

I contend that the common resources of a village community are developed and used within an institutional setting that is quite multifarious and complex. The 'rules of the game' or management of resources is not mediated and governed by the individuals of a community in isolation with the state agents or NGOs, traditional cultural practices (e.g. 'sacred groves', rituals, and caste-based discriminations on water use from wells), the political institutions like the village rural local bodies, and international development and donor agencies. These multiple agents, and wider social and political institutions and practices, determine the 'rules of the game' in village communities, in the context of watershed development. The final say on the management of resources and 'setting up' of institutions is characterised by *who* is bringing money and resources for development. The ministries of agriculture and rural development of central government outline the watershed development policies and guidelines, but they are implemented by the provincial governments and in some cases by the district level governments. A major part of funds for watershed development comes from the central government departments. Most of the big NGOs involved in watershed development in Rajasthan receive their funds from international donors. International development agencies and donors also provide funds to central and state governments for watershed programmes, and thus play a crucial role in determining the various project activities and priorities, and undertake training programmes for state actors.

NGOs of various kinds have different modes of functioning depending upon their specific ideologies and commitments. This is very important in not only shaping the 'rules of the game' but also in the distribution of resources and benefits, management and development of resources in a sustainable manner, kind of

technology, and knowledge for resource development. Besides, the rural local bodies or the *panchayats* play an influential role in watershed development activities. As such, the institutions created for the development and management of resources cannot function in isolation with these formally elected political institutions. Furthermore, various research institutes, academics and consultants help in shaping and reshaping the dominant development discourse. Apart from this ensemble of agents, the social relationships between the residents of a particular village or cluster of villages, also determine the distribution of resources. Asymmetrical power relations within a village community influence the access to resources and distribution of benefits. Ultimately, these multiple players, overlapping institutions and the processes of negotiations, competition, conflict and cooperation between them shape and reshape the politics of development in rural areas.

The discussion presented in Sect. 2.2 above opens up many new questions and issues for investigation to comprehend the nature and power of contemporary watershed development regime. First, the representation of the power of discourse of development in post-development literature takes us well beyond the rather naïve celebration of 'civil society' in the mainstream development literature. The more deterministic Foucauldian and Gramscian positions motivate us to ask whether, through what modes and to what success, dominant development agencies and ideas use institutions of civil society as terrains for the disciplinary deployment of power. The more fluid view of hegemonic power prompts us to investigate the modes through which institutions and agents maintain autonomy, and succeed in altering the dominant agendas of development (Gupta and Sinha 2008). It also helps us to analyse the processes of cooperation, competition, negotiation and contestation between the various agents and recipients of 'development'. How do different ideologies (e.g. Gandhian, socialist or altruistic) influence the action of different development agents? How are the issues of gender and equality in watershed projects dealt with by different kinds of development agents? Furthermore, how do different agents receive, appropriate and amend the mainstream ideas of development?

Second, on the basis of empirical evidence, we need to establish how (and with what implications) the binary oppositions between the 'global' and the 'local'; 'state' and 'community'; or 'traditional' and 'modern' are reproduced in the narratives of grassroots organisations as well as the official development accounts. Third, in order to understand the politics of development in rural Rajasthan, the 'depoliticisation' thesis needs to be examined not just in the case of government projects but also in the case of NGO programmes. We need to find out if the expansion of bureaucratic power necessarily negates politics in all situations. Do all state interventions for rural development reinforce existing relations of power? What is the emancipatory potential of participatory watershed projects? How do the activist NGOs and other non-governmental development actors influence the government policies, and thus 'politicise' the arena of development? What new political possibilities do they open up? These are some of the questions, which I explore in the rest of the book.

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Chapter 3
Rajasthan: The Land of *Rajas* (Kings) and Droughts

Development interventions, as Salskov-Iversen et al. (2000) have pointed out, do not happen on a blank slate: the site on which they are implemented is one that is already constituted by historical processes. While being wary of historical determinism, in this chapter I provide historical context and analysis of agrarian relations relevant to understanding contemporary watershed development interventions. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part provides a brief sketch of the land tenure system and agrarian relations in feudal/colonial times, the impact of land reforms in post-colonial period, changing patterns of rural leadership and social mobility and the emergence of civil society actors in Rajasthan. The second part presents a discussion on the significant changes taking place in the agricultural development, village common resources and their governance in the colonial and post-colonial periods, limits to agricultural productivity and the growing importance of seasonal migration in Rajasthan.

3.1 Historical Context

Rajasthan, the desert state in the northwest of India, is the largest state in the country in terms of geographical area. Of the 34 million hectare land area of Rajasthan, 13.3 million hectares is under cultivation. Only 3.3 million hectares is irrigated, of which two thirds is irrigated by open dug wells and tube wells that in turn are dependent on rainfall for recharge (GoR 2002). The rest of agriculture (more than 70 %) is entirely dependent on rainfall. The total population of the state is over 56 million, and more than 70 % of the population earn their livelihoods from agriculture and the allied sector (ibid). The relief features of the state are marked by the Aravalli Range, which runs across from northeast to southwest for nearly 692 km (Sharma and Bharadwaj 1993). One of the oldest mountain ranges in the world, it has passed through several cycles of erosion. The area lying west of the Aravallis is covered by vast stretches of sand known as Thar. The area east of the Aravallis comprises

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semi-arid regions merging with the eastern plain (the Banas Basin) and the south-eastern *Pathar,* which include the Vindhyan scrap land and the Deccan Plateau (ibid). Rainfall is highly erratic in this part of the country, and it is exceedingly susceptible to recurrent droughts. Over the centuries, the inhabitants have devised several mechanisms to tackle this problem of water scarcity for survival, and feudal/colonial as well as post-colonial states have tried to address the problems related to dry land agriculture with different motives, methods, resources and power.

3.1.1 The Feudal Regime and Peasantry

Rajasthan was formed as a state of the Union of India in March 1949, by a merger of 19 princely states (headed by various *Rajas* and *Maharajas*), chieftainships and territories (Ajmer-Merwara) under direct control of the British (GoR 2002). The region was known as *Rajputana* (or the land of kings and warriors) during the British rule in India. The process of merger and administrative reorganisation continued until 1956, when the state took its present shape as per the recommendations made by the States Reorganisation Commission of India. The system of land titles and revenue varied from one princely state to another. Besides the highly exploitative nature of the system of taxation and revenue, there were some common features in terms of revenue administration across the princely states. The land under the direct control of *Rajas* or *Maharajas* was called *khalsa,* and the other lands were divided, both in terms of ownership and revenue rights, across the *Thikanedars* and *Jagirdars* (or chieftains). The number of *khalsa* villages was 16573 and that of non-khalsa (mainly under the control of *Jagirdars*) ones 18075 at the time of formation of Rajasthan (Kamal 1984).

There were several levels of chieftains, each with a well-defined place in the royal court or *durbar* and role in the governance systems. *Jagirdars* were required to collect revenue within their estates (*Jagirs*) from cultivators, traders and craftsmen and were responsible for the maintenance of law and order (Ballabh 2004). The annual levies or *nazrana* to be paid by *Jagirdars* to the princely states was calculated on the basis of cultivable lands only, and village commons (pastures, 'wasteland' or uncultivable land, community forests, village ponds, watershed drainages, river beds, etc.) were not part of these levies. Any revenue generated from village commons was kept exclusively by the local *Jagirdars*, who were also under obligation to provide men and material during war and certain court services in peacetime in return for the Maharaja's confirmation of their estates (Kamal 1984). Within the Rajput order, marked differences of wealth, power and status existed among the various ranks of the nobility and within the families associated with particular *jagirs* (Rudolph and Rudoph 1984). *Jagirs* varied in extent from large areas approximating those of minor princely states, capable of supporting their own army battalions, to small farms on which the Rajput head of the household tilled the land (ibid).

The Maharaja was the source of power that the *Jagirdars* enjoyed although they – as vassals with their roots deep in soil and in command of the vast authority –

acted like local powerful clan magnates. While acting under the patronage of the royal court or *durbar*, the *Jagirdars* enjoyed the status of 'patrons' of the populations under their jurisdiction. They were addressed by the local population as *hokum* (or one with the authority to rule), *mai-baap* (parent or the overlord) or *annadaata* (provider of food and shelter).

By the middle of the nineteenth century, most of the princely states had accepted British supremacy.[1] Most rulers of former princely states used to pay tribute to the Treasury at Delhi as they entered into treaty agreements with the British Government. Thus, prior to the formation of Rajasthan, it is argued that the peasantry was subjected to 'triple slavery' – that of *Jagirdar*, Maharaja and the British (Shrimal 1984). At village level the peasants were subject to indebtedness due to the money-grabbing tactics of the professional moneylenders. The Imperial Gazetteer of India–Rajputana (1908: 44) describes the pathetic condition of cultivators in the following words:

> The cultivators are generally in debt and many of them are heavily involved. This state of affairs is due partly to their own extravagance and imprudence or to debts they have inherited, partly to bad seasons, and partly to the grasping methods of the *bohra* or professional money-lender. In several states the majority of the cultivators are entirely in the hands of their *bohras* and depend on them for everything. The rate of interest varies from 18 to 36 percent yearly; and the profits of the money lender are swelled by charging compound interest.

Rajasthan has a history of agrarian movements and protests against harsh taxation systems in the first half of the twentieth century.[2] In recent times peasant protests can be traced to peasants mostly from the *thikana* areas bringing petitions to the *durbar* against the economic coercion by *Thikanedars*, especially on the issues related to village commons. In a petition by cultivators to the *Maharaja* of Marwar state in 1932, it was stated (quoted in Singh 1998: 127),

> From time immemorial the *kisans* have been paying *hasil* (rent) in kind which included only part of grain. Now, the *thikana* insists on realising both grain and fodder as part of *hasil.* In addition, it demands payment in lieu of the grass which we gather by weeding the fields. Formerly, the rent for maize and carrot crops was realised in cash. Now the *thikana* demands the rent in kind. Consequently, the peasants have stopped growing these crops. The *thikanedar* does not allow us to graze our cattle even on the lands attached to our ancestral wells. There is no other land where we can take our cattle for grazing. As a result, even in the rainy season, we have to feed our cattle on dry fodder. If anyone resists any of the demands made by the *thikana*, he is assaulted, wrongly confined and maltreated in various ways.

In another petition (ibid: 128), it was complained that

> For generations the *kisans* have been in possession of certain wells attached to their agricultural holdings for which they had been paying Rs 40 per well as rent to *thikanedar*. Now the *thikana* has begun to demand Rs 60 per well. These wells have been sunk by our ancestors,

[1] For a detailed and comprehensive account of the treaties and alliances between the British and princely states of Rajputana, see Tod (1914) and Ojha (1937).

[2] For a detailed account on peasant movements in various princely states of Rajputana, see Pande (1974).

and we have been meeting the costs for their repair. There is, therefore, no justification for the *thikana* to demand a higher payment for the wells.

The 'peasantry' itself was segregated into various caste groups. The main bulk of the peasantry, the 'principal agriculturalist castes', consisted of Jats, Dhakads, Dangis, Sirvis, Malis and Bishnois, of whom the Jats were the most prominent and economically prosperous. It was by and large the Jat peasantry that played a leading role in the peasant movements in Rajasthan to secure its interests by establishing counter hegemony in the countryside against the militarily dominant Rajputs. In addition, some of the 'tribal' groups, such as Meenas, Bhils and Girasiyas, that were concentrated mainly in the hilly and forest tracts also practised agriculture, but former untouchable castes or the 'scheduled castes' did not rely on agriculture as the main source of livelihood, and their land holdings, if they had any at all, were quite small (Singh 1998: 136). Each caste had its *jati panchayat* (caste assembly) which arbitrated in the economic, political and cultural disputes within the caste group and represented the caste in external disputes. These *jati panchayats* provided a ready-made channel of communication and organisation for articulating the interests of caste groups.

Historical accounts show that the peasants were making not only economic but also political demands. They were agitating, especially during the decades of the 1920s and 1930s, against the autocratic and despotic form of governments in the princely states. The concentration of too much power in the hands of *jagirs* or *thikanas* and the *durbar* was often contrasted with the relative powerlessness of *kisans* and the other classes (Singh 1998). Peasant protests in Rajasthan ranged from organised violence, generally in the form of spontaneous direct action, to non-violent passive resistance. The doctrine of non-violence penetrated and took control of the peasant movements in Rajasthan at a relatively later stage because the peasant uprisings here, like in many other parts of India, started before the Congress appeared on the rural scene (in late 1920s) to take up their cause. Local idioms of protest preceded the nationalist movements and persisted even after they were incorporated within the nationalist movements. The outside leadership of the peasant movements (e.g. Bijolia movement, 1917–1922) in Rajasthan in the early stages was not Gandhian but left wing and radical in orientation, and it tactically combined non-violence with cautious violence especially to counter the hostility of the *Thikanedars* (Singh 1998: 148).

By the late 1920s, however, the Indian National Congress had succeeded in marginalising the leftist leadership, and by the mid-1930s, it had entrenched itself fully in the peasant movements in Rajasthan. Besides bringing in the ideology of non-violence, Congress leadership in Rajputana largely supported the movements led by rich and middle peasantry in their struggles for land and political power. However, it failed to unite the rich and middle peasantry with poor peasants, landless labourers and tribal peasantry (Singh 1998).

Interestingly, many Rajput dynasties tried to forge political alliances with the tribal chiefs, the anterior rulers of their territories. The rituals in the coronation ceremonies of princes of Udaipur and Jaipur were performed not by *Brahmin* priests

but by a representative of the tribes (Bhil or Meena). Originally, this practice must have been a diplomatic symbol of political alliance between the conquerors and the vanquished (Narian and Mathur 1990: 34). The fact remains that this custom was maintained over a period of 1,000 years, which elevated the ritual status of the tribal population in these princely states. Thus, Meenas of Jaipur and Bhils of Udaipur enjoy a much higher *social* status when compared to tribal communities in other parts of India. The depth of this bond between the rulers and their tribal subjects was vividly demonstrated in the parliamentary and state assembly elections held in 1952, where the ex-rulers and the members of their family were able to leave the Congress party virtually voteless in villages with sizeable tribal population (ibid). It was mainly the landed aristocracy in Rajasthan which resisted the land reform programme initiated by the Congress party which came to power in the newly formed state.

3.1.2 The Impact of Land Reforms

After independence, and creation of Rajasthan, the state legislative assembly passed the Rajasthan Land Reforms and Resumption of Jagirs Act in 1952. The tenants of all the *Jagirdars* were conferred heritable and transferable rights. They were declared *Khatedar* (account holders) tenants and were brought into direct relationship with the new (democratic) state. This was followed by a series of legislations regarding tenancy, agriculture and irrigation.[3] Traditionally, the caste system in Rajasthan has remained highly exploitative (as in other parts of India) with the hegemony of upper castes and some dominant (primarily agriculturalist) middle castes (or the 'Other Backward Castes'), such as the Jats and Gujars.[4] Land reforms and redistributions in Rajasthan changed the profile of rural communities to a large extent, but these reforms remained far from being egalitarian. In the late 1970s, the bottom 25 % of rural households possessed barely 2 % of the total land, and the top 25 % possessed almost 70 % of the total land (Pande 1984). Land reforms were thwarted mainly by the powerful lobby of big agriculturalists (Jats and Rajputs) that constituted the single-largest group among the legislators of all the political parties in Rajasthan during the first three decades after independence (Kamal 1984: 17).

[3] For instance, the Rajasthan Agricultural Land Utilisation Act 1954, Rajasthan Irrigation and Drainage Act 1954, Rajasthan Tenancy Act 1955, Rajasthan Agricultural Produce Market Act 1961, Rajasthan Agricultural Credit (Stabilisation) Fund Rules, 1966.

[4] Broadly speaking, the so-called upper castes constitute almost 20 % of the total population of Rajasthan (Brahmins 7 %, Rajputs 7 % and Vaishyas 6 %). Middle castes or the 'other backward castes' constitute 42 % of the population (Jats 10 %, Gujar + Yadav 10 % and other OBCs 22 %). Scheduled castes consist of 16 % of the total population and scheduled tribes 13 % (Meenas 8 %, Bhils 2 % and other STs 3 %) (Lodha 2004). After independence, the Government of India made legislations for the abolition of practice of 'untouchability', and seats were reserved for the members of former untouchable or scheduled castes and tribes in legislative assemblies, parliament and government jobs.

As in other parts of the country, land reforms in Rajasthan were initiated to fulfil two primary objectives. The first was to eliminate highly unequal access to land, and the second was to remove uncertainty among the small landholders and tenants so that they may also contribute to agricultural growth and enhance their incomes. However, in the case of Rajasthan, there was another more fundamental aspect of land reforms: the need to break the stranglehold of the feudal landlords in the countryside (Vyas and Sagar 1995). The changes in the ownership pattern of landholdings between 1960 and 1982 suggest that the number as well as area under very large holdings (above 20 ha) have significantly declined. These holdings accounted for approximately 3.6 % of the total holdings in 1961–1962 but came down to 1.4 % by 1982. The same is true for the large holdings of between 10 and 20 ha. It is clear that the hegemony of the large and very large farmers has considerably weakened (ibid: 40). Nevertheless, the exercise of confiscating the land above a certain ceiling and distributing it among the landless or the near-landless did not prove to be quite fruitful. The land declared surplus was much less than what was estimated, the land resumed was less than that declared surplus and very little of the distributed land was put to productive use by the intended beneficiaries because of the poor quality of such lands and paucity of funds with the cultivators to develop those. Broadly speaking, the big landlords have been successful in utilising the legal loopholes to their advantage and have frustrated the objectives of the land ceiling law by retaining their surplus land wherever possible (Iyer 1995: 163).

However, it is also true that some families from among the landed aristocracy could not face the challenges of the abolition of the feudal system and therefore came down in the class hierarchy (Sharma 1973). This created 'status dissimilarities' among the families of the same caste (Sharma 1974: 206). Within the caste, the status of different families came to be determined by their achievements in occupational, economic, educational and political fields. The role of ascription started to become less determining in status evaluation when there was homogeneity of ascriptive rank in terms of family background and landed property. Sharma (ibid) argues that the ex-Zamindars (or landlords) who own big landholdings even today are influential but those who do not retain it are not only less influential but have also slid down the scale of status hierarchy. The families most affected by this belong to the Rajputs, Jats, Charans and Brahmins (all traditionally powerful caste groups). The main beneficiaries were some of the ex-tenant-peasants (belonging to the middle peasantry) and the other functionaries of the *Jagirdars* who manipulated the transfer of big landholdings to their name during the time of the abolition (ibid).

Unlike the rich and middle peasantry, the rural poor in Rajasthan were neither articulate nor sufficiently organised to exercise influence on the land reform policy and programme in their favour (Swaminathan and Chaudhary 1995: 283). Badly maintained land records are responsible for many of the daily problems that poor peasants face. Land records are often incomplete and wrongly filled (ibid). Encroachments and allotment of common lands are, reportedly, statewide problems (Rathore 2007; Joshi 2007). It is a normal and easy method of acquiring and encroaching public lands through bribing revenue officials, and generally, it is the more powerful village residents (economically well off or politically well connected)

who are able to encroach public lands – pastures, forests or wastelands (Swaminathan and Chaudhary 1995).

According to the latest statistics compiled by the Agriculture Department in the state, the average size of land-holding in the state is decreasing rapidly. While it was 5.45 ha in 1970–1971, it came down to 3.96 ha in 1995–1996 (GoR 2001). In 1995–1996, out of a total of 53.64 *lakh* (hundred thousand) land holders in Rajasthan, 4.87 *lakh* landholders were large farmers (with landholdings of more than 10 ha), and 16.11 *lakh* were marginal farmers (with landholdings of less than 1 ha). Decrease in average size of landholding is making agriculture a less and less profitable occupation, and this is reflected in the changing profile of leadership at state level. While the big landlords constituted the most powerful section in legislative assembly in the 1950s and 1960s, it is now the urban middle classes which are most powerful and articulate.

3.1.3 Prospects of Social and Political Mobility

Post-independence developments (adult franchise, spread of modern education, rapid expansion of transport and communication facilities, etc.) were quite sudden in Rajasthan when compared to other parts of India directly under British rule. However, this did not sever the continuity of the traditional upper caste and class elites in formal positions of power and authority in the new political organisations and institutions (Sharma 1995: 375). The numerical predominance of certain caste/tribal groups, in spite of their relatively depressed economic positions and low 'caste ranking' (particularly, the Jats and Meenas), disturbed the hegemony of the upper castes in certain parts of Rajasthan, but in most cases, the traditional elites were able to maintain their power base in the initial decades after independence by diversifying their income generation activities through kinship networks and occupying new seats of power and authority (legislative assembly, police and bureaucracy).

Rajasthan was the one of the first states to experiment with *panchayati raj* system of rural local governance. This system failed when first introduced in the late 1950s as the traditional rural elites were not yet ready to shed their power and the state was not yet strong to undertake radical reforms. The *ex-Jagirdars* and *ex-Zamindars* entered into Panchayati Raj institutions to extract benefits of development and maintain their dominance in the countryside (Sharma 1995). For several years after their formation, *Panchayats* were not given effective powers (revenue as well as budgetary); their elections did not take place and were kept ineffective due to the vested interests of the bureaucracy as well as traditionally powerful sections of village communities (generally, upper caste male leaders). It was only in the early 1990s that the *Panchayati Raj* system got a new lease of life in the form of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment making panchayat elections mandatory and initiating effective devolution of power from the state bureaucracy to democratically elected rural local bodies.

A study of rural leadership in Rajasthan in the first three decades after the formation of the state shows that the hold of economically better-off people continued on the mechanism of power as it operated at village level in all fields of life but age as a factor of dominance of traditional leadership gradually lost its prominence in village politics (Chaudhary 1981: 112). With regard to traditional dominance of higher castes in multi-caste villages, there is a considerable reverse trend. This does not mean, however, that the lower-caste people have started dominating the political scene at village level, but reservation of seats in rural local bodies coupled with 'anti-untouchability' legislations has definitely provided them avenues for representation, social and political mobility and protection. The monopoly in politics of the rich and well-to-do continues irrespective of caste, education, age and family size. Nevertheless, some change is visible in the traditional pattern of leadership status in its ascriptive sense, and a new rich class of leaders who have more than one source of income (government job, small business, etc.) has gradually emerged as the most powerful when it comes to village politics.

Anyone familiar with the ground realities of gender relations in rural North India will not disagree that the Rajasthani society is traditionally highly patriarchal. Child marriage, dowry, female infanticide, high incidence of illiteracy and *purdah* (practice of covering the face in public) are quite common although some positive changes have taken place in the last few decades due to the spread of modern education, civil society interventions and awareness campaigns (against child marriage, domestic violence and various other oppressive practices and customs) and reservation of seats for women in legislative assembly, government jobs as well as rural local bodies. In rural areas, women contribute to a significant portion of agricultural labour, and are mainly responsible for the back-breaking task of fetching drinking water from long distances, grazing cattle, weeding, collecting fuelwood, cleaning, washing and cooking. Yet, their landownership is almost negligible and prospects of economic independence severely limited. Historically, the participation of women in public arenas (village meetings, *jati panchayat,* etc.) has also remained minimal in the past (with 'upper-caste women' generally confined to their homes), although it is becoming increasingly better with the opening up of avenues of economic, social and political mobility.

As far as electoral politics is concerned, single-party dominance continued in Rajasthan until the end of the 1980s with the exception of a brief period in the late 1970s when the first non-Congress government was formed in the wake of anti-Congress sentiment post emergency. Furthermore, within a given village there is a high incidence of factionalism or faction alliances which cut across caste lines. A study of factionalism and village politics by Nagla (1984) demonstrates the presence of different factions among followers of the Congress party each owing its allegiance to a particular leader at the block, district and state level (generally an MLA or MP) . By the mid-1980s, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) was able to make its inroads at village level quite fully and now stands neck and neck with the Congress party in electoral politics. Unlike the first three decades after independence, Rajasthan is today ruled by political elite drawn from a number of castes that are incorporated into the urban middle classes, with some rural-based agriculturalists,

especially the *Jats* (Narian and Mathur 1990). An integral part of this process of power shift from landed aristocracy to urban middle classes is the rise of non-state actors or the civil society in the state.

3.1.4 Civil Society and Non-State Actors in Rajasthan

The national movement for independence in India symbolised the values of freedom, democracy, self-help, civil rights, self-determination and social justice. However, the fervour of national movement was not as strong in the princely states of Rajputana as in some other parts of the country. Apart from the freedom associations that emerged in the 1930s and 1940s, Rajasthan did not form voluntary organisations of the kind that grew in British India (Rudolph and Rudoph 1984; Watt 2005). The Rajasthani middle classes, such as they were, developed very few modern institutional channels for collective action. In British India, the universities, the bar and a host of social, literary, cultural and political associations had given focus to the organised interests, before a mass movement under Gandhi's leadership gave new strength to nationalism. These associations failed to develop fully in Rajasthan, where higher education was weak and the bar was poorly developed since much of the legal practice rested with the traditionally trained *vakils* or pleaders in *durbars* (ibid).

Nevertheless, Rajasthan too had the *Sarvodaya* movement, the *Khadi* and adult education movements in the 1950s and 1960s that 'laid the foundation for secular voluntary action' (Bhargava 2007). In the 1970s, India as a whole witnessed a decline in state institutions of democracy in the wake of the declaration of national emergency. Non-state associations and voluntary mobilisation became important as defenders of democratic rights, civil liberties and citizenship. New social formations began to emerge in India under the leadership of veteran Gandhian and socialist leader Jay Prakash Naraian. This was the time when the voluntary sector or the NGOs in Rajasthan emerged as an effective 'third sector' after the government and the private sector and engaged itself in community development (ibid). The Gram Vikas Manch in Udaipur, Urmul in Bikaner, the Social Work Research Centre in Ajmer and Gramin Vigyan Vikas Samiti in Jodhpur emerged as initiators of NGO movement in Rajasthan, and interestingly, the top leadership of these NGOs, barring Gram Vikas Manch, hailed from states other than Rajasthan (ibid: 260).

In the 1970s, most NGOs concentrated mainly on complementing the state-initiated development activities, such as drinking water provision, adult education, the 'food-for-work' programme, primary health care and agriculture and livestock development. The 1980s witnessed a proliferation of NGO activities, which was supported by international donors and organisations. While international donor opinion showed an inclination for NGO participation in rural development, the Rajasthan government also extended its support for a greater involvement of NGOs in governmental programmes related to health, education, wasteland development and drought relief. This was primarily due to changing international and national

climate in favour of 'state-NGO partnership'. However, very soon, tensions between the two began to emerge as several NGOs working at grassroots started to question state functionaries over issues of corruption and asked the state to yield to the demands from the grassroots level about local control of local resources. Broadly speaking, the state wanted the NGOs to be an extended arm (or even contractors) of the government. Some NGOs refused to take up this position, but there were many who 'joined hands with the rentier class within the state' (Bhargava 2007: 261).

3.2 History of Agricultural Development

While agriculture and allied activities (animal husbandry, pastoralism, etc.) have remained the backbone of Rajasthan's rural economy, harsh agro-ecological conditions (erratic rainfall, low soil productivity and soil erosion) have played a significant role in recurrent droughts and famines in this region from time immemorial (Bhatia 1967; Gahlot 1937). Both people and the state have responded to these challenges in their own capacities. In historical records, we find several instances of construction of large water reservoirs or lakes in feudal times for drought and famine relief. One of the earliest references of such activities is from the 1660s. During the famine of 1662 in Mewar (Udaipur) region of south Rajasthan, the principal relief work was the dam of the Raj Samand (cited in the Imperial Gazetteer of India, Rajputana 1908). Another example is the construction of Jai Samand Lake by damming four minor rivers under the aegis of Maharana Jai Singh of Mewar (Udaipur) and is one of the largest artificial lakes in the world (Saxena 1975). These lakes were used for irrigation purposes and proved to be highly advantageous to the neighbouring cultivable areas through percolation as well as canal irrigation (ibid).

Rainwater harvesting, or systems of harnessing water where it falls, has helped the inhabitants of Rajasthani villages to meet their requirements of food, water and fodder. There are different forms of water harvesting structures (according to local topography and agro-ecology) that we can find in Rajasthan (for a detailed discussion on the various 'traditional' water conservation techniques, see Bharara 1999; and Agarwal and Narayan 1997). Small water harvesting structures, which basically help in groundwater recharge, are quite useful for drinking and domestic use (especially in arid regions) and also serve as watering point for cattle. However, small-scale rainwater harvesting was not a substitute for irrigation by large reservoirs or canals, and as such never remained a priority for the feudal/colonial regimes mainly interested in generating revenue through extensive agriculture (by secured irrigation facilities). The Public Works Department in several princely states of Rajputana was engaged in irrigation works of different magnitudes to maximise revenue from agricultural production. Since the famine of 1899–1900 increased attention was paid in almost every princely state to the subject of irrigation, and the knowledge and skills of European engineers and scientists were employed for the best utilisation of water resources. The Imperial Gazetteer-Rajputana (1908: 47) notes,

> In accordance with the recommendations of the Irrigation Commission of 1901–3, investigations have been undertaken in the greater part of Rajputana at the expense of the Government of India and under the supervision of European engineers, with the object of drawing up projects for utilizing to the best advantage all available sources of water-supply.

Special efforts were made by the princely states on the construction and maintenance of wells and reservoirs, particularly in times of scarcity. We find references in historical records (Imperial Gazetteer of India-Rajputana 1908: 49) of agricultural advances known as *taqavi* for the construction or repair of wells (which were mostly the property of individual cultivators) and ponds in the periods of drought. These loans by the *durbar* (or princely state) reduced to some extent the dependence of cultivators on the *bohras* or moneylenders (Saxena 1975). The majority of the states in the colonial era also advanced money for the purchase of seeds, bullocks and agricultural implements for increasing agricultural productivity, and hence revenues. In some cases these loans were interest free, and in lean or adverse agricultural seasons, advances were given freely throughout Rajputana (Imperial Gazetteer-Rajputana 1908: 44).

In the late colonial period, the states of Alwar, Jodhpur, Udaipur, Jaipur and Bikaner passed their cooperative acts in 1920 along the lines of the Cooperative Societies Act of India, 1912, in order to meet the farmers' need for credit, particularly for agricultural purposes. Besides, several measures were taken to improve and modernise agriculture by the princely states under British sovereignty in the early years of the last century. The agent to the Governor-General for Rajputana was instructed by the Supreme Government to encourage the princely states under his jurisdiction to establish agriculture departments (Saxena 1975). The states of Udaipur, Jaipur, Jodhpur and Bikaner established such departments immediately while smaller states responded later (e.g. Alwar in 1935). The cultivators were induced to use improved implements for agriculture and try new seeds (Anstey 1929: 158). In the year 1928, an experimental farm was established at Udaipur, where new varieties of wheat (Pusa wheat), cotton (American cotton) and sugarcane (Coimbatore sugarcane) were tested, and around the same time, a special department named as *Krishi Sudhar* (Agricultural Improvement) was opened to carry out further new experiments and to purchase bullocks, to improve cultivation and to dig wells (Saxena 1975: 49). However, the poor peasantry could not gain much out of these developments, and the benefits remained largely confined to the rich and middle peasantry (ibid).

3.2.1 Village Commons in Feudal Rajasthan

The peasants, particularly the poor, depend on community forests, pastures, uncultivable lands ('wastelands') and watershed drainages for their requirements of fuelwood and fodder. Comparatively, the rural rich or the middle and big landholders depend much less on common property resources. While *Jagirdars* were the

custodians of some of these resources, they were managed locally by the village residents and reflected their concern for the collective sustenance and for the protection of fragile land resources. Jodha (1989: 282) suggests that this is particularly indicated by traditional practices observed in a number of villages. As an indicator of concern for the community's collective needs, the area of permanent pastures was periodically revised by the village residents to match the increase in number of cattle. Also, ploughing and cutting of shrubs were periodically prohibited in the catchments of ponds, and statues of deities were erected in such areas as warnings to protect vegetation. However, these local management systems varied from village to village to suit local needs.

Colonial rule adversely impacted the village commons and started to alienate local resource users from their natural resources. Colonial officials forced the princely states to increase grazing and wood taxes appreciably, and to maximise revenue they put large areas of community pastures and forests into crops (Jain 1992). Additionally, village forests came increasingly under the jurisdiction of state forest authorities, and wood extraction by state authorities to generate revenue rose drastically (Robbins 1998). Nevertheless, in years of scarcity the forests were usually thrown open to the people for grazing, grass-cutting and the collection of fruits or tubers (Imperial Gazetteer-Rajputana 1908: 51). The peasants had a right to demand access to pastures, and in case of any encroachment on pasture land by *Jagirdars* or local chieftains, they protested and filed complaints with the Revenue Departments of the princely states (Singh 1998). It may be noted that while agricultural lands were leased out to individuals, pastures were leased out collectively to the village as a whole. However, in the regions where pastoralism was the dominant mode of subsistence, pastures were leased out both to individuals as well as the village collectively (ibid: 102). Overall, the results of the institutional changes brought by the British Raj to Rajasthan included a decrease in local villagers' control over and access to community lands. While common property resources with low revenue potential (uncultivable lands, pastures, village ponds, etc.) were allowed to be managed locally, more productive resources (e.g. forests) were acquired by the feudal/colonial rulers.[5]

[5] In the last two decades, we have seen a sudden rise in the studies on commons in India, especially from a *historical* perspective (see Chakravarty-Kaul 1996 on common lands in Punjab). While archival records on common lands and forests are available for British India, such records were not maintained as meticulously and systematically in the princely states of Rajputana. Nevertheless, some of the findings of the studies on common lands in British India could be compared to changes taking place in princely states of Rajputana. Chakravarty-Kaul (1996: 263) suggests that there was a decline in the uncultivated lands in general from 1861 onwards (in Punjab region of British India), and with it a shrinkage in the common lands. After the enactment of the Indian Forest Act of 1878, the open waste outside the villages got considerably reduced, and negatively affected grazing on village commons, and wherever common lands continued to exist, the free-rider problems on common lands started to take on destructive proportions. As population pressure and cattle number grew, the policing of common lands became increasingly difficult, posing a 'disincentive to investment in conservation and improvements in common forests and grazing lands' (ibid). Free-riding via encroachment on common land and water channels was very much in existence before 1947, especially by the stronger elements in the villages where the tradition of communal

The village lands in Rajputana were often divided into zones for grazing and collecting fodder; grazing fees were collected for each animal, and rotational grazing practices were imposed around watering points, particularly in the desert areas (Jodha 1977: 346). These provisions, however harsh or taxing they have been, broke down with the abolition of the *Jagirdari* system and introduction of democratic form of governance and centralised planning in post-independence era. The *pace* of decline of common resources in Rajasthan, it is argued, has significantly accelerated since the 1950s (Christian 1959: 8 cited in Bharara 1999). There are several reasons for this, but encroachments of common lands and rapid expansion of population (with declining infant mortality and death rates) have played a decisive role.

3.2.2 Village Commons in the Early Post-Colonial Period

Encroachments of common lands drastically increased in the post-independence period because government or regulatory authority was now not always present in the villages (Ballabh 2004). Rise of 'individualism', factionalism, and decline in the overall capacity for collective action are also cited as the prime reasons for the rapid decline of common resources in the post-independence period in several studies on Rajasthan (see Jodha 1972; Gold and Gujar 2002).[6] A study of people's perception of droughts and degradation of natural resources in the desert part of western Rajasthan by Bharara (1999: 103) indicates that increase in human and livestock populations is considered by the local inhabitants as the main reason for decrease in vegetative cover (forests), decline in community pastures and over-exploitation of underground water. The increase in land under cultivation as a result of land reforms and allotments of common lands to landless households is also considered as causes for the shrinking of commons in Rajasthan. Ironically, the privatisation of common lands, done to help the rural poor, ended up in the hands of the non-poor. Furthermore, most of the land received by the poor households was also sold by them as they did not have complementary resources to develop, improve and use the newly received lands (Jodha 1986).

In the early 1950s, as I have mentioned above, all the villages (and their common natural resources) of Rajasthan came under the direct control of central authorities (centres of power being Jaipur, the state capital; and Delhi, the national capital). This form of authority was quite different from the previous form because the local

land management and the authority exercised by the leaders was *absent* (ibid, emphases mine). Another species of encroachment, suggests Chakrvarty-Kaul (ibid: 275), began in the post-1954 period (following reorganisation of states in independent India) due to redistribution of common lands by the government among the rural poor who were not a part of the 'proprietary body' or collective ownership of these lands. Thus, the policies of the government tilted in favour of the economically and socially deprived groups, but in the process eroded collective control over common resources.

[6] Gold and Gujar (2003) maintain that the power of hereditary rulers in feudal times, while harsh and often exploitative, successfully sustained the forests.

chieftains lost 'legal' powers albeit, to a large extent, many of them continued to hold 'symbolic' (traditional reverence) and 'material' (landholdings and government jobs) powers. The new state, founded on the ethos of democracy and development, became the custodian of land, forests and water of the region. The government took responsibility and power to manage the existing irrigation systems and began the construction of new structures (dams, canals, reservoirs or tanks), primarily to increase agricultural productivity. Many government officials started acting like new 'patrons' replacing the old (feudal) because people were now dependent on them for their needs of loans, water, electricity, land transfer and records and for accruing the benefits of various anti-poverty programmes and development projects.

However, this centralised system did not guarantee either equity or efficiency in the use of natural resources at the village level. At the end of the 1950s, when the new system of democratic administration at the village level in the form of *Panchayati Raj* (rural local governance) was introduced, it failed to introduce land use regulations effectively or manage common resources efficiently (Jodha 1969). In spite of being given powers of regulation by the state government, very few *panchayats* took any steps to manage or develop community pastures and village forests or to regulate their use. According to Jodha (ibid), in his study of select villages in western Rajasthan, factionalism within village communities and the incapability of new institutions to solve local disputes and raise taxation (mainly to curb free-riding) prevented them to take developmental initiatives with regard to common property resources. The replacement of conventions by formal laws relating to land eroded the traditional social and religious sanctions protecting the village commons (Jodha 1989). But at the same time it did not create new forms of credible and effective authority. The decline in 'local' control over local resources and affairs is seen as the main cause for the accelerated pace of degradation and shrinkage of common resources in the post-independence period.

Despite their significant contributions to the livelihoods and subsistence of the rural poor in the drylands, common property resources did not receive much attention from planners in the first three decades after independence. In the wake of a looming food crisis, rural development planning largely emphasised private property resource-centred activities, be it the promotion of high-yielding crop varieties, distribution of cross-bred cattle, or supply of free electricity and pump sets for groundwater lifting (Jodha 1986: 1169). The state did not fully appreciate the problems of dryland farming although some legislative change did take place. The Rajasthan Soil and Water Conservation Act, 1964, deserves special mention. The Second Schedule of this Act enumerates a large number of conservation measures (including earth works and some regulatory measures) as part of the schemes to be undertaken by the Rajasthan Soil and Water Conservation Board or other agencies to be created under the Act. However, the approach of the legislation was very specific and narrow: conservation technology and 'scientific' knowledge were presented as the *only* solution to resource depletion, budgetary provisions for soil and water conservation works were quite low, and there was total neglect of the needs of the people dependent on natural resources for sustenance. Furthermore, looking to

the magnitude of the resource depletion problem, the 'scheme approach' (as embodied in the Act) hardly proved effective (Jodha 1970: A-83).

In some sense, the developmental state did continue the colonial approach to resource conservation, which considered rural people completely 'ignorant' of conservation needs and methods (Jodha 2000). This perspective was used to justify the nationalisation of resources, the over-reliance on both the public sector and wisdom and the bureaucracy in managing natural resources (Gadgil and Guha 1995). While colonial impact already started to adversely affect village commons as far as local control was concerned, the dominant aspect of post-colonial state intervention in wastelands and other common lands in Rajasthan includes dismantling the traditional community management systems and replacing them by formal, legal, administrative and fiscal arrangements and top-down, largely technology-dominated approaches, with little participation of local communities (Jodha 2000: 467).

In Rajasthan, where drought is the rule rather than an exception, the new regime set parameters to define droughts (particularly on the basis of total number of rainy days and average annual precipitation), and took the responsibility of providing help (in the form of wage employment, 'food for work', remissions of loans, etc.) to the residents of villages in the periods of drought. In the 1960s and 1970s, the major thrust of the agricultural development policy of the government remained on increasing productivity and area under cultivation through investments in secured sources of irrigation (major and minor irrigation schemes), high-yielding variety (HYV) seeds and chemical fertilizers. It boosted agricultural productivity remarkably but at the same time increased the disparity between the people dependent on irrigated and non-irrigated (rain-fed cultivable lands) respectively.

Nevertheless, in the post-independence period the state made some attempts to address the problems of uncultivable lands or wastelands, primarily by exerting its own authority over wastelands, and evolving various technical and administrative measures for their development. The central government undertook tasks of creation of research centres for soil and water conservation for ravines, desert areas, grasslands, areas with salinity and water logging, etc. The Central Arid Zone Research Institute in Jodhpur was one such institute established in Rajasthan. Soil and water conservation programmes as included in the Drought Prone Area Programme (hereafter, DPAP) and Desert Development Programme (hereafter, DDP) were initiated in Rajasthan (with funding from central government) in discrete locations, primarily as relief work.[7] The interventions remained subsidy-driven activities without local participation as well as concern for local needs and indigenous knowledge in choice of activities, species (tree and cattle) and methods (Jodha 2000: 467). Soil and water conservation interventions in Rajasthan from the 1980s onwards are presented in the next chapter, and below, I present a brief note on the limitations of agricultural productivity and growth in the state.

[7] Drought relief in itself has become a political issue in the last decade or so in Rajasthan. It was one of the main issues in the assembly elections in the state in 2003. For more on this, see Khera (2006).

3.2.3 Limits to Agricultural Productivity

Contrary to popular notions, the scope for extensive cultivation in Rajasthan is now limited. The area under cultivation fluctuates from year to year but seems to have peaked at a figure of 155 million hectares of net sown area. Most of the increase in production has been achieved with the use of HYV seeds, fertilisers and, above all, timely supply of water. More than the size of the holding, it is the access to irrigation that critically influences the use of fertilisers and the extent of adoption of the HYV (Vyas and Sagar 1995). Extension and intensification of agriculture on marginal lands because of the fast-growing population, it is argued, has generated substantial demand for groundwater in the state (Rathore 2007). The trend of declining groundwater table has exacerbated rapidly in the last two decades, and roughly 80 % of the total land area is now under critical and dark zone (withdrawal more than recharge) which leaves limited growth prospects in the agricultural sector.

Recent estimates of labour in the agricultural sector of Rajasthan indicate that there is a trend in reduction of male workers in agriculture leading to 'feminisation of workforce' (Acharya and Sagar 2007: 138). It implies that while male cultivators (small and marginal farmers) are shifting out of agriculture (forced outmigration due to declining incomes) to more beneficial options (mining, construction and low-skilled jobs in urban centres), female workers generally stay back to tend the lands. Further, agricultural *labourers*, who are the poorest of the poor in rural areas, are reducing among both sexes. Workers are shifting out of being agricultural labourers and becoming labourers in non-agricultural sectors. Absolute numbers of workers in agriculture (both sexes) have decreased in the southern districts of Rajasthan (Udaipur, Dungarpur, Rajsamand, Ajmer, Bhilwara, Pali and Sirohi), all of which have performed badly in agriculture, with zero or negative rates of growth in the 1990s (ibid: 140). With improvement in rural infrastructure, roads and means of transport, the possibility of short-term outmigration for work has increased, and this is the major source of supplementary incomes for the rural poor (near-landless, marginal and small farmers). The incidence of outmigration depends on the severity of drought and crop failure as well, and several scholars suggest that there is a strong case for expanding non-farm activities in the rural areas (see Visaria 1981; Rathore 2007). While earthen work and physical construction activities can provide temporary wage labour to the small and marginal farmers and near-landless in the villages, they cannot cancel out the importance of incomes from seasonal migration and employment in the urban areas.

Nevertheless, watershed projects initiated by a range of actors play a crucial role in restoring the fragile natural resource base in drylands, by bringing in new resources and livelihood opportunities for village residents, who then cooperate, negotiate and compete over distribution and management of these resources. The next three chapters explore and illustrate the expansion of Rajasthan's watershed development regime, the relationship between its diverse elements, changes in institutional forms and practices to manage watersheds by various agents and the attendant processes of social and political changes in Rajasthani villages.

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Chapter 4
National Goals, International Agenda and Local Needs

4.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the state interventions in watershed development in Rajasthan, especially since 1991 when a new department called Department of Watershed Development and Soil Conservation (hereafter, DWD&SC) was established in the state.

Following on the preceding critical review of new institutional and post-development literature, the questions I raise here are: What are the interlinkages between local needs, national goals and international agenda vis-à-vis development of rain-fed areas? How have the institutional forms and practices changed with regard to governance of natural resources in the past two decades as a result of interventions by DWD&SC? What is the nature of partnership between the state agencies and NGOs? What kinds of relationships exist between international donors and provincial governments? And how do the state practices of decentralised management of natural resources converge with the wider processes of democratic decentralisation in the countryside since the early 1990s? It is through these questions that I engage with some themes in the literature reviewed in Chap. 2 – about the nature and power of the contemporary watershed development regime, the tensions in the relations between entities in this regime, the effect of this regime on politics and power relations in the countryside and the effect of wider politics on this ensemble of development actors. I will show how heterogeneous elements, ranging from local to national to international, transect with the DWD&SC, affect its actions and produce changes with implications for the governance of natural resources.

In the previous chapter I have provided a brief historical background of the state of Rajasthan, particularly the important changes that took place during transition from feudalism to democracy with specific reference to agriculture and village commons. In this chapter I first outline the elements of continuity and disjuncture between other forms of state agencies involved in water conservation in Rajasthan and the DWD&SC. I discuss the beginnings of watershed development in Rajasthan

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parallelly with the emergence of its official guidelines during the first decade of programme implementation in India (1991–2003). I trace the intersection between changing discourse on participatory rural development and watershed development activities in Rajasthan. I also highlight the presence, from the outset, of local, provincial, national and international actors, as well as state, 'civil society' and 'community' ones.

The second part of the chapter critically examines (mainly on the basis of secondary but also primary data) three different projects undertaken by DWD&SC in Rajasthan between 1991 and 2000: the 'Integrated Watershed Development (Plains) Project (1991–1999)' sponsored by the World Bank, 'People's Action for Watershed Development Initiative' Project (PAWDI), a collaborative project of DWD&SC and NGOs, sponsored by the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (1995–1999), and watershed projects funded by the central Ministries of Rural Development and Agriculture, implemented between 1995 and 2000. While IWDP is described as a 'successful' project by the World Bank for its focus on people's participation, PAWDI is considered to be a 'failed' project (it was abandoned midway) for the lack of coordination between project partners. The watershed programmes of DWD&SC implemented between 1995 and 2000 produced mixed results. The main focus of this section is to show the expansion in power and resources of the watershed development regime in Rajasthan and the internal tensions between its important elements.

Following these, in the third part, I have discussed the policy changes on watershed development since 2001 and their effect on the functioning of DWD&SC. During the period of my field work in 2003–2004, almost all the governmental watershed projects in Rajasthan were put on hold due to massive administrative changes in DWD&SC. These changes were due to the decision of the state government to transfer the administrative control of DWD&SC to the department of Panchayati Raj in a bid to provide effective powers to the panchayats and rural local bodies. To understand the politics of watershed development, I examine the crisis in the department owing to the recent policy changes in favour of decentralisation of rural development activities in the state. However, the analysis of watershed interventions by the rural local bodies since then is beyond the scope of this book.

4.2 The New 'Apparatus' for Rain-Fed Areas

We see the lineages of rural and agricultural development in Rajasthan in the late colonial period. While the issues of governance and development of natural resources were important in *Rajputana*, the new (development-oriented) state in Rajasthan was qualitatively different in its approach to management and development of village commons as well as private arable lands. It started to determine the annual targets for rural development and agricultural production, the techniques to be used for achieving these targets and the training and skills necessary to be imparted to the rural population to accomplish these goals. The main thrust of the

new state in rural Rajasthan (as in other parts of India) in the first three decades after independence remained on major irrigation schemes and projects of building big dams and canals.[1] In the decades of the 1950s and 1960s, the most important challenge for the Indian government was to achieve self-sufficiency in food production. This target was achieved in the 1970s (owing to the 'green revolution' which started in the latter half of the 1960s); it nevertheless bypassed vast areas of the country which did not have assured irrigation facilities. While farming became quite a profitable business in some parts of India (particularly Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh but also Ganganagar and Hanumangarh districts in the north-west of Rajasthan due to canal irrigation), the majority of peasants in rainfed areas continued to practise subsistence farming in order to make ends meet.[2]

In the first three decades after independence, soil and water conservation activities were taken up mostly as relief work in discrete locations. Also, the primary emphasis of soil and water conservation (SWC) activities undertaken by the state was to treat command areas of big dams and canals in order to prevent siltation in these large water bodies. Farmers (especially small and marginal with fields adjoining watershed drainages or streams) in rain-fed areas continued to undertake treatment activities (such as gully-plugging or *nala-bandi*) at their own expense to prevent soil and water erosion not for the purpose of water or soil conservation but to increase their agricultural production through harvesting crops on soil that gets mounted up as a result of plugging. These small-scale activities were driven by the intention of some immediate gains through increase in arable land (as a result of plugging) rather than long-term objectives of conservation and sustainability.[3]

The budgetary provision for minor irrigation schemes and soil and water conservation activities remained low, at least until the late 1970s. The perspective plan of Rajasthan (1974–1989) indicates that during the Fifth Five Year Plan which started in 1974, the proposed expenditure on minor irrigation projects (such as tanks and anicuts) was 75 million rupees while on major irrigation projects it was 1400 million rupees, although the difference in the potential created by major and minor irrigation schemes was not very high. Major irrigation schemes in 1974–1975 were estimated to create a potential of 0.41 million hectares, and minor irrigation schemes, 0.15 million hectares in Rajasthan (NCAER 1980). These figures clearly demonstrate that the government recognised the need for water and soil conservation but prioritised major irrigation schemes over soil and water conservation activities in its efforts to achieve food security. Rainfed areas and drylands, which sustain the majority of rural populations, were largely marginalised in the process of the rapid transformation of Indian agriculture which started in the late 1960s. The process of

[1] For example, the Rajasthan Canal Project (later to be known as Indira Gandhi Canal) in north-western Rajasthan or the Mahi Dam Project in south-eastern Rajasthan.

[2] In Rajasthan, the districts of Ganganagar, Bharatpur and Jaipur (all with secured irrigation facilities) saw the highest increase in net area sown in contrast to the district of Udaipur (having remained mainly rain fed), which experienced negligible changes in the net area sown during 1972–2001 (Rathore 2007).

[3] Interview with an Assistant Engineer, DWD&SC, at Udaipur (12/08/2003).

shrinking of common pasture lands and decline in the availability of fodder at local level added to the miseries of small and marginal farmers, pastoralists, and near-landless people in the state who are primarily dependent on livestock for their livelihoods. The aspirations of peasant farmers in drylands for better crop yields and availability of fodder and fuelwood continued to grow during the period when 'green revolution' was taking place in certain pockets of rural India. Mass media (newspaper and radio) and better means of transportation played an effective role in the dissemination of information and in increasing the level of awareness amongst peasants about agricultural and rural development schemes in different parts of Rajasthan when compared to the feudal/colonial period. The peasants were now more exposed to changes taking place in agriculture and irrigation in other parts of the state and wanted to reap the benefits of the transformation in Indian agriculture.

By the early 1980s, three important changes in development thinking for rain-fed areas took place. First, with the increasing politicisation of development and poverty (which is the result of democracy having made its roots stronger in the first three decades after independence), there was increasing pressure on the government from local politicians and *panchayats* for more funds for drought relief, better availability of fodder and fuelwood and temporary wage employment in rural development projects and schemes. Development of rain-fed areas and reduction in disparity between irrigated and unirrigated lands itself became a political issue in Rajasthan. Shiv Charan Mathur, the Chief Minister of Rajasthan (1981–1985), who belongs to Bhilwara district (rain-fed area), increased spending on SWC activities (especially farm-bunding, that directly benefits individual farmers) and popularised the slogan of *khet ka paani khet mein* (literally, conserve rainwater where it falls). Also, it became reasonably clear to the people involved in making national plans that there are limits to further improvements in productivity of the 'green revolution' pockets. During the 1980s, the new thrust of the agricultural and rural development machinery in India was to incorporate rain-fed areas into the national mission of increasing agricultural productivity, and to find relatively long-term solutions to the problems of crop failures and droughts. The Seventh Five Year Plan document of the central government clearly reflects this shift in priority:

> There is no evidence, as yet, of a decline in the amplitude of annual fluctuations in the output of food grains in the country, because a large proportion of food grains continues to be produced under conditions of uncertain rainfall, and even a good part of minor irrigation including the so-called controlled irrigation through wells is vulnerable to the vagaries of monsoons. The persisting fluctuations in agricultural output suggest that there is no basis for complacency and slackening of developmental efforts in agriculture in the wake of a succession of good harvests and consequent accumulation of stocks. It also suggests the need for regional dispersal of output growth through the expansion of assured irrigation in areas where the proportion of area irrigated is low and through the development of dry land farming where irrigation is either not possible or is uneconomical.[4]

[4]The document further states that 'on the basis of the past experience, it is proposed to take up during the Seventh Plan a new Centrally Sponsored Scheme called the National Watershed Development Programme for Rain-fed Agriculture, to supplement the state's efforts, by merging

Secondly, while there was a decline in the overall capacity of collective action at the local level (primarily owing to increasing centralisation of the state), and transformation of traditional institutions for managing common resources at the village level between the 1950s and 1980s, there was an overall increase in the associational sector, particularly in the form of non-governmental development organisations (in terms of size and influence) in Rajasthan. As mentioned in the previous chapter, by the 1980s several NGOs were engaged in community development and rural development projects, especially in the fields of informal education and natural resource development in Rajasthan. Working close to village communities, these organisations realised the significance of common resources like fodder and fuelwood, particularly for the poorer people. Local control of natural resources was a key element in their strategies for rural development. They raised their concerns with the government departments of forest, agriculture and irrigation, and started to create pressure on the governmental planning machinery to pay serious attention to enhance the availability of common resources like fodder and fuelwood in rain-fed areas.

Thirdly, the rising popularity (within the international development circles) of the idea 'small is beautiful' (following Schumacher) and 'farmers first' (following Robert Chambers), popular unrests against big dams and canals for their environmental costs and causing mass displacement of populations and the growing prominence of the notion of 'sustainable development' (epitomised by the World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) led to considerable changes in the international policy discourse during the 1980s. Increasing politicisation of the environment (at global as well as local levels) made 'environment' the mainstay of international development strategies by the early 1990s. Several international development institutions (such as the World Bank) began to focus heavily on ecologically fragile regions such as drylands and deserts. Chronic poverty in rain-fed areas now came to be seen as intricately linked to poor natural resource base (depletion of topsoil, flash floods and decline in vegetative cover) within international development circles. Development specialists and consultants (see FAO 1997; WB 1999) argued for intensification of water and soil conservation activities in arid and semi-arid regions across the world. The World Bank decided to fund water and soil conservation projects in Rajasthan and some other states in India in the late 1980s. Many international development and donor agencies such as the Ford Foundation of the USA and Swiss Development Corporation (SDC) also decided to implement similar projects in different parts of rural India or increase their budgetary support and funds for these programmes implemented by other agencies. They also

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the ongoing programmes. The main components of the Watershed Development Programme for Rain-fed (Dry land) agriculture are to harvest water and conserve soil moisture from the low rainfall, which is also highly variable in these areas, and to extend farming practices and cropping systems which increase production by minimising yield risks'. (http://planningcommission.nic.in/plans/planrel/fiveyr/welcome.html) (Accessed 09/05/2014).

popularised concepts like 'people's participation' and 'self-help groups' in their watershed programmes.[5]

Broadly speaking, these three changes came to define the future of development strategies in the rainfed areas of India. A new government department called Watershed Development and Soil Conservation was created in Rajasthan in 1991. 'Watershed development' in technical parlance came to be defined as 'integration of technologies within the natural boundaries of a drainage area for optimum development of land, water and plant resources to meet the basic needs of the people in sustained manner' (Doolette and Magrath 1990: 12). The basic task in watershed management is to prevent the flow of rainwater so as to achieve *in situ* soil and moisture conservation through water harvesting, contour barriers and drainage line treatment with low-cost and small structures (Krishna 1992). These activities were not new and had been going on for a while in different governmental programmes, such as DPAP and wasteland development. 'Watershed development' is different from the segregated practices of soil, water and forest conservation in scattered locations, and comes as a package for comprehensive treatment of a given watershed area. The main idea behind watershed development in India, as conceived by the central government, was to marry farmers' needs in rain-fed areas (of better availability of food, fodder and fuelwood in the villages) with the national goals of better agricultural productivity, crop yields, and to prevention of the loss of vegetative cover (Farrington and Bebbington 1993). The Eighth Five Year Plan (1992–1997) set on to 'end the neglect of the vast rainfed and dry-land areas', and recognised the essential need to 'involve people in the process of development'.[6] As such, watershed development emerged as a new site and mode of the operation of multiple development agencies.

Government watershed programmes are mostly funded by the central ministries of Rural Development and Agriculture. The broad objective of the Ministry of Rural Development is promotion of overall economic development in the countryside, and improvement of the socio-economic conditions of the resources of poor sections of people living in rain-fed areas. The DPAP and DDP of the Ministry of Agriculture, which focused on soil and water conservation activities from earlier on but were largely taken as relief work in scattered locations, were restructured in 1987 to function on the basis of the new definitions of watershed and 'watershed development' (GoR 2001). A major watershed development project called the National Watershed Development Project for Rainfed Areas (hereafter, NWDPRA) was launched by the Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, to increase agricultural productivity in rain-fed areas. The Ministry fully sponsored (75 % grant and 25 % loan to the State Governments) this project in several states including Rajasthan. Rajasthan got

[5] SDC worked closely with the Dryland Department of Government of Karnataka and an NGO called MYRADA, and experimented with self-help groups in their rural development projects in the early 1980s. Ford Foundation has been quite active in agricultural and rural development from early on and played a crucial role in popularizing the concept of 'participatory' management of natural resources.

[6] http://planningcommission.nic.in/plans/planrel/fiveyr/welcome.html (Accessed 09/05/2014).

a sum of Rupees 136 crores for the first phase of 5 years starting in 1990. Simultaneously, a sum of Rupees 74 crores was approved for funding by the World Bank to start the Integrated Watershed Development Project (hereafter, IWDP) in four districts of Rajasthan, initially for a period of 4 years (1991–1995). These schemes became operational with the formation of a new Watershed and Soil Conservation Department of Rajasthan in January 1991.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the problems of water scarcity, soil erosion and recurrent droughts in Rajasthan are not new, but the solution in the form of 'watershed development' was novel. It was formulated by agricultural engineers, natural resource economists and rural development experts (with some inputs form NGOs already active in this field). The villages in these programmes are designated as 'programme areas' and villagers as 'users' group' or 'beneficiaries'. The new department had sole responsibility of the implementation of the NWDPRA and IWDP (funded by the World Bank), and was the main project implementing agency (PIA) for the watershed programmes under the Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS), DPAP and DDP.[7] The department was to have its own field staff drawn from the different line departments. At its inception, the department had the strength of 1875 persons (Krishna 1992). It was organised into 62 field units, 17 divisions, 3 circles and 2 zones. The World Bank project IWDP had a separate organisation headed by a project coordinator and dedicated project staff at the field level. At each level, the character of the staff was multi-disciplinary, drawn from the disciplines of agriculture, soil conservation, forestry, horticulture and veterinary sciences (ibid). Watershed atlases were prepared for each district of the state with the use of remote sensing techniques, and watersheds were prioritised in terms of their susceptibility to erosion. The administrative control of DWD&SC in Rajasthan at its inception was with the state Department of Agriculture.[8] As is evident, these programmes thus reconfigured territory and population as objects of developmental intervention, and gave rise to new institutional entities arranged in a hierarchy of roles and power. Overall, we see a rapid increase in the power of the watershed development regime in Rajasthan since the early 1990s.

The watershed development programmes launched by different ministries had their own separate guidelines, objectives, funding patterns and technical components. The DDP focused on reforestation to arrest the growth of hot and cold deserts. The DPAP concentrated on non-arable lands and drainage lines for *in situ* soil and moisture conservation, agro-forestry, pasture development, horticulture and alternate land use. The NWDPRA had the features of both these programmes with the additional dimension of improving arable lands through better crop management

[7] The administrative jurisdiction of DPAP, DDP and EAS is with the Ministry of Rural Development of the Government of India while that of NWDPRA is with the Ministry of Agriculture of the Government of India. The implementing agency for all these programmes in Rajasthan was DWD&SC. NWDPRA is solely implemented by DWD&SC, but there were multiple PIAs for DPAP, DDP and other projects of the Ministry of Rural Development of the Government of India. Besides DWD&SC, other PIAs include NGOs, Forest Department and *Panchayat Samitis*.

[8] In 2005, the administrative control was shifted to the state Department of Panchayati Raj and Rural Development, and this had a considerable transition cost, as explained later in this chapter.

technologies. NWDPRA, launched in 1991, envisaged to treat one small watershed, covering between 1500 and 2000 ha in each sub-district. Under IWDP, one project area of 25–30,000 ha was selected in each of the four districts chosen for this project (Krishna 1997: 257).

By 2001, 10 years after the launch of watershed programmes in Rajasthan, almost 9,29,000 ha of land was treated under the NWDPRA with the investment of Rupees 291.68 crores (39 million pounds), and 7,25,000 ha was treated under the DPAP, DDP and EAS with the investment of Rupees 300. IWDP ended in 1999, 9 years after its launch, during which 1,47,557 ha of area was treated at the cost of Rupees 113.90 crores.[9] A collaborative project between the DWD&SC and two NGOs, namely, Tarun Bharat Sangh in Alwar district and Sahyog Sansthan in Chittorgarh district of Rajasthan, was started in 1995. About 1980 ha of land was treated in this project (which ended in 1999) with the financial aid of Rupees 4.30 crores from the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation. In the late 1990s, the Planning Commission of India envisaged spending Rupees 76,000 crores over the next 25 years through various watershed development programmes in the country (GoI 2000a).[10] With the amount of money involved in watershed development, it becomes an important component of the politics of rural development in Rajasthan. The government officials, local leaders, NGOs, consultants and peasant farmers (middle, small and marginal) all compete and cooperate to maximise their benefits and to exercise their authority and power. Who gets what depends on how villagers liaise with those who are bringing in resources and development funds as I show later in this chapter. But first, I would like to present a detailed discussion on the official guidelines for watershed development in the first decade of watershed activities in Rajasthan (1991–2000) because changes in government policies and guidelines for watershed projects are indicators of the politics of watershed development.

4.2.1 The Changing Discourse of Watershed Development

Initially (in the early 1990s) watershed projects started as a *technical* intervention to increase bio-physical gains and develop natural resources in rain-fed and drought-prone areas. By the mid-1990s, with innovations in participatory approaches for rural development, rapid expansion in the powers of non-state development agents and activists (who pressed for issues like ‘indigenous technology’ and ‘equity’) and

[9] These figures demonstrate that what started as a technical solution to the problem of rain-fed farming in the late 1980s became a major rural development programme in Rajasthan within a span of one decade.

[10] The latest technical committee on watershed development (known as the Parthasarathy Committee, 2006) constituted by the Ministry of Rural Areas, Government of India, recommends a major jump in the budgetary allocation for watershed programmes of the tune of Rupees 10,000 crores per year (Joy et al. 2006: 2994–2296).

simultaneous processes of democratic decentralisation in India, 'watershed development' became an important discourse in itself – the term 'watershed development' proliferated within development circles and in the villages of rain-fed India. 'Watershed Development' not only joined the league of big rural development projects running at that time, such as *Jawahar Rozgar Yojna* (JRY), *Indira Awas Yojna* (IAY), Development of Women and Child in Rural Areas (DWACRA), it also became a site of contestation *between* the ministries of agriculture and rural development for the control of funds and resources mustered by the central government.[11] Concepts like 'people's participation', 'indigenous technology', decentralisation and equity, apart from natural resource development, came to occupy centre stage on debates and discussions on watershed development (which in turn was an outcome of the *global* discourse on 'sustainable development').

The mandates of the two key central ministries involved in watershed development, those of Agriculture and of Rural Development, were non-identical. For the former, it was enhancement of crop yield and productivity of rain-fed areas through sustainable agricultural practices, while for the latter it was development and maintenance of the natural resource base of rural areas for increased employment generation, and improvement in the overall socio-economic conditions of the rural poor (GoI 2000a, b). Both ministries had separate guidelines for the implementation of their respective programmes, which have been revised at regular intervals to incorporate the experiences of the previous phase, and inputs given by academics, development specialists, research institutes and NGOs active in this field (especially the Society for Promotion of Wasteland Development, Watershed Support Services and Activities Network and Ford Foundation and Gram Vikas Manch).

4.2.1.1 Guidelines of the Ministry of Rural Development

In 1993, almost 5 years after the initiation of watershed programmes under DPAP and DDP, the Ministry of Rural Development of the Government of India constituted a technical committee under the chairmanship of Prof. Hanumantha Rao (a renowned agricultural economist) to study the implementation and impact of watershed programmes all over the country. The committee recommended a set of

[11] The tussle over the control of funds and resources between these two ministries has been going on for a long time. In October 1974, the Department of Rural Development came into existence as a part of Ministry of Food and Agriculture. In August 1979, the Department of Rural Development was elevated to the status of a new Ministry of Rural Reconstruction. That Ministry was renamed as the Ministry of Rural Development in 1982. In January 1985, the Ministry of Rural Development was again converted into a Department under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, which was later rechristened as Ministry of Agriculture in September 1985. However, in 1991 the Department was upgraded as the Ministry of Rural Development. Another Department, viz. Department of Wasteland Development, was created under this Ministry in 1992. In March 1995, the Ministry was renamed as the Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment with three departments, namely, the Department of Rural Employment and Poverty Alleviation, Rural Development and Wasteland Development. Again in 1999, the Ministry was renamed as the Ministry of Rural Development.

operational guidelines, objectives, strategies and expenditure norms for watershed development projects under the administrative control of the Ministry of Rural Development. The committee tried to address in the new guidelines issues such as recognition of low-cost indigenous technologies of water and soil conservation, people's participation in watershed projects, decentralisation of management and equity in distribution of resources. These are some of the main issues raised by NGOs (and international donor agencies). Below, I present a summary of the guidelines and important recommendations on different aspects of watershed project implementation and management. After providing the summary, I critically discuss its main features.

On the technical aspects, the committee observed that farmers and village communities have evolved their own methods based on local knowledge and materials which are simple, cost effective and easy to operate and maintain, but noted that 'local solutions may be practical innovations; they may not be the best technological options for the whole of watershed taken as an integrated system' (GoI 1995: 2). The committee advised that scientists should investigate the feasibility of local technical innovations and suggested in the new guidelines the adoption and upgradation of low-cost local technologies and materials for sustainable watershed development.

On the issue of people's participation in watershed projects, the committee noted that the project outcomes are not sustainable in terms of the management of common property resources and maintenance of assets created, for the lack of participation by village communities and the user groups. The committee maintained that success can be achieved only through government's participation in the people's programme rather than the other way round and recommended that the project staff (of governmental or non-governmental PIAs) need training in techniques of project management such as PRA (participatory rural appraisal) and community organisation (ibid, 1995: 2). For villagers, the committee suggested training and exposure to 'modern scientific and technical methods, entrepreneurial skills to identify and exploit opportunities, and team building to work in user groups' (ibid, 1995: 3). Further, the committee observed that in the initial phase of watershed programmes, there has been much concentration on setting the objectives, technical components, and cost norms but inadequate instructions on how to implement the projects once they are sanctioned. This led to considerable divergence in the implementation procedures in different states and even within the state in different projects.

One can argue that the recommendations were full of contradictions. On the one hand, the committee suggested involvement of democratically elected *panchayats* in watershed projects. On the other, it endorsed the new institutional prescription of creating formal institutions like user groups or associations, which largely remain outside the arena of village politics. From the outset, we see a tension between the two types of participation, one based on decentralised polity and the other on local resource management. This indicates the beginning of tussle between the newly created rural local bodies and the government officials over the management of funds, resources and activities of watershed projects. Development programmes are always contradictory, and this is what allows for heterogeneity in the regimes that

exist to support them. Below, I demonstrate this by critically evaluating the salient features of the new guidelines adopted in April 1995.[12]

Firstly, the guidelines gave special emphasis to improve the economic and social conditions of the resource-poor and the disadvantaged sections ('the asset-less' and women) through more equitable distribution of the benefits of the programme and greater access to income-generating opportunities for these groups. However, it did not explain how these objectives could be put into operation. The committee recommended that project implementation through government departments should be supplemented by NGOs and semi-governmental institutions and advocated for funds to be given directly to the democratically elected rural local bodies. It is worth noting that this was also the time (1994–1995) of the revival of rural local bodies in India after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act.[13] However, the issue of devolution of funds to *panchayats* and NGOs was left at the discretion of state bureaucracies, which were not yet ready to shed their power. As a result, hardly any NGOs or rural local bodies were involved in the watershed projects in Rajasthan until 2000–2001, when the guidelines were revised again to ensure devolution of funds to rural local bodies.

Secondly, the guidelines defined the role of PIAs in watershed projects to motivate the *gram panchayats* to pass the necessary resolutions to make public contributions, conduct PRA exercises to prepare the development plans for each watershed, undertake training programmes for the village communities to form self-help groups, provide technical guidance and supervision of watershed development activities, inspect and authenticate project accounts, undertake research to adapt low-cost technologies, and set up institutional arrangements for post-project maintenance. Each PIA was to carry out its duties through a multi-disciplinary team designated as the Watershed Development Team (WDT). Each WDT could handle 10–12 watersheds (of 500 ha approx.) and have at least four members: one each from the disciplines of plant sciences, animal sciences, civil/agricultural engineering and social sciences. All the adult members of a village or watershed area were required to form watershed associations. However, the guidelines did not spell out what kind of training is required for village communities and how PIAs can motivate *gram panchayats*. There was an inherent assumption in these recommendations about a frictionless space between PIAs and the rural local bodies, and negation of the possibility of conflicts within village communities and between rural local bodies and the PIAs. Also, within DWD&SC, the engineers wanted to retain full control of project funds. My interviews with the officials of the DWD&SC in Udaipur and

[12] For details, see the Guidelines for Watershed Development, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, 1995 (based on the recommendations of Prof Hanumantha Rao Committee).

[13] The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act provides constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj System of rural local bodies. Consequently, elections to these rural local bodies were made mandatory every 5 years, and seats were reserved for women, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes. The first elections after the Amendment Act came into force were held throughout the country in 1994–1995. This was a milestone in redefining the rural politics in India. These elected bodies were given several powers of the implementation of development projects and schemes in the following years.

Jaipur reveal that no efforts were taken to employ community organisers or social workers until 2000, in the absence of any specific directions on their salary and job specifications. A Deputy Director of DWD&SC, on the condition of anonymity, informed me.

> The Watershed Department [DWD&SC] largely comprises of soil scientists and agricultural engineers with specialisation in rainfed agriculture. Before the initiation of comprehensive watershed projects in early 1990s, most of these officials largely remained at the margins of irrigation and agricultural bureaucracy in Rajasthan for lack of funds and resources available for soil and water conservation activities. When large amounts of funds from central government and the World Bank started pouring in for watershed development in Rajasthan, the engineers of the DWD&SC did not want to share their 'cut' with anyone else. […] Also, any appointments on these posts [community organisers and veterinary para-workers] without any written examination for recruitment, which is mandatory in most government jobs, would have attracted allegations of nepotism and favouritism. So it was the best strategy for us to delay and defer the appointments as much as we could.[14]

Thirdly, the committee recommended that subject to the overall supervision and control of the watershed association, the day-to-day activities of the watershed development project were to be carried out by a 'watershed committee' consisting of 10–12 members (to be nominated by the watershed association) with adequate representation of women, and people belonging to scheduled castes (SC), scheduled tribes (ST) and other backward classes (OBCs). The Watershed Committee was to elect a head from amongst its members, and each watershed project was to have a Watershed Secretary (a full-time paid employee of the Watershed Association who was preferably a graduate from the same village or at least from some nearby village.[15] One can't question the intent to include traditionally deprived sections of rural communities in watershed projects, and also agree that even symbolic representation in watershed committees is better than complete exclusion. However, the expert committee failed to provide details of the income generation activities for landless and marginal farmers (who mostly belong to lower castes and tribes) or on the specific needs of women that should be taken care of in the watershed projects, for example, collection of fuelwood and water for domestic use.

Fourthly, the committee defined the end results from watershed projects. These included completion of all the planned work for the treatment and development of the drainage lines and arable and non-arable lands in the watershed area with the active participation and contribution of the user groups, who were expected to take over the operation and maintenance of the assets created. Above all, the village community was expected to be organised into 'several self-help groups for savings and other income generation activities by the end of the project period' (ibid, 1995: 6). However, the committee did not provide any details on how self-help groups could be formed and how they would function. I appreciate that most committees only provide broad recommendations and it is for the state governments to issue

[14] Excerpts from interview in Udaipur.

[15] The funds for every watershed project were to be used in the following proportion: (a) Watershed Treatment/Development Works- 80 %, (b) Watershed Community Organisation- 5 % (c) Training- 5 % (d) Administrative Overheads- 10 % (GoI 1995: 17).

directives on project implementation activities. In Rajasthan, the DWD&SC, as a direct result of not appointing community organisers and social workers, was neither able to form 'self-help' groups nor initiate any activities for the landless or near-landless (more on it later in this chapter).

Furthermore, how the interests of the poorer members of village communities were to be secured in these groups for income generation activities remained unanswered. The committee simply sprinkled the idea of 'self-help' groups, which became an integral part of rural development discourse by the mid-1990s due to the rising popularity of new institutional and 'social capital solutions' in the international development circles. My interviews with officials and villagers in Udaipur district indicate that in none of the villages were any efforts made by the officials to form self-help groups to start income generation activities. Guidelines are largely influenced by changes in rural development discourse, and new theories and concepts churned out by academics and experts. However, policy models cannot be easily turned into practice in concrete situations (cf. Mosse 2005; Li 1996).[16] What is interesting to note from these guidelines is how different imperatives and institutional forms of power come together on the question of watershed management and development. We see expansion of the 'watershed development regime' on the one hand and discourses emanating from diverse sources on the other: poverty alleviation and wasteland development (ministry of rural development), SWC technology (soil scientists and engineers), people's participation and multi-agency partnership (NGO and international donors) and local control of local natural resources (*panchayats* and some activist organisations).

The second phase of watershed projects (1995–2000) was planned on the basis of these guidelines. NWDPRA of the Ministry of Agriculture continued to be solely implemented by the DWD&SC in Rajasthan with the major thrust on increasing productivity in rain-fed areas. Unlike the programmes of the Ministry of Rural Development, the NWDPRA projects were not designed on the basis of watershed associations and watershed committees in the initial phase. It strictly remained a government project, implemented by functionaries of DWD&SC with a very limited involvement of the villagers. In 1999, the Planning Commission of India directed the two ministries to evolve some common guidelines to bring about convergence and harmonisation in the implementation of various watershed development projects in the country. Consequently, the two ministries came up with 'common principles for watershed development' in 2000. They realised that since the focus and mandate of the two ministries remain different, it is not feasible to develop a common set of operational guidelines, but decided to prepare their separate operational guidelines based on these common principles.

[16] Mosse (2005: 15) argues that ideas like 'participation' or community are strategically and politically useful but lack conceptual clarity and are descriptively weak. Further, 'development interventions are not driven by policy but by the exigencies of the organisations and the need to maintain relationships.[…] Policy models do not and *cannot* shape actual practice in the way that they claim' (ibid: 16, emphasis in original).

The 'common principles' of 2000 retained the rhetoric of 'participation', equity, 'local technology' and 'self-help groups' with additional focus on sharing information with watershed committees on total financial resources available for the project before the beginning of project activities. The guidelines of the Ministry of Agriculture were called 'WARASA-*Jan Sahbhagita*' (Watershed Areas' Rainfed Agricultural Systems Approach – People's Participation), which were adopted in 2000. The main thrust of WARASA-*Jan Sahbhagita* was on 'decentralisation of procedures, flexibility in choice of technology, and the provision for active involvement of the watershed community in planning, execution and evaluation of the programme' (GoI 2000a, b: 5). The guidelines suggested making a move away 'from the subsidy-oriented development to self-reliant development', without clearly explaining how this could be achieved.

The WARASA-*Jan Sahbhagita* guidelines made provision for dedicated funds to support income generation activities for landless or near-landless workers. My interviews with Junior Engineers and Assistant Engineers of DWD&SC in 2004 revealed that these funds had been deposited in bank accounts opened in the name of Watershed Committees and were lying idle. While the guidelines made it mandatory to set out a certain percentage of total funds for watershed activities in the name of income generation for the landless and people below poverty line, the officials of DWD&SC (which are mostly agricultural or civil engineers) informed me that they were neither trained to manage income generation activities nor did they have the incentive or motivation to live in villages for a longer duration in order to start up these kinds of activities.

The Ministry of Rural Development revised its guidelines in 2003, which were named 'Haryali' (literally, greenery). The most important change with regard to project implementation was the involvement of rural local bodies or the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). This was in line with the constitutional changes with regard to democratic decentralisation in India, which began in the mid-1990s, but Mr Shanta Kumar, the then Union Minister for Rural Development in the BJP-led government, played a key role in the devolution of project implementation powers to PRIs. I will discuss the impact of these policy changes in favour of PRIs on the functioning of DWD&SC in Rajasthan in the last part of this chapter. I now turn to examine three different kinds of projects implemented by the DWD&SC in Rajasthan between 1991 and 2000.

4.3 Integrated Watershed Development Project (Plains)

The World Bank-assisted Integrated Watershed Development Project (Plains) was initiated in 1990–1991 in three states, viz. Rajasthan, Gujarat and Orissa. It was one of the first large-scale watershed development projects in the country by foreign assistance. The project was fully implemented by the newly created DWD&SC in Rajasthan. There was a multi-disciplinary team dedicated for this project drawn from a variety of government departments (soil conservation, irrigation, and

veterinary sciences). The main objectives of the project were to (1) introduce improved and sustainable land management practices in selected watersheds through the promotion of cost-effective and replicable conservation technologies, (2) adopt institutional arrangements to facilitate inter-agency coordination in watershed planning and implementation and (3) ensure full participation of the watershed land users in the development and management of common properties (WB 1999: 11). The project consisted of the establishment of contour vegetative hedges/barriers and demonstrations of horticulture on arable private land; afforestation and pasture development on non-arable public lands; construction of check dams and anicuts to prevent water and soil runoff in a given watershed area together with livestock development, artificial insemination and training of select villagers in para-veterinary services. These para-veterinary workers were called *gopals*.

DWD&SC, the PIA for IWDP in Rajasthan came into being concurrently with the launch of the project, and had to face several challenges in its initial stage, such as the new experience of working in an inter-disciplinary team and a very short span of lead time for the first year of field implementation before the onset of monsoon (Krishna 1997).[17] Substantial efforts were put into the training of staff, developing a new work culture in the traditional bureaucratic setup to suit the project requirements of flexible and quick decisionmaking. Initially, the villagers were also sceptical and fearful that if they allow the DWD&SC to work on their private fields (to make field bunds), they might lose control of their lands. It was in this environment of mistrust and apprehension that the IWDP started up. The director of the new department encouraged the field staff to reach out to people and make efforts to spend more time in 'field' (villages).[18] This task was not simple as the state bureaucracy was traditionally moulded in top-down structure and infamous for corruption. An assistant engineer, who was on deputation on this project, informed me,

> Conventionally, engineers and officials take a 'cut' of 10 % on every release of payment. […] The new director told us that he will take strict action if the cut is more than 3 %. We knew that the director was an honest official himself. Also, he was close to the chief-secretary and had been given a free hand by the chief-minister. […] This project was important for the state government because it was bringing in a lot of money from the World Bank for rural development. On our part, we decided to comply because a restraint on 'cuts' in the first phase could bring in more money in the second phase. This project was a golden opportunity for many engineers who had never seen such large amount of funds at their disposal in the past.[19]

It is important to note that it was not the elimination of corruption but its reduction that was considered key. Using this strategy, the director attempted to win the trust of the engineers and realise his personal ambition of making IWDP 'different' from any other *governmental* rural development project, by introducing the practice

[17] Anirudh Krishna, an Indian Administrative Service officer, was the director of DWD&SC from 1991 to 1994, and he played a key role in the first phase of IWDP in Rajasthan.

[18] As informed by an Assistant Engineer who worked in the IWDP, Udaipur.

[19] Excerpts from interview on 04/06/2004.

of 'participatory rural development' through 'user committees', which I discuss below.

One of the most important components of the project was involvement of local people in the project activities. But there were no explicit mechanisms mentioned by the Bank to ensure this participation. The only suggestion given in this context was the formation of user committees (UCs) to seek people's cooperation in the project activities. These UCs (comprising 7–8 members) were facilitated by the department staff by holding an 'informal' election among the area residents of each watershed. My interviews with the engineers and veterinary doctors (on deputation in IWDP, Udaipur) revealed that these UCs did not necessarily represent the entire village community as there were no special reservations for women, or members of SC/ST in multi-caste villages. The large farmers were not kept away from the programme and the department maintains that this strategy was more successful than if they had isolated large farmers entirely, thereby 'making enemies of them from day one' (Krishna 1997: 265). The project functionaries generally worked within the existing system of power relations in the villages but made special efforts to incorporate young and educated village residents in the UCs. My conversations with village residents in Bhainsra Khurd and Chirwa village in Udaipur suggest that for the poorest people in project villages, marginal farmers or landless, who are least likely to attain education, have least say in meetings and committees, lack capacity to liaise with government officials and generally work as wage labourers in urban areas, it was a new experience to see government officials talking to them and explaining about project activities, even though it was for the sake of formality in a large number of cases because the project activities (check dams, contour bunds, vegetative barriers, anicuts, plantation nurseries and pastureland enclosures) were prefixed. Note that this kind of interaction between government officials and villages was unprecedented, and it was happening at a time before the constitutional reform regarding rural local bodies in India in 1994, which delegated many rural development activities to democratically elected Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). At the end of the first 2 years, the department claimed to have 'effective local organisations or UCs to work with in about half of the project locations' (Krishna 1997: 267). The department found the field results as encouraging in the initial years of the project with increased productivity and availability of fodder from common lands. By 1993, over 30,000 ha of common lands were fenced and treated (ibid).

Besides the formation of UCs, another method that the WB devised to ensure people's participation was cost-sharing by beneficiaries. This idea is based on the assumption of economic rationality, i.e., people are more likely to take care of the assets created for common use if they contribute towards the cost of their creation. Furthermore, the Bank's rationale for cost-sharing is that full subsidy leads to state dependency, and in order to make rural people 'responsible' and enterprising, they should be charged some kind of user fees, even if it is in the form of token contribution (WB 1999). The Bank claims that in the pilot phase, beneficiaries shared the cost to the extent of 25–40 % in horticulture and 10 % on the establishment of vegetative barriers (WB 1999: 9). However, and surprisingly, the state governments never supplied data to the WB on actual beneficiary contribution (ibid). This is due

to the fact that in the absence of hard and fast rules regarding contributions by beneficiaries, there were not just irregularities and inconsistencies in terms of recovering costs from the so-called beneficiaries, but also the DWD&SC functionaries found it hard to convince people to contribute towards project costs. An engineer of DWD&SC informed me that

> Given the trend of full subsidy in *sarkari* [governmental] programmes, it was next to impossible to convince people to contribute towards project costs. We decided not to deduct 'contribution' from the wages of poor labourers working in construction activities as we wanted to gain the trust of the village communities in the first place. Deduction from daily wages would have created suspicion and mistrust for the project and project functionaries from day one. It was important for us to achieve targets for physical construction activities so as to secure funds from the World Bank for the next phase. So, we decided to put the issue of cost-sharing by beneficiaries on hold, and provided only vague estimates to the Bank of people's contribution towards project costs.[20]

This suggests that the issue of 'voluntary contributions' was mired in what IWDP officials wanted the WB to hear, as financial flows were dependent upon it. In 9 years, 1,47,557 ha of area was treated under IWDP at the cost of Rupees 113.90 crores. This project is considered by the World Bank as successful and sustainable. In its summary of assessments, it gives the highest grading on financial, physical, institutional development (community participation) and environmental objectives (WB 1999: 14). The Bank considered its performance in supervision as 'highly satisfactory'. The Implementation Completion Report (ICR) of the WB (1999: 12) notes,

> The three main project objectives were substantially achieved. The programme of land treatment was either mostly substantially achieved or even exceeded, was of good quality, and most developments created positive impacts on the conservation and restoration of natural resources and increased agricultural production and increased family incomes. The project also substantially improved the collective capability of government agencies to implement programmes of watershed development and achieved substantial involvement and commitment of local communities in planning, managing, and maintaining improvements of communal and individually owned natural resources and assets. While delays were experienced in the early implementation of the project and technical assistance was greatly under-utilised, collectively these did not impose a serious adverse effect on the project outcome.

As per the World Bank requirements, a project impact assessment of IWPD in Rajasthan was conducted by an external agency comprising a team of scientists from the College of Technology and Agricultural Engineering (CTAE) at Udaipur in March 1999. The study mainly examined the measurable outputs (physical work and environmental gains) of the project, such as contour vegetative hedge (CVH), mixed horticulture, pasture development, natural drainage lines treatment, and also assessed the system of common property resources management under the project. Interestingly, the World Bank's ICR (Nov. 1999) was prepared after taking into account this external evaluation report by CTAE (March, 1999), which reveals a

[20] Excerpts from interview on 07/07/2004.

completely different picture. I present below the main findings of this external evaluation study conducted by CTAE.

The assessment by CTAE scientists indicates that the survival of different types of vegetative materials used for establishment of CVH is extremely poor. The report notes that 'intensive efforts made and huge amount of funds invested for such an important component proposed for increasing *in situ* moisture conservation in arable lands have not shown any desired impact and the productivity levels remained more or less similar to the base level' (CTAE 1999: 44). On boundary plantations, the evaluation report states that the performance of plantations done on boundaries is not up to the mark or satisfactory. The assessment team suggested that these kinds of work should not be implemented under targeted programmes as the efforts are drained to merely achieve targets to meet strict deadlines, with little or no attention to the issue of maintenance. Another component of the programme, mixed horticulture, also remained below average. The team observed that the overall performance in respect of survival of fruit plants was poor in all the watershed areas of IWDP except in some of the fields of Bhilwara and Udaipur watersheds where better survival was observed only in those fields which were under the control of big farmers who possessed better infrastructure with regard to fencing/protection, availability of irrigation water, water-lifting systems and hired labourers (ibid 1999: 62).

As far as pasture development on common and private lands is concerned, the CTAE study revealed that only 25 % of the beneficiaries were aware of the activities taken for pasture development before the initiation. About 80 % were of the opinion that the productivity of pasture lands increased for the first 2 years, until the watch and ward provisions made by the department were in place (CTAE 1999: 84). It was observed that the villagers were interested only in wage employment during the implementation phase and took little or no interest in the maintenance of common lands (ibid). The divergence between the WB's 'success story' and CTAE's negative report indicates that the entities like CTAE (an academic institution) do play a critical role within the watershed development regime but very often their voices get unheard and the interests of the powerful actors (WB and DWD&SC) prevail.

According to the World Bank's assessment, the most important criteria of success are people's participation and involvement and therefore its sustainability (WB 1999: 14). I conducted my fieldwork in the project area 4 years after the completion of the project, and my data reveals the post-project situation, which is appropriate to examine issues related to sustainability. I visited Nauwa, Chirwa, Bhainsra Khurd, Godech and Kailashpuri watershed areas of IWDP in Udaipur district. My visual observations suggest that pasturelands were now open to grazing in all of these five watersheds. My interviews with the engineers and veterinary doctors of the department also reveal that pasture development in common lands and private lands have failed drastically due to lack of people's cooperation. However, the villagers informed me that this was due to the withdrawal of watchmen deputed by the department for common pastures after the initial years of the project. Furthermore, long dry spells and drought (between 1999 and 2002) created a scarcity of fodder in the villages and the pastures were left open for grazing. It is important to note that the poorer villagers are more dependent on common pastures for grazing their goats. A

villager in Chirwa who worked as a wage labourer in the IWDP construction activities in his village (1993–1995) informed me,

> For centuries, we have been practising open grazing. I worked as a labourer in loose-stoneboundary wall construction on pasture land for a simple reason that I needed *mazduri* [wage-employment]. […] But enclosures are not useful as such. Where will we take our goats for grazing in the times of drought? […] And now, the well-off villagers and government officials blame us for not maintaining the enclosures![21]

While the Bank's policy of cost-sharing for sustainability of assets was based on economic rationality, people acted 'rationally' by exploiting whatever resources were available to them at times of drought and distress. In Chirwa and Nauwa villages, I noticed that people even carried home stones from the loose stone check dams built during the project for their private use. In both these villages, the relatively well-off residents blamed the poorest residents for destroying these structures. The stations to check soil erosion and siltation are non-functional due to the absence of any caretakers. Watchmen for enclosures and caretakers for siltation plants were appointed just for a period of 2 years, and no budgetary provisions were made to pay their wages after that period.

If we take individual components of the project (technical, physical or community organisation), it has performed poorly in all of these. But the World Bank considers it to be a success. The DWD&SC of Rajasthan also bagged the 'National Productivity Award' for this project by the Government of India. We can argue that the function of the 'success story' is to provide the context for continued roles of the entities and relations that make up the apparatus (Mosse 2005). It is pointless to prove whether the project is a success or a failure because these are not absolute categories, but a more meaningful question is to ask what the project did for the variety of people involved in it or to investigate the 'messy, contradictory, and multilayered effects' of development schemes (Li 2005: 384).

The project strengthened World Bank's presence in India in rural development and environment sectors. It provided jobs for its consultants and advisors and the opportunity for its officials to visit Rajasthan (a favourite tourist destination in the world map) either as guests of the state or all expenses paid from the project money. An official told me that the project staff made all efforts to impress consultants and supervisory staff from the WB, by organising 'cultural programmes' of folk dance and music and by organising their field visits in 'trophy villages', where the 'beneficiaries' know what to do and what to say. A member of the evaluation team of CTAE informed me,

> A lot of money was spent by the DWD&SC officials to impress WB evaluation teams. They created 2–3 sample watersheds and would take the WB team only there for evaluation purposes. I really don't understand who was paying for the elaborate feasts and drinks. […] DWD&SC officials trained select villagers to answer the queries from WB team. I can't forget this incident from one of the visits: a villager in Chriwa was asked by a WB official as to what benefits the project has brought to him, and he told that his milk production had doubled in the last six month. […] This is completely laughable! […] Anyone who

[21] Excerpts from interview on 10/06/2004.

> understands even the basics of animal husbandry would know that it is simply impossible, whatever the technique of artificial insemination and breed improvement one might use![22]

'Success story' attracts more funds, and Rajasthan was able to get a much higher proportion of funds in comparison to the other two states which implemented the WB's IWDP (Orissa and Gujarat).[23] They tried their best to make this project a 'success story' but did not simply follow the guidelines of the WB blindly. One example is the mismatch between the WB's 'technical expertise' (on NRM) and that of DWD&SC. The Bank considers that the technical assistance of its experts was greatly under-utilised in the IWDP project (WB 1999: 12). An official of the DWD&SC informed me that the video films sent for training purposes of farmers and members of UCs by the Bank were in the English language and devoid of local context. Also, the type of grass (*vetiver*) suggested by the WB experts for vegetative hedges was not conducive to local conditions, and the DWD&SC decided to discontinue its use after unsuccessful 'field-testing'. While the DWD&SC acted against the WB on the issues which do not involve large sums of money (training videos or vegetative hedges), the SWC activities in which the scope for misappropriation of funds was most were taken on a priority basis. An assistant engineer informed me in the following words:

> I am not sure to what extent loose-stone check dams could prevent water and soil erosion. Nor the survival rate of plants on common lands is high. […] But for the engineers, pit digging and check-dams are the best if they want to make money.[24]

For the soil and water conservation bureaucracy, this project helped in the expansion of its paraphernalia—a new department for watershed development. It was a lucrative posting for higher-level officials as they got new resources (manpower and money) at their disposal. For the middle-level officials, the benefits were monetary. Nevertheless, the reactions of DWD&SC officials were themselves quite varied. For (some) enthusiastic officials, this project meant opportunities for experimentation of their ideas, technologies and a chance to interact with villagers for their own self-actualisation. They could derive from this project a sense of purpose in their routine duties or government job because the project offered a wide array of tasks with some scope for individual initiatives. Some officials also tried hard to reach out to the people, to empathise with them, to motivate them and to involve them in this government project that was meant to be 'participatory'. One such official (a veterinary doctor), narrated,

> In the first phase of the project, the director delegated authority and financial resources to lower levels. We did not have to 'look up' to Jaipur for minor issues, and release of money. Later on, in the second phase, the entire project was hijacked by engineers, and they started a campaign to get rid of people from animal husbandry, forestry and agricultural extension from IWDP. In fact, IWDP became like a 'punishment posting' for people like me who

[22] Excerpts from interview on 21/03/2005.

[23] Rajasthan secured a total of 33.62 million USD, Orissa 19.43 million USD and Gujarat 19.43 million USD (WB 1999: 63).

[24] Excerpts from interview on 27/05/2004.

> were on deputation from other departments. The dominant lobby of the engineers within IWDP significantly stifled the morale of other staff, and innovative schemes, such as creating a pool of para-veterinary workers, were withdrawn in the second phase of the project.[25]

Many other officials and engineers in collusion with the presidents of the UCs were able to misappropriate project funds. In most cases, the presidents of the UCs were appointed by the IWDP staff (and not by the villagers) to facilitate sharing of the misappropriated project funds between the staff and the president. This meant that project funds were not actually spent on development activities but shown to be spent on papers. One of the project activities was raising saplings in plant nurseries in each village. On average Rupees 50,000–75,000 could be earned from these plantation nurseries. In most cases, it was the UC presidents who got hold of these nurseries. In other cases, they gave these to their relatives, as my interviews with engineers and veterinary doctors suggest.

Krishna (2002) argues that the IWDP project and other watershed projects (which were started before the revival of *panchayats* in Rajasthan in 1994) gave leadership opportunities to many young and educated villagers, and a large number of these 'new leaders' (which consolidated their positions in their respective villages through IWDP) have neither ritual (traditional) authority nor, in most cases, have any significant economic power (in terms of landholding size when compared with traditional village headmen). What they do have, remarks Krishna (2007: 143), is 'higher educational ability, more information about the world outside the village, and better contacts among people who run things in this external world'. The presidents of the UCs, not necessarily from a higher caste or privileged background (traditional village leaders), gained financially and politically from the project. Many of them contested elections for the rural local bodies in 1994–1995 and gained political mileage.[26] A short story of one such 'new leader', Rooplal Dangi, president of the UC in Bhainsra Khurd village, who also got training to become a para-veterinary worker (*gopal*) in IWDP, is presented below[27]:

> There are people belonging to four communities in this village: Nagda [Brahmin], Dangi [OBC], Salvi [SC] and Gameti [ST]. Traditionally, there has been dominance of Nagdas. Besides practising agriculture, most of them are school teachers in nearby areas. Although there are variations in terms of landholdings or economic status within any given community but collectively, Gametis are the poorest. I am Dangi and I inherited just 3 *bighas* [about one hectare] of land from my father but was lucky to get school education until eighth standard. Otherwise, I have lived in a lot of hardship. […] A relative of mine in the nearby village of Nauwa was quite active in local politics and he became the UC president in that village. When IWDP started in my village, he introduced me to the DWD&SC staff when they visited here for the first time. The staff informed me about the project, and they asked me to become the UC president, and I accepted. […] I came to know about the '*gopal* scheme' in the project and requested the veterinary doctor in charge to select me for this training. Now, para-veterinary services [artificial insemination and treatment of common

[25] Excerpts from interview on 16/05/2005.

[26] My interviews with the presidents of UC in Nauwa, Chriwa and Bhaisra Khurd confirm this.

[27] Informal conversation with Rooplal in Bhainsra Khurd village (12/07/2004).

> cattle diseases] are my main source of income. […] It is unfortunate that *gopals* were not given permanent employment in DWD&SC or animal husbandry department after the project was over. […] When compared to other UC presidents, I have been very honest and sincere. I even gave a plant-nursery to one *Gameti* household. A UC president from neighbouring village informed me that UC presidents were entitled to an honorarium of Rupees 3500 per month for one year. This was never told to me by the engineer of DWD&SC and I was not paid a single penny. I did not argue and fight for it because the project staff had already done a favour to me through training for *gopal*. […] After the project was over, I successfully contested the panchayat election. I won because of my honesty and sincerity as UC president in IWDP project.

While the project increased the livelihood opportunities of those villagers who got temporary employment as watchmen and those who got training as para-veterinary workers, a large chunk of the money was spent on administrative costs, which largely comprise the salaries of the IWDP staff. My interviews with some poorer village residents in Bhainsra Khurd and Chirwa villages who worked as wage labourers in construction activities (anicuts, check dams, v-ditches, contour-bunds, tree plantation, etc.) undertaken in IWDP confirm that the project had a positive upward effect on wages for them. But this was not the explicit or implicit goal of the project as it was not a 'relief programme'. The demand for wage employment is perennial and high in rural Rajasthan, and therefore, projects like the IWDP will always be welcomed in Rajasthani villages (and the state capital) irrespective of whether they are 'successes' or 'failures'. The CTAE study found that almost all the villagers or 'beneficiaries' replied positively when asked if the activities taken under the watershed were beneficial (CTAE 1999). All my respondents including landless workers and farmers said that there should be more projects like the IWDP in their respective villages.

On the lessons learnt from the project, the WB (1999: 38) maintained that NGOs had an important role to develop community awareness, ensure community involvement and create local organisations for future management of their local natural resources and that they should be involved in similar projects where community participation is essential. This belief in the efficacy and importance of NGOs indicates the fact that inter-agency partnership, 'coalitions of interests' (Alsop et al. 2000) or 'synergy' (following Evans 1996) came to occupy an important place in the international discourse on natural resource development by the mid-1990s. The WB insisted that they should 'utilise NGOs to develop community awareness, ensure community involvement and create local organisations for future management of local resources as an essential part of the watershed development' (WB 1999: 7). I contend that this assumption on the part of WB is based on the simplistic notion of 'synergy' prevalent in the international development discourse. While NGOs were involved in Orissa and Gujarat at a much later stage, there was no NGO involvement in Rajasthan as the DWD&SC officials were sceptical about forging partnership with them. Below, I briefly discuss an 'innovative' watershed development project in Rajasthan which was based on the notion of 'synergy' between state and civil society actors.

4.4 People's Action for Watershed Development Initiatives (PAWDI)

PAWDI was a collaborative project initiated by the Government of Rajasthan (GoR) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. DWD&SC and two NGOs namely, Tarun Bharat Sangh (TBS) and Sahyog Sansthan were the implementing agencies for this project in two districts of Rajasthan: Alwar and Chittorgarh. The NGOs were chosen by the SDC as they had already been funding water conservation and common land development activities of these two organisations respectively. In fact, the selection of NGOs played an instrumental role in the choice of sites (Alwar and Chittorgarh). The project was operational in two watershed areas: Retam in Chittorgarh, where Sahyog Sansthan was the partner NGO, and Ajabgarh in Alwar, where TBS was the partner NGO. The project was conceived in 1995 with the following main features, outlined by the Swiss donor agency: (1) design, test and implement appropriate, cost-effective and sustainable approaches in watershed development, (2) create autonomous and self-sustaining community organisations for implementation and for management of assets created, (3) generate a close collaboration between government agencies and NGOs, in order to tap their complementary skills, (4) promote equity, involvement of women, and people's participation in the sustainable management of natural resources and (5) prioritise 'process development' over the achievements of targets (SDC 1998).

The project was to be implemented over 7 years in two phases. In the first phase of 3 years (July 1996–June1999), the target was to treat 15,000 ha of land with the expenditure of Rupees 15.3 crores, to be borne by the Government of Rajasthan (26 %), SDC (64 %) and the local people (10 %). Like the IWDP, the idea of cost-sharing by villagers was based on the logic of economic rationality on the part of SDC (and supported by the two NGOs), i.e. people would consider the watershed treatment as their own work if they contribute towards the cost (in the form of labour contributions). The NGOs, which have already been working in this area, were involved in PAWDI to use their experience and skills in organising the village communities through mass interactions, exposure tours, street plays, training programmes for watershed activities, assistance in the formation of self-help groups and the formation of people's committees or *Lok Samitis* (hereafter, LS) in every village of the watershed area, with due representation of women (about 30 %), and of members belonging to SC and ST in multi-caste villages. The DWD&SC provided the technical inputs and took care of all the physical activities related to watershed, like contour bunds, pasture development and water-harvesting structures. The LS which comprised 7–11 members depending on the size of the villages were made the key decision-making body on behalf of the entire village. All these features made PAWDI theoretically a very sound project for it entailed people's participation, gender equity and representation of traditionally deprived castes.

There were, however, several competing agendas at work in this project. For SDC, the agenda was to promote GO-NGO partnership and address the concerns of 'gender equity' and people's participation in watershed projects. For TBS, the main

agenda was to promote local control of natural resources (as opposed to state control) through rainwater harvesting. For Sahyog Sansthan, the main agenda was to 'improve the livelihoods condition of the rural poor' through 'self-help' groups and expand its hold in the project area by bringing more money and resources for development.[28] For the government, the main agenda was to improve its tally of land treated through watershed activities by incorporating another 15,000 ha and for some of the engineers of DWD&SC to make money out of it.[29] A very senior official of DWD&SC who was involved in the planning process of PAWDI informed me that

> The three partner agencies were not even ready to reach out to each other. This was reflected in the 'team building' exercise in 1995 that took place at TBS *ashram* in Bhikampura village. Our officials did not stay in the TBS *ashram* in a remote village for the lack of basic amenities over there. We decided to stay in the government 'tourist bungalow' near the Sariska Tiger Reserve. The engineers were more interested in visiting the Tiger Reserve than participating in the 'team building exercise' in a remote village with dearth if proper accommodation, toilets or drinking water. The team of consultants from SDC stayed in the Sarsika Palace hotel [a five-star heritage hotel]. So, you can imagine how that 'team building' exercise might have gone![30]

This narration points to the differences between the work culture of foreign donors and consultants, government officials and grassroots NGOs. It took 2 years to decide the mechanism for planning and implementation, and that too was after the facilitation by a consultancy firm from Delhi (SDC 1999). The DWD&SC outsourced the topographical and soil survey to private consultants. Based on these surveys, a technical plan was prepared by the DWD&SC. The NGOs, DWD&SC field-staff and LSs jointly prepared (at least on paper) 'Participatory Village Treatment Plans' to decide on the watershed treatment works to be taken, and the contribution by the villagers. After the approval of plans and technical sanctions by the higher authorities, the DWD&SC issued work orders to the LSs, which then implemented the work (under supervision of DWD&SC). In order to maintain transparency in accounts and to check the leakage of project funds, it was decided in the Joint Project Committee[31] that all construction work would be measured by the LS and DWD&SC field staff and after checks have been made, money would be withdrawn from the LS bank account by the LS chairperson and the Junior Engineer of the DWD&SC. It was decided that payments to wage labourers involved in construction activities would be made by the LS chairperson in the presence of LS members and NGO functionaries to prevent corruption. However, this rule was not

[28] The external evaluation report of PAWDI suggests that technically speaking, Retam area does not even require watershed treatment activities. Sahyog Sansthan had been active in this area for some time and just wanted to consolidate its base (SDC 1998: 14).

[29] As informed by a senior official of the DWD&SC at Jaipur (14/08/2004).

[30] Excerpts from interview in Jaipur on 12/08/2004.

[31] The Joint Project Committee was the main decision-making body which involved representatives of the government and the SDC. The NGOs were in direct contact with the SDC. There was a project Coordination Centre at district level that comprised the WD&SC teams of the department and the NGO functionaries.

followed in practice. The engineers of DWD&SC retained full control of finances, and misappropriated project funds. A complaint was made by the TBS activists to the Joint Project Committee, which led to investigations followed by suspension of service of six engineers. This increased the animosity between the DWD&SC and TBS.

By the end of phase I of the project in 1999, only 13 % (1980 ha of the targeted 15,000 ha) of the area could be treated. The project planners took it for granted that there is a natural 'synergy' between the state agencies and the NGOs in the case of PAWDI. In reality, the DWD&SC and partner NGOs were quite uncomfortable with each other. An official of the DWD&SC who was responsible for PAWDI project in Chittorgarh district informed the author that the department wanted to select the project areas/villages on the basis of a 'watershed atlas' prepared by them using remote sensing technology in order to treat the area on the basis of natural drainage flow. However, the partner NGOs wanted to select the villages where they had been working for a while to consolidate their respective position as 'development agents' or new patrons in those villages. Furthermore, he informed me that

> PAWDI project brought an additional workload for junior engineers and many of them moved out, and got their postings done in different areas. None of the engineers remained in Chittorgarh for more than six months. There is no governmental housing facility for engineers in the town. We wanted to spend a part of project funds on constructing accommodation for engineers and field staff in Chittorgarh town but the involvement of NGOs in the project (which immediately opposed this plan) rendered this possibility out. […] In my view PAWDI would have been very good project if the NGOs were left out of it.[32]

The DWD&SC engineers were never interested in involving NGOs but agreed to it on the insistence of the foreign donors as well as the decision of the political head and topmost officials of the department. Apart from the issue of corruption as mentioned above, there were ideological differences between the NGOs, the SDC and the government agencies. The SDC wanted to make provisions for special programmes for women (by creating the self-help groups for savings) in order to realize the ideals of gender empowerment, which had come to prominence in international development thinking by that time. Sahyog Sansthan helped in the formation of 30 women self-help groups in 28 villages, where women lend to each other for consumption purposes, health needs and sometimes loans for their husbands (SDC 1999). TBS refused to create self-help groups as it lacked any experience or expertise in the formation of such groups, unlike Sahyog Sansthan, which has been doing this job for longer. Rather than promoting self-help groups, TBS functionaries wanted to focus on natural resource generation through building a large number of water harvesting structures, and tree plantations.

A mismatch between the priorities of the donors and the actual needs of the local population is quite common in international development (see Mosse 2005), and PAWDI was no exception. In an external evaluation report of PAWDI (SDC 1998) prepared by Indian and Swiss consultants, it is mentioned that women were more interested in smokeless *chullahs* (hearth), better access to fuelwood, sanitation and

[32] Telephone interview on 20/07/2004.

hygiene facilities and access to clean drinking water, for which no funds were allocated in the project. SDC was keen on addressing issues of 'gender' through participation of women in project activities (SDC 1998: i) but failed to realise that for the majority of women in Rajasthani villages, it is more important to have access to clean drinking water, smokeless *chullahs* and better sanitation facilities than soil and water conservation activities. The DWD&SC functionaries continued into PAWDI with the packages of activities and practices of other government programmes like the IWDP and NWDPRA. Through this, they wanted to exercise their power of 'technical expertise' (on natural resource development) but such packages were not accepted by the partner NGOs. Government and NGOs in PAWDI had different outlook with regard to development activities. The chief executive of Sahyog Sansthan informed me of the following:

> The main objective of PAWDI was to learn from villagers or from the experience of NGOs who have been working in this field for some time. The DWD&SC engineers, on the contrary were not even ready to listen to us on the issue of SWC activities to be undertaken. They just wanted to replicate their standard watershed development activities (contour-bunds, check-dams etc.) without listening to the NGO partners. They even constructed bunds in water-logging areas![33]

The PAWDI external evaluation team notes that the preparatory phase of the project was quite long but no serious attention was paid to the actual needs of the people, clear role of various project functionaries and joint responsibilities (SDC 1998). The interests of the project partners did not match with each other, and they felt that they could have done a better job individually rather than in collaboration (SDC 1999). Also, the control of power (financial sanctions, measurements, payments, monitoring, etc.) mainly remained with the government, and that was another reason for conflict between the partners. The demand made by partner NGOs to cross-check measurement logbooks for construction activities was rejected by DWD&SC for fear of being caught for misappropriation of project funds. The NGO functionaries were required to spend long hours among villagers, talking to them, conducting socio-economic surveys and helping them to elect members of LS. The budgetary provisions for community organisation activities were too little, and one of the partner NGOs (Sahyog Sansthan) did not have sufficient 'trained' staff to carry out community organisation activities.[34] Not even 40 % of the funds made available under different heads were used in the first phase (SDC 1998). The only component in which expenditures exceeded budgetary provision was consultancies and project coordination (ibid: 9).

We see internal tensions within the development regime in the case of PAWDI, which ended in blame games. The ultimate objective of the project planners was to transform this project into a 'process' (SDC 1998: i). This means that the project planners wanted to empower rural communities through the benefits of this project in such a way that they can take care of their natural resources once the project period is over. However, the project failed to achieve any of its stated goals. In fact,

[33] Excerpts from interview at Udaipur on 21/08/2004.

[34] As informed by an assistant engineer of DWD&SC who served in PAWDI project team.

the best intentions of the policies (equity, participation and 'synergy') proved difficult to be translated into action in the field. PAWDI was abandoned after the first phase and left many questions unanswered, especially on the prospects of GO-NGO partnership in the management and development of natural resources. The case of PAWDI suggests that the assumption of inter-agency 'synergetic' relationship between the state agencies and NGOs in Rajasthan turned into inter-agency 'conflicts'. Unrealistic donor expectations, differences in culture and incentive structures, corruption in government sector and competing interests and agendas of the different project implementing agencies may hamper multi-agency partnerships. This is a point I have also discussed and emphasised elsewhere (see Gupta 2014).

4.5 Observations on Governmental Watershed Activities

From its inception in 1991 until 2005, the DWD&SC in Rajasthan was the sole implementing agency for NWDPRA funded by the Ministry of Agriculture of the central government and main implementing agency of the DDP, DPAP and other programmes of the Ministry of Rural Development of the Government of India. Since 1995, after the new guidelines for watershed development (suggested by Hanumantha Rao Committee) issued by the Ministry of Rural Development came into force, project funds for programmes under its jurisdiction had been gradually transferred to the newly constituted PRIs in various states including Rajasthan. In these programmes, DWD&SC remained the main PIA besides a few NGOs in some districts (particularly Udaipur, Bikaner and Barmer). The DWD&SC along with the Forest Department remained PIAs in 90 % of watershed projects during 1996–2001, and NGOs were given only 4.5 % of the total watershed project funds (ARAVALI 2001). The *Panchayat Samitis* explained their unwillingness to take watershed works in the initial years as they did not have any staff at their disposal capable of implementing these projects (ibid).

A survey by ARAVALI[35] (a Government of Rajasthan–promoted non-governmental research organisation) indicates that on an average there is a leakage of about 10–15 % funds in watershed (ARAVALI 2001: 32). The department officials do not spend time in the villages for entry point activities mentioned in the guidelines, and many a time watershed committees are formed even without the knowledge of the majority of villagers (ibid). This is symptomatic of governmental rural development projects from early on. It is more important to ask how watershed projects create new avenues of political mobility and leadership opportunities and how these 'new leaders' view the issue of corruption in watershed projects. I give the example of Veniram from Morath village to illustrate this point.

In Morath watershed, there are three main caste groups: Gayari (OBC), Jat (OBC) and Bhil (ST). The average landholding for Bhil families is the lowest, and many of them migrate (seasonally) to Udaipur and urban centres of Gujarat in

[35] Association for Rural Advancement through Voluntary Action and Local Involvement.

search of wage labour. Veniram is a young Bhil whose father was a labourer in a nearby copper mine. Due to his father's relatively secured source of income, Veniram was able to attain school education (up to tenth standard) and got associated with a local politician of the Congress party. In 1994, when the *panchayat* elections took place after constitutional reforms with regard to rural local bodies, the seat of *sarpanch* was reserved for ST. Veniram fought the election and came out victorious. He was well connected with the 'world outside the village' and was proactively engaged in the development works of the village, capable of 'getting things done' using contacts in different government departments.[36] A watershed project was sanctioned by the DWD&SC under NWDPRA for the village next to Morath, but Veniram got it sanctioned for his village through his personal contacts and political connections in the state capital. He was also able to get one community lift irrigation scheme sponsored (by the District Rural Development Agency) for his family and relatives nearer the newly constructed anicut, which was built as part of the watershed project implemented by DWD&SC. On the issue of corruption by engineers and other government officials, he argued,

> There is no harm in letting the DWD&SC officials take their 'cut' from the project funds, if that is needed to attract development projects for the village. […] After all, the rest of the money is still used for the benefit of the villagers as they get wage employment.

Veniram also suggested that if the *Panchayat Samiti* is made the PIA, it will reduce a lot of energy that goes to waste in dealing with the DWD&SC: the sheer distance between villages and the DWD&SC office in Udaipur is a hindrance in project implementation. In the next part I discuss the impact of policy changes made by the central Ministry of Rural Development in favour of PRIs, giving them effective powers (finances and project implementation) in watershed projects in 2003.

4.6 The Politics of Watershed Development (2003–2005)

The process of democratic decentralisation which started in the mid-1990s was accelerated in Rajasthan under the Congress government (1998–2003) led by the then Chief Minster, an ardent supporter of rural local bodies. In August 2002, the Government of Rajasthan decided to transfer effective powers to PRI in terms of funds, functions and functionaries. A cabinet sub-committee, headed by the Home Minister, was appointed to transfer powers to PRIs, and on its recommendations, the democratically elected *Zila Parishad* was made the premier agency for rural development. The sub-committee of the cabinet also suggested constituting 'the Rajasthan Development and Engineering Services' in order to appoint administrative and technical officials in the *panchayat* bodies. The *Zila Pramukhs* (elected head of *Zila Parishad*) and *Pradhans* (elected head of *Panchayat Samiti*) were given powers to write the annual confidential reports of the Chief Executive Officer of *Zila Parishad*

[36] Informal conversation with Veniram in Morath village of Udaipur district on 12/06/2004.

and Development Officer of the *Panchayat Samiti* respectively, thus ensuring political control over rural development bureaucracy.

This policy change taken by the government created operational and logistic problems for the DWD&SC in Rajasthan as it lost effective control over funds (which were transferred to PRIs). Following these policy changes, the Government of Rajasthan in early 2004 changed the administrative control of the DWD&SC from the Department of Agriculture to the Department of Panchayati Raj and Rural Development and decided to restructure its DWD&SC. The government decided to attach the engineers of the department to the *Panchayat* offices to assist the PRIs in watershed-related development works. This was aimed to provide handy assistance to the PRIs in technical matters related to development activities. The idea was to reduce the procedural delays that occur due to geographical distance between the field and head office. By April 2004, most of the watershed projects in Rajasthan were transferred to Panchayati Raj Institutions. PRIs found it difficult to implement the projects on their own, as they lack appropriate manpower and technical expertise. It was thought that if the engineers of DWD&SC are attached to the *Panchayat Samiti* offices, they would be able to offer their services to the PRIs in the implementation of watershed projects. The bureaucratic/institutional restructuring as a direct consequence of policy changes by the central and the state governments created a huge turmoil within DWD&SC.

My interviews with the higher officials of DWD&SC (deputy directors and joint directors) suggest that they were not happy with this transition. They were likely to lose resources and manpower under their control. Amongst the middle-level functionaries (Assistant Engineers and Junior Engineers), a few were in favour of it as they believed that watershed works in any case were transferred to *panchayats*, and they saw the possibility of the establishment of a new service (Rural Engineering Service) in the near future, which would increase their cadre strength and chances of promotion, and bring more jobs. The President of the Association of Assistant Engineers of DWD&SC, who was in favour of transfer of engineers to PRIs, informed me,

> There is increased political involvement in the new scenario but issues of selection of sites and watershed treatment activities can be dealt amicably with the *panchayat* functionaries. […] It is very unlikely that the politicians will raise unreasonable demands because of the vigilance by their political opponents.[37]

Some other engineers of the department were unwilling to reside in rural areas and work under the administrative control of PRIs. They saw this as loss of their status, power and control over budget and resources. They also argued that there is an excessive workload for Junior Engineers in the present scenario because they have to take care of *panchayat*-related works besides the watershed development activities. A junior engineer complained,

> Political interference will lead to more corruption, and watershed treatment based on villages as unit may not permit complete treatment of the macro watershed area if the

[37] Interview in Udaipur on 05/08/2005.

> watershed selection is driven by political considerations. Political changes may not be simultaneous with the project period and this may affect the watershed treatment work. The new *panchayat* functionaries might use watershed development for 'blame games' and this will hamper the developmental outcomes of projects.[38]

Many engineers moved the High Court of Rajasthan to challenge the decision of the government on the basis that they were being forced to work under the supervision of an officer (generally a Block Development Officer) who was junior to them in terms of administrative hierarchy. Some other engineers stopped attending offices on the pretext of long leave until the issue gets resolved. Almost all the ongoing watershed programmes were halted and suspended due to this crisis in the department in 2003–2005.

The politics of rural development has entered a new era in India with the processes of democratic decentralisation initiated by the revival of PRIs. As watershed development is one of the largest development programmes in rural Rajasthan, it is bound to shape the politics of rural development and in turn will be influenced by the processes of democratic decentralisation in rural India. One can witness a gradual shift of power and control from the technocrats to the political leaders. It is somewhat premature to judge how this transition will affect the future of watershed development activities in the state. The new apparatus of watershed development, which was the creation of international agenda, national goals and local needs, continues to remain in flux. The policy as well as administrative changes explained above help us to understand the heterogeneity of what the state does and indicate the complex processes of negotiation and bargaining *within* 'the state'. Below, I briefly note some of the changes with regard to watershed guidelines that have taken place after 2006.

4.6.1 Reconfiguring Watershed Development Programmes

Some development consultants and NGOs have raised doubts on the capability of PRIs and viability of watershed projects implemented by them (see Mihir Shah 2006: 2981). They also suggest that subsidies on watershed projects largely benefit big farmers and emphasise the need to work out a detailed structure of incentives and cost-sharing mechanisms in order to save watershed development from becoming 'one-shot investment supported mainly through state subsidies' (Shah 2005: 2671). With the revised Haryali guidelines of the Ministry of Rural Development coming into force in 2003 (which promoted *panchayat*-centred watershed programmes), NGOs lost their territory or share of watershed projects that they used to obtain from the Ministry of Rural Development. Furthermore, a major controversy arose over the role of and the relationship between the elected *panchayats* and the village watershed committees (Vaidyanathan 2006: 2984). The Ministry of Rural Development of India decided to constitute yet another technical committee to

[38] Interview in Jaipur on 08/06/2004.

review all the issues relating to organisation and implementation of watershed programmes.

The technical committee, also known as the Parthasarathy Committee, submitted its report to the Ministry in early 2006. It recommended that there should be a village watershed committee to be elected by village *Panchayat* in a meeting of the *gram sabha* (body of all village adults). The report cautioned against 'romanticising local knowledge and emphasises the need to bring in expert knowledge' from research institutions, professionals and NGOs (Vaidyanathan 2006: 2985). The committee recommended the involvement of NGOs for capacity building and training in the preparatory phase (first 2 years) of watershed projects. The committee also suggested the involvement of development professionals and consultants at every level of implementation. The committee has also suggested a bold tripling of the financial allocations for the watershed programme to around Rupees 10,000 crores per year on a revised norm of Rs 12,000 per hectare (Vaidyanathan 2006: 2984).

While NGOs and consultants have been able to gain some of the lost territories in the arena of watershed development, many engineers and senior functionaries of DWD&SC in Rajasthan feel dejected in the new scenario. In addition to the watershed development activities, they also needed to take on additional activities of *panchayats* for agricultural and rural development. They are not used to living in small towns and rural areas, and commuting daily (from cities) is not always a viable option. An Assistant Engineer (name withheld) from Udaipur who has been recently posted to a *panchayat samiti* (about 200 km from Udaipur city) in an adjoining district informed me,

> The place of my new posting is a very small town. I just go there once a week from Udaipur. […] The central government has not given us (DWD&SC) a single penny for the last two years for watershed activities. They (central government) require records of all watershed activities from 2001 onward. It is nearly impossible to dig up old records. We are heavily understaffed. […] I have got only one junior engineer and one typist to assist me in the *panchayat samiti* office. There is a situation of chaos in the department owing to recent restructuring. We do not know who our boss: Watershed Department, Agriculture or Panchayati Raj? […] This chaos can only end if the government comes up with clear guidelines on how it wants to run Watershed Department and recruit new engineers to take the burden of additional activities of *Panchayats*.[39]

Eventually, the engineers have come to accept the decision of the governments, both central and state, to transfer all watershed-related activities to PRIs. It is beyond the scope of this book to explore how the PRIs are performing watershed development activities in the state. Perhaps a new round of research is warranted to address that issue.

[39] Telephone interview on 14/08/07.

4.7 Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the reasons for the emergence of DWD&SC, which is the most powerful element of the watershed development regime in Rajasthan, and have highlighted the convergence of local needs (income enhancement through dryland agriculture, and wage employment), national goals (increase in agricultural productivity of rainfed areas and creating rural employment) and international agenda (sustainable development of 'eco-fragile' regions through participatory soil and water conservation). I have suggested that the changes in the guidelines for watershed development signify the changing political climate in the country, which is marked by the processes of democratic decentralisation and decentralised management of natural resources (facilitated by the Union Ministry of Rural Development). I have also demonstrated the interplay between the various 'players' (state actors, NGOs and consultants), which are crucial in the formulation and reformulation of guidelines for watershed development. The changes and revisions in watershed guidelines, I maintain, signify the politics of rural development.

I have critically evaluated the World Bank-sponsored IWDP and SDC-sponsored PAWDI projects, especially in the context of 'participation' and 'partnership' respectively. IWDP presents some elements of the 'apparatus' described in post-development literature (following Ferguson 1990) expansion of bureaucratic power and 'suspension of politics' (Chhotray 2004) in the initial phase, but the claims of 'anti-politics' machine are unfounded. It is true that like any other rural developmental project, IWDP was fraught with corruption, and government officials (in connivance with presidents of UCs) were able to misappropriate project funds. However, some government officials have been able to prevent corruption to a certain extent, and the opportunities offered in the form of presidentship of UCs (coupled with *panchayati raj* reforms) have helped in the emergence of 'new leadership' in some project villages.

While the World Bank insisted on people's participation through voluntary contribution, the project functionaries (in the initial phase) were able to put this issue on hold to avoid opposition by poorer villagers for whom this project was the main source of wage employment in their villages. Motivating people to perform voluntary labour in a *sarkari* project is a tough task for the engineers and officials of DWD&SC, and they wanted to refrain from any controversy (given the history of full subsidy in *sarkari* projects). For this reason, the DWD&SC never supplied any records on 'beneficiary contribution' to the Bank. In the case of PAWDI, I have shown that *unrealistic* expectations (influenced by the simplistic ideas of productive 'synergies') on the part of foreign donors (SDC) and clash of interests between the functionaries of DWD&SC and the partner NGOs led to the failure of the project. All these issues indicate internal tensions within the watershed development regime and highlight the interplay between its various components.

I have argued that the recent restructuring or unbundling of DWD&SC entails high transition costs. The senior- and junior-level officials of the department have responded differently with regard to recent policy changes in favour of democratic

decentralisation. This reflects the *heterogeneous* nature of the state itself and puts into question the representation of the 'state' as a unified entity. I conclude that watershed management and development itself has become a site for the *remaking* of the state and its internal relations. In the next chapter, I provide the case of Gram Vikas Manch, one of the most famous NGOs in Rajasthan, which has emerged as an important player in the 'decentralised natural resource management' in Udaipur district in southern Rajasthan.

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Chapter 5
Development Specialists and Grassroots Workers

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the initiatives of an NGO that I shall call Gram Vikas Manch (hereafter, GVM), in the field of natural resource development with specific reference to watershed development projects. GVM is based in Udaipur district of south Rajasthan and is one of the largest NGOs in the state. It has been engaged in rural development from the late 1960s, and its activities mainly include informal education, women and child development (WCD), primary health care (PHC) and natural resource development (hereafter, NRD). During the last two decades, watershed development projects and intensive focus on natural resource development (including afforestation and agricultural extension activities) have been adopted by GVM as the most prominent strategy for tackling rural poverty and environmental degradation. Since the mid-1990s, a major chunk of its annual budget for development activities is spent on NRD activities.

What is the main agenda of GVM vis-à-vis watershed development, and how does it operate in its 'field of action' (Udaipur villages)? How do GVM's intervention in the NRD *change* existing relations of power and patronage in rural communities, and *create* new relations of patronage? What is GVM's relationship with other elements of the watershed development regime? These are the main analytical questions that are addressed in this chapter in order to highlight the interplay between the various actors involved in governance and control of local natural resources; to illustrate the dynamism of institutional forms and practices; and to demonstrate complex processes of negotiation, cooperation and conflict in 'community-based natural resource management' programmes led by non-governmental development organisations. What happens when grassroots NGOs expand their power, resources and capacities in order to consolidate their position in the development regime? This is the question I have addressed elsewhere with reference to the interventions of the GVM (see Gupta 2014).

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The GVM is known internationally for its rural development initiatives in Udaipur. A large number of academics, researchers and foreign students visit GVM every year, and most of its funding comes from foreign donors. The GVM is quite an influential organisation on policy matters related to NRD both at national and state levels. It is a member of the Rajasthan State advisory board on Joint Forest Management, and also a member of the district-level steering committee on Watershed Development (Udaipur) set up under the aegis of the Ministry of Rural Development. The relationship of GVM with the state is partly collaborative and partly competitive, and it is an important component of the development regime in Rajasthan.

GVM's activities are managed by urban-educated development specialists and a large pool of village-level agents known as 'para-workers'. GVM prides itself in blending 'expert knowledge' of its professional staff with 'grassroots experience' of other functionaries in the organisation in its developmental activities. To manage its activities, GVM has divided Udaipur district into five blocks and several zones within each block (which coincide with administrative blocks). A zone consists of a cluster of villages. Currently, GVM works in about 600 villages of Udaipur district, which is almost half the total number of villages in this district. The developmental interventions of GVM, particularly in the field of common property resources and NRD, are quite significant in shaping the micro-politics in rural Udaipur. Always conscious of its 'mission of service' and development of remote (tribal) villages, GVM incorporates and reproduces the dominant rhetoric of 'community' and 'participation'. While its rural development interventions do improve the life chances of a large number of ordinary village residents in Udaipur, they create new kinds of patron-client relationship between the villagers and GVM. This makes GVM an interesting case study to understand the diversity of institutions operating in watershed development in Rajasthan.

This chapter is divided into four parts. I start with a brief historical background of Udaipur region, especially with regard to agriculture and common resources, and then discuss the ideology, agenda, organisational structure and the main activities of GVM. In the second part, I provide an account of the shift in GVM's strategy of delivering development during the last two decades with specific reference to its NRD interventions. In the third part, I present three village narratives to highlight the micro-politics of GVM's role in management of land and water resources. I then critically discuss its recent watershed projects. Following this, in the fourth part, I explain how GVM's interventions create new forms of patron-client relation in Udaipur villages. I problematise GVM's notion of 'participation' and 'empowerment' with regard to NRD, and discuss its position within the wider development regime.

5.2 Udaipur and GVM: Background Information

The main geographical features of Udaipur district, located in southern Rajasthan, are the Aravalli hill ranges, low and erratic rainfall (400–645 mm/year) and extreme variation in average annual temperature (4–48 °C). As per the latest census, its total population is 3,068,420 with large proportion of scheduled tribes (approx. 36 %, mostly Bhils) and scheduled castes (approx. 8 %). Literacy rate is 61.8 % with a large disparity between male and female literacy rates. Dug wells constitute the most important source of irrigation, and about 70 % of the total land consists of forests, common lands and uncultivated barren lands (GoR 2001: 27).

Historically, this part of Rajasthan is known as 'Mewar'. From the Imperial Gazetteer – Rajputana (1908: 118), we can get a broad idea about the general conditions of agriculture, irrigation and forests in Udaipur in the early years of the twentieth century. About one-fourth of the cultivated area was irrigated, mainly from the wells (ibid). While conventional agriculture was practised in the valley areas, on the hillsides, *walar* or shifting cultivation was practised by Bhils, which consists of felling trees and burning them on the ground in order to clear the room for a field which is manured by the ashes. A small portion of the forests of Mewar was 'reserved', but even that was under no system of real conservancy; rather it was kept for sporting purposes (of the aristocracy) and to a certain extent for the supply of forage and fuel for state requirements (ibid: 119). Elsewhere, people were allowed to 'cut wood and graze their cattle at will' (ibid). However, restricted access to forestlands for grazing or wood collection was introduced post independence in Udaipur region.

The pattern of settlement by 1900 A.D. in the large parts of Mewar state (especially, southern parts) comprised large villages and towns inhabited by Rajputs and other castes, surrounded by forest or hilly tracts inhabited by Bhils. Bhils were required to take permission from the Rajput *jagirdars* when they entered a new area for slash-and-burn agriculture. There was a commercial relationship between forest dwellers and village dwellers*; Patels* (agriculturalists), *Bohras* (professional moneylenders) or *Rajputs* (landlords) loaned money to Bhils in time of need and employed them on their fields for labour. Over time, Bhils moved on from shifting cultivation to settled agriculture (this transformation becoming rapid with the collapse of the feudal system and restrictions imposed by the post-colonial state on 'slash-and-burn' kind of agriculture practised by Bhils). Post-independence processes of land reforms proved crucial in deciding the final settlement pattern in Udaipur villages. Landholders belonging to the upper and agricultural castes (intermediary castes) continued to occupy the best arable tracts of lands leaving Bhils and former 'untouchable' castes to the periphery in multi-caste villages. Primarily, GVM's rural developmental interventions are concentrated in Bhil-dominated villages of Udaipur.

Post-independence land settlement led to the creation of new boundaries between villages, and demarcation of forestlands and revenue lands. While some villages ended up with vast grazing and common lands, some others fell into forest reserves, with little possibility of getting tenure over land. The loopholes in the land regulation

system have allowed all categories of peasants (big and small) to encroach on public lands (pastures, forest and revenue wastelands), but generally, influential and politically well-connected cultivators have been able to encroach upon large proportions of public lands (practice of encroachment is known as *kabja*, a sort of de facto privatisation). I have mentioned in Chap. 3 that regularisations of encroachments by the land revenue department are done in a highly arbitrary fashion. This has led to patron-client relationships between encroachers and state functionaries: those who are able to bribe the land revenue and forest officials are easily able to get their *kabja* (or encroachment) regularised in the official records. Encroachments of public lands have put a severe strain on common resources like pastures and fuelwood in rural Udaipur, and freeing common lands from encroachment is one of the main interventions of GVM and some other NGOs active in Udaipur villages.

5.2.1 The Ideology and Organizational Structure of GVM

GVM was formed in 1969 by a veteran educationist and diplomat with a mission to serve the poor and eradicate widespread illiteracy, especially in the rural areas. GVM provides a classic example of a voluntary organisation formed by urban elites of colonial times, with a zeal to transform the rural societies left untouched by the forces of 'modernisation' and 'development' in the new era of democracy. Promotion of community organisations, fostering leadership and encouraging people's participation in state-sponsored rural development programmes were the key activities that the founders set for the GVM. The expectation was that education and literacy would strengthen awareness about citizens' rights and entitlements. The administrative cost of running these services was not very high. It mainly required a group of workers, inspired by the social service motto of the organisation, willing to work in the villages to spread literacy and mobilise the poor for participating in various governmental development schemes. About three decades after its inception, the agenda of the GVM, however, looked somewhat different. It now considered concentration of authority with the state and state-led patronage as the main reasons for the disempowerment of the people and their institutions. In line with the international development thinking of the time, there was a strong emphasis on 'state failure', and advocacy on the need of autonomous action by civil society-community combination.

Over the period, the GVM has emerged as a service delivery organisation and strives to create its own sphere of influence and activities in rural Udaipur. The GVM aspires to work for a paradigm of development and governance that is democratic and 'polyarchic', and as such, it is interested in multiple, including non-state poles of power in the countryside. The GVM maintains that poverty in rural Udaipur is directly linked to degradation of natural resources. The poorest people are heavily dependent on common resources like community pastures and forests for their sustenance, but they are denied a stake in the management of these natural resources because of excessive centralisation by state agencies and privatisation of public

lands (by encroachment). For GVM, development and management of natural resources is of utmost importance to reduce poverty in Udaipur villages (this is reflected in its budgetary spending on the NRD programme in recent years). GVM has conveniently adopted the discourse of natural resource degradation to legitimise its own role as development agent promoting alternative (or 'bottom up') development (as against 'top down' development strategy pursued by the state).

The GVM is well organised in terms of administration, and its setup is comparable to any bureaucratic organisation. At the time of my fieldwork in 2005, the GVM had 288 full-time staff and 1,154 para-workers. Full-time workers are stationed in offices at the unit, block and zone levels, while para-workers provide services directly at village level. In 288 full-time workers, 58 were 'professionals' (holding professional degrees in rural development, social work, forest management, civil engineering, etc.). The number of professionals has risen considerably in the organisation over the last decade, and many of them belong to other states. Full-time workers are on the payroll of the organisation and draw a fixed salary. They can be transferred from one block or unit to another. Professionals generally draw higher salaries in comparison to other full-time workers. Most of the full-time workers belong to Udaipur, and many of them have been associated with GVM for a long time (in contrast to professionals who are new to the organisation and whose turnover rate is very high). They have gained practical knowledge and experience of managing community development programmes over years, and most of the block-level and zone-level coordinators and secretaries belong to this category. Para-workers are villagers trained by GVM in various sectors (like forestry, education or health), and they provide services in their own villages. They receive a monthly stipend from GVM for the day-to-day tasks of project delivery at the village level. The village community is generally referred to as '*samuh*' (meaning group or collectivity) by the GVM functionaries. A *samuh* is not representative of the entire community but comprises individuals who are willing to participate in various developmental activities (or services) managed by GVM. Most of its activities are concentrated in villages with high incidence of poverty, and it prioritises working with the sections (generally STs) which are marginalised *within* multi-caste villages.

The highest governing body (or the Board of Trustees) of GVM comprises senior bureaucrats, renowned academics, technocrats and famous social workers. For all managerial purposes, Chief Executive is the head of the organisation. The Chief Executive is assisted by a General Secretary, who is responsible for accounts, personnel and estates. There is a secretary for each of the blocks where GVM is working, and an In-charge for each of the functional units (e.g. NRD, Education, WCD, Health and Engineering). Each block has four to five zonal offices in its span of control. At the base, every zonal office has a cluster of villages where GVM runs its development activities. The 'head office' of the organization was set up in the district headquarters with funding from Canadian donors. Office work (maintenance of records, files and documents) is systematically organised and professionally managed. The jargons used in development circles are widely prevalent in the head

office and the offices at subordinate levels (block and zone): 'NRD', 'watershed development', 'PRA', 'beneficiary groups', 'survey', 'targets', 'capacity building', 'empowerment', etc.

The primary funding agencies of GVM are the Netherlands-based Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation (ICCO), Germany-based Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst (EED), the European Commission, Ford Foundation, Plan International and the Shell Foundation. GVM also collaborates with the Government of India and the Government of Rajasthan for several development projects. It has an active association with the Ministry of Environment and Forests, the State Forest Department of Rajasthan and the Council for the Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART). When compared to smaller NGOs the negotiating power of GVM with its donors is quite high, and GVM can pursue its policies without much interference by its donors in day-to-day affairs and activities. This is possible for two reasons. Firstly, the trustees of GVM are all well-connected and highly placed individuals, and it is easier for them to attract funds from foreign and domestic donors. Over the years, GVM has established its goodwill and name in foreign universities and international development circles as a 'volunteer-friendly' NGO, and it is a popular organisation to gain 'grassroots' experience for interns or student volunteers from rich countries (mainly the USA, Canada and the UK). Secondly, the development professionals in GVM prove handy in its interactions with international funding agencies and the government because they share the same terminology and language (e.g. 'NRD', 'watershed development', 'rural livelihoods', etc). They can write project reports and present the work done and activities taken in a manner that is comprehensible to donors and suits donors' criteria of assessment and evaluation of projects. Next, I highlight the change in GVM's strategy from demanding development in the 1970s to delivering development by the early 1990s.

5.3 From 'Demanding' to 'Delivering' Development

It is important to understand the shift in GVM's focus from holding the state accountable or 'demanding development' (in the 1960s and 1970s) to service provision or 'delivering development' in rural areas by the 1990s. From its inception in 1969 till the mid-1980s, GVM focused on promoting adult education in rural areas with the expectation that this will help the poor to become aware of their rights and entitlements. Around the late 1980s, two significant changes took place with regard to rural development practice. First, the government began to reach out to non-governmental organisations for implementing some of its development projects. This was partly due to the pressure created on the state by the voluntary sector itself and partly because of the changing discourse on rural development in which government projects began to come under heavy criticism by development professionals and academics alike (see Mohanty and Tandon 2006; Sen 1999). The main reasons for criticism were 'top-down' approach of government's development machinery

and neglect of people's participation in development projects. This created a wider scope for NGOs' involvement in government-sponsored projects because they were considered 'closer to the people' and sensitive to 'local needs' (see Farrington et al 1999).

Secondly, an increase in the budgetary support to voluntary organisations, owing to the rising prominence of 'civil society' as a panacea for 'failed states' in development thinking (see Hulme and Edwards 1997). As a result of these changes, GVM started to get better financial support from both the state agencies as well as foreign donors. Serious differences erupted within the top leadership of the organisation over the approach or strategies of development to be adopted for the future. During the late 1980s some senior functionaries of the GVM left the organisation because of its relationship with the state. These functionaries were in favour of leading agitations against corrupt bureaucrats and building pressure on the state to provide entitlements to the poor. This confrontational line did not go down well with the family of civil servants that founded and controlled the organisation. Against the will of some of its functionaries, the GVM in the mid-1980s adopted an undeclared policy of encouraging the village poor to participate in government projects as well as in the projects delivered by the organisation but to not mobilise the poor for direct political action (mass rallies, demonstrations and agitations) to press for their rights.

In 1990, a Yale-educated grandson of the founder was appointed to the post of the Chief Executive. The agenda of the GVM began to change under his leadership. It now set out to deliver more development services in the villages on its own. This required enhancement in resources and capacities of the organisation. Several young graduates and specialists with degrees in social work, rural management and forest management were recruited by GVM besides expanding its roots in villages through a pool of 'para-workers'. Until the late 1980s, GVM got most of its funds for specific projects in the field of informal and adult education, community health or afforestation. Towards the end of the 1980s, two donor agencies, ICCO and EED, offered financial support to GVM on an institutional basis, which means that funds could be used at GVM's discretion and were not bound to specific projects. In short, GVM became an important component of the development regime in rural Udaipur by the early 1990s, and its focus shifted from demanding development (from the state) to delivering development. Presented below is an account of changes in GVM's strategy to increase rural livelihoods through NRD over the last two decades.

5.3.1 Natural Resources and Livelihoods

While NRD is now its biggest programme, it is interesting to note that GVM entered into this field in the mid-1980s with the budgetary support provided by the central government's National Wasteland Development Board for 'afforestation' programme. Farmers were encouraged to pool in their small holdings, and create vegetative and physical barriers around the pool of land to check social and water run-off. To ensure farmers' participation in its wasteland development programme,

GVM decided to provide incentives to individual farmers in the form of full cost of developing private wastelands before starting soil and water conservation works on common wastelands. In the drought period of the late 1980s, GVM also sponsored activities like building water ponds for cattle on the lands owned by the rural local bodies or *panchayats*. GVM's venture into soil and water conservation activities is also influenced by the changes in government policies regarding rain-fed areas in the late 1980s. By the late 1980s, both central and state governments increased spending on small water harvesting structures and accelerated soil and water conservation activities in Rajasthan. Likewise, GVM also initiated water conservation activities (that mainly included construction of water harvesting structures) in villages where it already made its roots stronger. These activities created short-term employment for the village population and increased availability of fodder and fuelwood. A band of workers at the village level trained in the technical aspects of NRD was created by GVM to strengthen its presence at the grassroots level. These are called '*vanpal*' (village level) and '*van sahayak*' (zone level), and they act as community organisers for all natural resource development activities initiated by GVM. Starting its work on *panchayat* lands, and private lands in mid-1980s, GVM moved on to work on forestlands in 1991 (primarily with the support of the Forest Department and Ford Foundation) to help implement the Joint Forest Management Programme.[1] This was possible due to the shift in the Government's forest policy, which allowed for participation of local communities and NGOs in forest management and protection.

International development discourses (e.g., 'participatory watershed development') and national priorities (e.g. increase in government spending on rain-fed areas from the early 1990s onwards) shape the activities and priorities of NGOs to a large extent. Indeed, development discourses and policies have material effects (see Ferguson 1990; Mosse 2005). We can observe these material effects in the case of GVM, which became an integral part of the watershed development regime. By the mid-1990s, central and state governments were already undertaking watershed development projects throughout the rain-fed areas of India. Micro-watershed development projects (which consists of a comprehensive package of soil conservation and water resource development activities in a given village by an array of techniques, such as drainage line treatment, contour trenches, water harvesting structures, etc.) were started by several NGOs (big and small) in different parts of the country during that time. The GVM, which was involved for a while in soil and water conservation activities in scattered locations, also started micro-watershed development projects in the mid-1990s along the lines of governmental watershed projects. With the agenda of 'sustainable rural livelihoods' gaining popularity in international development thinking in the latter half of the 1990s, the GVM decided to integrate its land and water resources development activities to bolster impacts on the livelihood base of people. At the organisational level, it was done by merging all the discrete teams (water resource development, forestry, wasteland development

[1] GVM helped in forming groups of villagers (called Forest Protection Committees) for tree plantation on forestlands and for harvesting fodder grass from the plantation site.

and agricultural extension) into one functional unit, the NRD unit, in 1999. By 2004, the GVM claimed to have treated 12,343 ha of degraded pastureland, and to have completed watershed treatment work on 8,959 ha of land.

The GVM claims that its natural resource management programme is not restricted to land improvement but serves a higher purpose of 'community regeneration'. It believes that land settlements mediated by the state have often ended in confusion and arbitrary boundary demarcations between forest, common and revenue lands. In order to maintain its distinct identity as a development agent in Udaipur villages, GVM blames the post-colonial state for its failure in creating new institutions for the governance of the common lands, and also for being a partial arbitrator sheltering the privileged and the powerful in appropriating common resources. It faced the task of developing new norms of governance of common lands, and adopted a two-pronged strategy for this: first, to mobilise the village community to remove encroachments from the common lands (forest, revenue and pasture) in the villages where encroachment was of high degree, and second, undertake soil and water conservation activities on pasture lands, forests and private lands. It is interesting to compare and contrast watershed interventions in the early 1990s with those a decade later. While the focus shifted towards meeting targets of land treatment activities in the later years, GVM had invested much more time in community mobilisation and altering local power relations in the villages before taking up watershed activities during the early years. To illustrate this point, I present narratives from the villages where the GVM implemented watershed projects in the early 1990s and engaged fully with the micro-politics of resource use and management.

5.4 The Micro-politics of Resource Management

There are three stories presented below. The first story highlights the GVM's role in challenging the traditional hegemony and oppression of a former landlord or *thakur* in a cluster of hamlets of Ratanpura. In the second story, I illustrate how GVM functionaries pursued differently positioned groups to come together in watershed interventions in Chirawa village, and the pivotal role played by the GVM para-workers in bringing about this convergence of interests. In the third story from Kotwara village, I show how the personal interest and ambitions of the GVM para-workers affect developmental outcomes.

5.4.1 Ratanpura: A Story of Altering Power Relations

Ratanpura, where GVM started one of its first adult education programmes in the mid-1970s, is a collective of hamlets inhabited by Rajputs, Gairis, Rebaris and Gametis (Rajputs belong to the so-called upper caste, Gairis and Rebaris belong to 'Other Backward Classes' or OBC and Gametis are 'Scheduled Tribes' or ST).

GVM activities in the Ratanpura cluster in the 1980s were managed by a team of three para-workers. Ramlal (Rebari) was a health para-worker, Shakti Singh (Rajput) was a forest para-worker and Harilal, a member of the Gameti community, taught in GVM's adult literacy centre. This centre provided a platform for wider discussions on (lack of) development in the village. GVM functionaries encouraged people of different caste groups to sit together on a common platform (the caste system and hierarchy has traditionally prevented people belonging to higher and lower castes to sit together on the same physical platform). GVM moved beyond adult literacy interventions and diversified its activities in Ratanpura by taking up 'food-for-work' and other relief activities in response to the 1986–1989 drought.

The Ratanpura cluster was dominated by a powerful Rajput *thakur* (overlord), called Bhawani Singh, who also owned a big soapstone mine in the vicinity. This soapstone mine was the only source of wage labour proximate to Ratanpura. Besides exploiting labourers in his mines by not paying the statutory minimum wage, Bhawani Singh had encroached upon large tracts of village pasturelands for mining purposes. In the late 1980s, when GVM workers initiated an awareness campaign about wasteland development and pasture development activities, their efforts were thwarted by Bhawani Singh. In 1990, Bhawani Singh and his two sons were sent to jail on account of suspicion of murder of a rival mine owner. In his absence, people became less fearful of undertaking collective action. The GVM proposed to recover common pasturelands from his unlawful possession. Backed by GVM, local people were able to recover the usurped common lands from Bhawani Singh and other encroachers. They used police help in this exercise amidst opposition from Bhawani Singh's wife. This changed the balance of power in Ratanpura and consolidated GVM's position in the village.

GVM started soil and water conservation activities in Ratanpura in the early 1990s. By this time GVM was in possession of large funds (especially from the ICCO and EED) and was keen to undertake rural development projects on a larger scale. While soil and water conservation activities were becoming popular throughout rain-fed India, the Rajasthan state Watershed Department was implementing the World Bank–funded Integrated Watershed Development Project (IWDP). In comparison to GVM, it was providing better remuneration in terms of wages for land development works. However, for its reputation in the village, the GVM was able to draw the villagers to its side. The incentive for the para-workers was to enhance their own prospects of long-term employment with the organisation by popularising its activities. This was crucial for them because of the very limited job opportunities available in rural areas around that time. Harilal, the GVM para-worker, informed me that

> We created awareness that association with [GVM] will prove beneficial in the long run for the entire village community. We also told villagers that *sarkari* [governmental] projects and officials come and go. But [GVM] will always remain in the village. People found this argument quite convincing at that time. To tell you the truth, I wanted to popularize the activities of the organization as I saw an opportunity for long term employment with it.

The first effort was to form an understanding between different hamlets (which are inhabited caste-wise) for comprehensive land development activities. The GVM's proposal of enclosing all the pasturelands was turned down by some families because they feared that they would not be able to graze their goats and sheep. To incorporate their demands, a total of 35 ha (divided into four patches) of pastureland was enclosed and about 7–8 ha left for open-grazing. This created a feeling of trust towards the GVM in Ratanpura and also brought together people belonging to different caste groups. This solidarity developed further, and manifested itself in the *panchayat* elections of 1994. The seat of *sarpanch* or the head of *panchayat* was reserved for a 'scheduled tribe' candidate. Harilal, the GVM para-worker, decided to contest the election for the post of *sarpanch* as an independent candidate (he declined the offer of ticket by the Congress party). Bhawani Singh, who was released from jail in 1994, was eager to regain his control over village affairs, and fielded his own candidate against Harilal. Bhawani Singh also spent a lot of money to win over voters in favour of his candidate. However, Harilal, who had made his goodwill and image as an honest and sincere person, won the *sarpanch* election. The tussle between the private interest of the landlord and common interest of villagers continued in the *panchayat*. Harilal refused to allow Bhawani Singh to set up a stone thrasher on *panchayat* land and allotted the land for housing for people below poverty line in the village. This was the first blow to the traditional authority and position held by Bhawani Singh in Ratanpura.

The Ratanpura story points to the important role that NGOs can play in reshaping power relations at the community level. This effort requires time, sometimes more than the life of time-bound and budget-constrained projects of watershed development. The GVM in its early years of NRD interventions did spend time with the village communities and on mobilizing the poor against the powerful. In the process it created new leadership from within the underprivileged section (Gametis in this case). Undoubtedly, it was also keen on initiating watershed activities for realizing its new role as development service provider to its 'clients' (the village poor). Yet, the main concern of the GVM around this time was less focused on meeting targets (of spending or land treatment) in a time-bound fashion.

5.4.2 Chirawa: A Story of Minimizing Caste-Based Conflicts

Chirawa village, situated close to Ratanpura, is primarily inhabited by Rebaris (OBC) and Gametis (ST). The Rebaris have traditionally dominated the Gametis in this village by encroaching upon village common lands. They have larger stocks of land and cattle than the Gametis albeit the highest landholding size by an individual cultivator is approximately 5 ha. The GVM started an adult literacy centre in this village in 1978 that was closed down in 1980 due to the lukewarm response of the people. In the mid-1980s, when the GVM got involved in the wasteland development programme, it renewed its association with Chirawa and started a range of interventions, including primary health care, child care and informal education in

the village, besides taking tree plantation work on private and common wastelands. Two young members (one each from Rebari and Gameti communities) were selected as para-workers (health and forestry) by the GVM functionaries to promote more interaction between the two communities by means of developmental interventions. In the initial years, the Rebaris, maintaining the age-old practice of caste-based discrimination, refused to sit alongside the Gametis in village meetings called by the GVM. My interviews with the GVM functionaries reveal that GVM's priority was to develop common pasturelands but it was very difficult to start work on these lands because of the lack of cooperation by some Rebari families who had encroached upon common pastures in the village. To end this impasse, GVM functionaries adopted a two-pronged strategy. They started land treatment activities on the private wastelands of Gameti households in 1989. Owing to good rainfall the next year, the gains in the form of fodder were immediately visible. This attracted the interest of the Rebari households for land treatment activities. However, they were still reluctant to attend meetings with the Gametis organised by the GVM. The GVM workers decided to hold separate meetings with the Rebari families who showed initial interest in GVM's various activities in the village and specifically asked them for two things: first, that they should be ready to share a platform with the Gametis in group meetings; second, that they should put an end to the encroachments on common pastures. Mohan Lal Rebari, the GVM para-worker, informed me that

> We provided an incentive to the encroachers in the form of subsidizing boundary wall construction on their private wastelands. We had already started this work for the Gameti households and offered the same to the Rebaris on the condition that they clear their encroachments. This strategy worked, and the Rebari encroachers had to ultimately succumb to the collective will.

Consequently, the encroachers vacated the pastureland. The Rebaris got the message that the GVM wanted to work for collective benefit and not just for the underprivileged Gametis. Fodder yield increased within 1 year from the village pastureland (approximately 29 ha) after it was enclosed. A patch of about 7 ha was left open for grazing by small animals. The GVM promoted collective leadership of young and educated villagers (both Gametis and Rebaris) by involving them in various developmental activities in the village. Subsequently, watershed development activities were taken up in Chirawa by the GVM over a period of 8 years, and a total of 338 ha of common and private land was treated by an array of soil and water conservation techniques.

We can see a convergence of interests of village residents, the GVM functionaries and village-level para-workers of the GVM in promoting NRD activities in Chirawa. The GVM block-level functionaries were driven by the motive of expanding the area under coverage of soil and water conservation works. The increase in budgetary support by foreign donors and changed vision of the GVM in the early 1990s (from 'demanding development' to 'delivering development') were the main reasons for their keenness to undertake land and water resource development activities besides interventions in the field of health care and child care. The people of

Chirawa gained directly or indirectly (in the form of wage labour) through land and water resource development activities as also other developmental initiatives by the GVM. Its para-workers tried to reconcile conflicting situations such as encroachments and convince people to get watershed work done through GVM instead of the *panchayat* to secure their own position within the organisation in order to retain their employment. This story of Chirawa, like the one of Ratanpura, suggests two things: First, through its NRD activities, the GVM was successful in bringing together the Rebaris and the Gametis on a common platform after a complex process of negotiations, and was also able to help abate the age-old social discrimination in the village. Second, the GVM emerged as a 'patron' or the new agent of development (as against the state or *panchayat*) by bringing in resources for para-workers as well as ordinary villagers. How do 'para-workers' affect the developmental activities of the organisation? This is the point of discussion in the next narrative.

5.4.3 Kotwara: A Story of Challenges in Nurturing Local Leadership

Kotwara village is a cluster of five hamlets situated about 70 km away from Udaipur city. All the households (210) are of people belonging to ST, with two dominant clans (Bhagora and Neenama). In 1982, GVM initiated development work in the village with an adult literacy centre, which ran for about 7 years. The GVM started distributing tree saplings in the late 1980s as part of its afforestation campaign and took up the Joint Forest Management project in 1994 in Kotwara cluster. Roopdas, an elderly villager and traditional leader of a hamlet, who regularly attended the literacy centre of GVM, was selected as its health para-worker in the late 1980s. Dhurilal, a young and energetic village leader from another hamlet in Kotwara cluster, who used to run the GVM's adult literacy centre, was appointed as GVM's forestry para-worker (*vanpal*) around the same time. These two para-workers played a decisive role in popularising the activities of GVM in this village. They mobilised the people of different hamlets of Kotwara to implement the JFM project in which tree plantation on 250 ha of forestland and fencing to prevent open grazing in forest area was completed with the help of a Forest Protection Committee (FPC) formed under the aegis of GVM.

Dhurilal and Roopdas also played an instrumental role in attracting a comprehensive watershed development project for Kotwara in 1998, sponsored by government (District Rural Development Agency) and implemented by GVM. While the soil and water conservation activities taken up in the project were decided by the GVM's NRD unit, Dhurilal and Roopdas emerged as local leaders because they could bring a steady flow of economic benefits to the villagers. Dhurilal was promoted as *van sahayak* (a zonal-level functionary of GVM responsible for NRD activities). However, as GVM functionaries claimed, he started behaving arrogantly

with fellow villagers. A zonal-level worker of Kotwara narrated that Roopdas also started taking his duties as health para-worker for granted. He would just visit the houses near his home and fill up the health survey report, and ask the villagers to say good things about his work when the GVM functionaries from the block level enquired. On the grounds of complaints received by villagers in a meeting with senior GVM functionaries, Dhurilal and Roopdas were removed from services by GVM. They started disrupting GVM activities and meetings in the villages. Meanwhile, the GVM began promoting young leadership in Kotwara in recent years. A zonal worker of GVM informed me that

> The residents of Kotwara have got the feeling that they cannot let the development work done fritter away in the village, which has lasted several years, and decided to continue their active association with [GVM] even after the dismissal of Roopdas and Dhurilal.

My interviews with Roopdas and Walchand (one of the new leaders and president of Forest Protection Committee) reveal that the village residents have learnt to attract funding from government agencies as well as NGOs. Roopdas remarked that

> [GVM] gets all the money from foreign (donors) for our development. This money is for us! After all, NGOs need work for their own survival.

Kantilal, an ordinary village resident (with a landholding of around 1.5 ha), narrated,

> I benefited from the lift irrigation scheme sponsored by [GVM]. They also supported a boundary wall construction on my private wasteland. My wife got wage employment in the construction activities of JFM and watershed projects. I had good relations with Roopdas when he was in charge of GVM's activities in the village. Now he is no longer associated with GVM but I still maintain relations with him. At the same time, I also have good relations with Walchand (the new leader). It is GVM's discretion to choose the leader. […] I am happy with anyone they choose.

The story of Kotwara suggests that para-workers play a pivotal role in bringing in development projects not just through GVM but also the state agencies (like DRDA). Some para-workers know very well that GVM gets funds from foreign donors for developmental activities in Udaipur villages and it needs their help to implement projects like watershed or JFM. As far as ordinary village residents are concerned, they are willing to cooperate with any leader that the GVM chooses as long as a steady flow of funds, resources and developmental activities is ensured.

In its renewed role as service provider, GVM is always conscious of its identity as a grassroots organisation working for the benefit of the rural poor. GVM blames government agencies for corruption, inefficiency and serving the interests of powerful people. However, in terms of project formulation and implementation, GVM has emulated the official practices, especially in its recent watershed development projects. The project reports of GVM's watershed interventions reveal that like any government-sponsored watershed project, there are pre-fixed targets (hectares of land treated) and budgets that can be presented in yearly reports to public or donors. GVM has also adopted the rhetoric of 'participation' in its watershed projects, which I explain below.

5.5 'Participation', 'Empowerment' and Watershed Projects

Undoubtedly, GVM follows the official development strategies for land and water resource development (wasteland development and afforestation in the 1980s and JFM and watershed development since the 1990s). While treatment of private wastelands (by construction of boundary wall and tree plantation), common pasturelands (by enclosures) and development of water resources (by anicuts, deepening of wells and 'lift irrigation') were the main activities in the late 1980s and early 1990s, GVM adopted the official watershed development approach (comprehensive treatment of a watershed area or village through drainage line treatment, contour trenches, field bunds, water harvesting structures, etc.) of DWD&SC in the mid-1990s. In the initial years, the watershed projects in select villages were initiated at the behest of GVM functionaries. However, the demand for watershed development work was continuously on a rise. This was primarily driven by wage-labour concerns on the part of poorer villagers, and hope for better crop yield from land treatment activities and development of water resources on the part of relatively better-off cultivators in these villages. My interviews with the GVM's block coordinators in 2005 indicates that until 10 years ago, the field-level staff of GVM had to pursue village communities to take up watershed development projects but now it was a popular demand by village groups or *samuh* (in GVM's parlance).

It is important to note that long-term funding commitment (not tied to specific projects) by ICCO-EED and EU helped GVM to form a comprehensive and long-term strategy of 'delivering development'. GVM's interventions for land and water resource development in the early 1990s (e.g. in Ratanpura and other villages) were not pre-planned as 'projects' with specific targets (area to be treated), budgets (project funds) and techniques (drainage line treatment or boundary wall construction). In short, the interventions were 'tailor made' to a large extent. However, the later watershed projects of GVM began to follow a standard blueprint (as in governmental watershed projects), and the activities, targets, budget and resources were predetermined. While every village (and social groups within a village) had different requirements for land and water resource development, the project design was the same for all villages. Below, I present the standard format of recent watershed development projects undertaken by GVM.

GVM's recent watershed projects are driven by the rhetoric of participation in the form of 'PRA' reports, contribution by villagers towards project costs and creation of a 'common fund' for village development activities. My interviews with GVM functionaries suggest that these ideas have not evolved internally within the organisation but have just been copied from the outside.[2] To make its rural development projects 'participatory', GVM started to constitute (since the mid-1990s) Village Development Committees (a group of 9 to 11 members depending on the

[2] The idea of contribution by the so-called beneficiaries has become popular within international development circles since the late 1980s due to increasing dominance of neo-liberal thinking, which relates project failures and lack of people's participation in development projects to 'full subsidy'.

size of the village) in line with the watershed committees and forest protection committees of governmental projects.

The usual procedure for the initiation of watershed activities is as follows: GVM functionaries have made it compulsory that requests for watershed proposals should come in writing. The request application is generally written by the secretary or treasurer of the VDC. The GVM's NRD specialist and engineer at the block level make a survey report of the entire watershed area, which includes soil and water conservation to be undertaken on public and private land and estimates of funds required per hectare. Even a cursory look at the survey reports suggests that the package of activities (drainage line treatment, contour trenches, farm bunds, boundary wall construction, pasture development, pit digging and anicuts) is pre-fixed (only figures vary form village to village). In some villages there is a provision for 'community lift irrigation' through bore-well or open-dug well (fitted with electric/diesel pump set). Roughly an area of 15–20 ha can be irrigated from one pump house. In most cases, the GVM functionaries and para-workers (in consultation with the office bearers of VDC) choose the site for the lift, and in many instances, lift irrigation schemes have been used by the GVM to enrol people's participation in their project activities. An ex-employee of the GVM, who worked in the NRD unit, informed me that

> [GVM] has used the trump card of 'community lift irrigation' and water reservoirs (anicuts) to consolidate its position in several villages. Lift irrigation ensures immediate economic returns in terms of secured supply of water, and in turn, increases people's willingness to work with us.

The survey report and financial estimates are presented to the 'head office'. On the basis of this survey report (and funds available), the 'head office' sanctions funds for the watershed development project. In the socio-economic survey of the village, information on family size, landholding and live stock is collected from each household. However, the data collected on migration, local knowledge or common resources (such as different types of fodder available from individual and common lands) have no relevance for the watershed plan prepared by the GVM engineers. The NRD unit knows what they have to offer (drainage line treatment, boundary wall construction, farm bunds, anicuts, contour trenches and pastureland development and pit digging). Everything reduces to per-hectare cost and total spending. Project reports of recent watershed projects in several villages suggest increase in intensity of watershed works in the months of February and March to achieve the targets of the financial year ending in March. This practice is also prevalent in various state-sponsored developmental projects in Rajasthan. A senior GVM functionary remarked,

> In my 20 years of association with [GVM], I have seen it growing in term of scale, money and resources, which is good in itself. But ironically, during the last decade or so, [GVM] has become more *sarkari* [governmental] than *sarkar* [government]! The entire focus has shifted to meeting targets and report writing.

We can draw parallels between the project implementation strategies of GVM and state agencies. Both focus on the creation of people's institutions (like watershed

committees) and take some contribution from 'beneficiaries' towards project expenditures. Generally, this contribution comes in the form of voluntary labour that in turn translates into compulsory deduction from the daily wages of the labourers. The contribution by GVM is 60–80 % on private lands and up to 90 % on common lands. The idea of contribution has been floated by GVM and not village communities. However, villagers do not generally object to it. A respondent in Kotwara village said,

> People need work, and we don't mind if a contribution is deducted from our wages. [GVM] is providing us with work, so we agree to whatever they say. […] After all, something is better than nothing.

In the recent years, the GVM has started to prioritise 'formal' participation in the form of VDCs over 'substantive' village collaboration that it had in the early years. Making the village communities economically self-sufficient through creation of village common funds is a common practice in 'participatory' rural development. The contribution by the villagers in all the watershed activities of GVM is saved in the form of a rural development fund (GVK) that could be used at times of emergency like droughts. In principle, VDC is responsible for the management of GVK (under the supervision of GVM functionaries). When GVM started to undertake developmental activities on a larger scale, it expected to address two major issues regarding rural development: firstly, the communities not needing wait for approval of schemes and funds from the government, and secondly, operational flexibility to the communities to evolve their own rules, regulations and priorities in managing development activities. According to GVM's narrative, a change in development strategy from 'demanding development' to 'delivering development' required a synthesis at the village level that could empower the village communities through financial security. GVM claims that GVK is this synthesis, created by villagers' own contributions, thereby ascertaining absolute ownership of the village community. VDC and GVK were formally institutionalised in 1996 in the villages where GVM had a presence for a long time. My interviews with village residents in Ratanpura suggest that on the issue of utilisation of common funds, the decision of GVM functionaries prevails. While GVKs were formed in 484 villages by 2003, VDCs could be formed in only 233 villages. Persuading people to assemble and elect representatives is a more complicated process than opening bank accounts. The idea behind forming VDCs is to develop collective leadership in villages so that authority is not concentrated in the hands of a few individuals. It is pertinent to note that these institutions at village level (created by GVM) run parallel to the *panchayati raj* institutions that have been created as a process of democratic decentralisation in India, and the relationship between democratically elected gram panchayats and the GVM-created VDCs is not always cordial, albeit some GVM para-workers have also successfully contested elections for rural local bodies. GVM evaluates the performance of VDCs on the basis of GVM's popularity in those villages, and the interest that people show in attending meetings with GVM functionaries. Effectively, the more *active* a VDC is, better are the chances of investments by GVM in that village.

Unlike most government officials, the GVM workers sit together with villagers on the floor and are polite in their interactions with villagers. Yet, there is still a clear hierarchical relation of power between the 'deliverers' and 'recipients' of development. The GVM senior-level staff live in Udaipur city, hold 'expert knowledge' and belong to a different economic class. With the growing influence of urban-educated 'development specialists' within GVM (since the early 1990s), the intensity and level of interactions between GVM functionaries and village residents have changed considerably. Harilal, the GVM para-worker from Ratanpura, summarised this change quite aptly:

> Most of the [GVM] functionaries in the 1970s and 1980s were from a rural background, although educated in city. They were comfortable in staying overnight for meetings and discussion with the village community. In fact, it is only in the evenings that people have free time and could come for meetings. Some discussions required days and weeks, and the presence of [GVM] functionaries in villages proved quite crucial. Those workers attracted the trust and respect of villagers. The new workers [professionals] don't even like to spend a full day in a village. How could you then expect them to understand the problems and needs of villagers? And if anything goes wrong, they simply put the blame on para-workers like me!"

On the one hand we see marginalisation of low-paid para-workers in the new setup as the annual plans and decisions are now made by the 'specialists' at the 'head office', leaving the task of achieving the pre-fixed targets to the para-workers. On the other, in its renewed role of deliverer of development, GVM interventions have created a new kind of patron-client relationship with the village communities, mediated by para-workers. Conscious of its identity as grassroots organisation, GVM speaks of 'empowerment' through creating village institutions (GVK and VDC), but there are inherent contradictions in its actions. The ideas of people's contribution towards project costs, constitution of village common funds and VDCs have not emerged from the rural communities but 'brought-in' by GVM. In practice, these institutional changes tie the 'beneficiaries' into relations of patronage with GVM. Further, as an important element of the development regime, GVM positions itself in new relationships of partnership *and* competition with state agencies and other NGOs. I discuss these issues next.

5.6 'Community Regeneration' or New Relations of Patron-Client?

The GVM claims, as I have mentioned in Section II above, that land development serves a higher purpose of 'community regeneration'. The para-workers of the GVM are an important link between the villages and organisation. They mobilise different social groups in the village and create 'consent' over contentious issues like contribution towards project costs, enclosures of pastures, removal of encroachments, selection of VDC members and beneficiaries of schemes that serve private interests (e.g. 'lift-irrigation' schemes). While all of them have attained some kind

of formal education, not all of them come from privileged backgrounds (in fact, some of them grew up in the poorest of families in their village). However, it is equally true that para-workers are also an integral part of the patron-client relationship between the GVM and the village groups. As stated earlier on, until the early 1990s, GVM was not aggressively involved in 'delivering development', and its activities were concentrated mainly on adult literacy, afforestation and primary health. It was not in the need of enrolling the rural poor in development activities for meeting the annual targets of land treatment and watershed projects. However, enhanced pool of money and resources for development (since the early 1990s) reshaped the relationship of the organization with the villages. Village residents began to cooperate or negotiate to attract resources and funds from the GVM. The para-workers were the first point of contact for village residents if they wanted a watershed project for their village. People came to the meetings organised by the GVM functionaries to demonstrate that they are an active *samuh* (group). They participated in the 'self-help' savings groups and training sessions organised by the GVM for its various developmental activities to prove that they are good 'recipients' of development. They know well that the GVM is now not simply involved in preaching by way of adult literacy, explaining the importance of trees and forests or telling their womenfolk to raise their voice against domestic violence. But it does have money and resources for *real* development (livelihoods).

The 'active' groups, which consist of individuals within a village community, are able to *bargain* with GVM to get a better deal in the form of deepening of wells, anicuts, lift-irrigation scheme, improved livestock breed, etc. However, to get these benefits they have to cultivate a long-term relationship with the GVM by demonstrating that they are willing to accept it as their patron for development (cf. Weisgrau 1997).[3] Para-workers, who are also village residents, facilitate 'patron-client' relationship between villagers and the organisation. Often, their task is to create consensus on iniquitous propositions like abandoning open-grazing or subsidising the private land development activities of better-off farmers in the form of 'voluntary labour' (cf. Weisgrau 1997).[4] In several villages, leaders of rural local bodies try to develop linkages with the GVM and attract watershed projects in order to consolidate their position (politically) within their respective villages. The strengthening of rural local bodies has created new avenues for many of the *samuh* leaders and GVM

[3] Weisgrau (1997: 204) argues that non-governmental development organisations operate as new patrons in rural Udaipur. The old patrons (rulers and *jagirdars*) have been stripped of some of their lands and assets in post-independence India, and local *thakurs* have lost much of their land because of a variety of factors, such as the land reform policies, and the increasing profitability potential of industrial and other entrepreneurial activities rather than dryland farming (ibid).

[4] Weisgrau (1997: 205) suggests that from the perspective of the Bhils, the continued long-term reliance on new patrons (non-governmental development organisations) does not represent a sound development strategy but for the present, until literacy and better economic opportunities can be created in Udaipur villages, 'this *survival strategy* of dependency-based relationships remains a viable alternative as a route towards the goal of economic stability and a fuller political voice' (emphasis added).

para-workers to enter into active politics. For example, in Pindolia village, the deputy head of the village *panchayat* informed me that[5]

> My association with [GVM] has helped me to win *panchayat* elections as villagers know that I can get projects and funds for development. [GVM] functionaries are more accessible than officials of the government watershed department. Government officials are usually corrupt. Contrary to that, GVM has a clean image in our village. Their workers are polite and they treat ordinary villagers with respect. […] In the government's watershed projects, there are always delays in the release of money, and people get frustrated when they do not get their wages in time. In the [GVM] projects, they at least receive their wages in time.

Some of the interventions of GVM (particularly JFM projects) have created new 'boundaries' between villages (over the access to natural resources) and a new sense of 'we feeling' within a village community (that separates them with the resource users from their neighbouring villages). For instance, the residents of Kotwara village were not sure about the actual boundaries of their forest area until the JFM project was started by the GVM. The maps obtained from the forest department revealed that about 100 ha of forestland (under the *de jure* control of forest department), which was a part of the revenue village of Kotwara, had been encroached upon by some individuals from the neighbouring village of Tunder. The encroachers from Tunder used to cultivate this patch of forestland during the monsoon season. The people from Kotwara never resisted this encroachment for they were not sure about the actual boundaries of the forest area. The GVM was keen on implementing the JFM project in the entire forest areas of Kotwara, and motivated the Forest Protection Committee of Kotwara to approach the senior forest officials in Udaipur to get the encroachments by Tunder residents removed. They were successful in vacating the encroached piece of their forestland in 2001. This was possible because of the influence and clout of the GVM in the forest department. However, when the Forest Protection Committee of Kotwara (under GVM's supervision) started to enclose this patch of land, they were attacked by the encroachers from Tunder. Kotwara was GVM's constituency, and its residents have gained substantially from various development schemes brought by the organisation. People of Tunder are not GVM's clients (and not all the encroachers from Tunder are 'better-off' peasants), and therefore they tend to lose out in the NRD interventions. My respondents in Kotwara informed me that JFM has created unnecessary rivalry between them and their neighbours. It has proven to be detrimental for the residents of Tunder who lost the lands they had been cultivating for almost the last three decades, leading to inter-village tensions and conflicts.

Within academia, and development circles, there is a powerful discourse of 'traditional' or indigenous systems of resource conservation (e.g 'sacred groves'). In some villages, the GVM has tried to enact, but with little success, the 'traditional' systems of protection and conservation of common forests and pastures. *Kesar Chirkav* (sprinkling of saffron along the boundaries of a grove to treat it as sacred, and imposing restrictions on tree felling for a fixed period, generally 4–5 years) has been successful only in few villages. Even in these villages, people from

[5] Informal conversation with Bhairon Singh on 06/04/04.

neighbouring villages (who are not participants of *kesar chirkav* and do not treat that patch of forest as sacred) have tried to cut trees during the period of self-imposed restriction.

The GVM boasts of 'empowering' the rural communities by creating new village-level institutions in the form of GVK and VDCs. Further, it maintains that communities are themselves able to manage their common resources like forests and pastures, efficiently (in line with new institutional theorists of CPR) *and* equitably (in line with communitarians), and the GVM simply acts as a catalyst for them to act collectively. My observations suggest that the rate of survival of enclosures of pasture or forests is very high in comparison to government projects, but that is possible because of the continuous presence of the GVM para-workers in these villages and not because the villagers think that they have *contributed* towards the cost of development of these resources.

5.7 GVM and the Wider Development Regime

The GVM's watershed development projects (which link rural livelihoods to environmental sustainability), it is interesting to note, draw support from donors as diverse as the organisation of Protestant churches in the Netherlands and Germany (ICCO-EED), oil companies (Shell), consumer goods corporations (Hindustan Lever), Government of India (Ministry of Rural Development) and international development organisations (Ford Foundation). Donors such as the ICCO-EED from which the GVM receives a substantial portion of its funds do evaluate its performance from time to time. Evaluation reports by these donors indicate that the GVM is performing well on all counts or indicators set by them for their partner organisations. However, they emphasise creating database systems, quantification of work done and putting in place an effective monitoring system for its NRD interventions. This, I believe, largely affects the way the GVM's recent watershed projects are conceived (where support to local-level struggles against exploitation (such as in Ratanpura) have taken a back seat, and annual targets of land treatment activities have gained primacy).

Morevoer, the GVM, in its renewed role of livelihoods enhancement and capacity building, adopts a restricted view of capacity building through *service provision*. It maintains distance from local 'rights-based' struggles (e.g. the 'rights to information movement' in Rajasthan) as well as with other struggles by rural communities (often led by activist NGOs). The GVM is not reluctant to work with the government agencies but is not dependent on government aid and projects for its own existence. Only a small amount of its total funds come from the state agencies for specific projects and programmes that organisation runs jointly with state departments. The GVM started its first interventions in NRD in collaboration with the state. It is well connected with the 'higher ups' in bureaucracy, and several of its top functionaries are former bureaucrats. This helps the GVM in its day-to-day functioning: getting a village map and land records from *panchayat*, obtaining a

no-objection certificate to work on revenue lands, getting loans from nationalised banks for its 'self-help' groups or in pursuing the irrigation department to release water for irrigation to a village where the organisation is active.

The GVM is gradually learning to tackle the problems and conflicting situations that watershed development entails. This gets reflected in the ongoing discussions and meetings within the organisation and issues such as poor maintenance of water harvesting structures by the village community, lack of interest in meetings by the villagers after the completion of project (end of wage employment opportunities), encroachment upon the catchments of newly constructed anicuts, disputes between different hamlets in a village over the question of where to start the watershed treatment work or issues of more paying jobs (supervisory) to women to increase their incomes through watershed works. It is yet to be seen how the GVM is able to reconcile with all these issues in its future projects.

5.8 Summary

In this chapter I have problematised the community-based natural resource interventions led by an internationally renowned local NGO. I argue that the NRD interventions of the GVM are not a result of merely the 'local needs' of small/medium farmers in rural Udaipur but have been shaped by the state's efforts to incorporate NGOs in afforestation and wasteland development activities in the 1980s, and the changes in international development agenda around the same time, which brought issues of sustainable development of 'eco-fragile' regions, watershed development and 'participation' to the forefront. The changing role of the GVM from 'demanding' development to 'delivering' development has primarily made it an integral part of the watershed development regime in Rajasthan. The GVM draws its rationale by incorporating the discourse of 'state failure' and corruption in governmental projects.

I have drawn parallels between the state-sponsored watershed projects and that of the GVM. The watershed projects of the GVM are heavily influenced by the government guidelines (in terms of technical interventions, per-hectare costs, etc. However, the GVM's experience of implementing the watershed project sponsored by the district government has not been positive (owing to red-tape and delay in release of funds). There is a high level of transparency (in terms of money spent) in the GVM's watershed projects, and it has borrowed from the international development discourse, the idea of people's participation through contribution towards project costs and creation of village development funds. It may be too early to judge whether this is leading to 'community self-reliance', but it is quite clear that these participatory exercises translate into lower wages for the poorer people due to compulsory deduction in the name of people's contribution. Yet, one of the main achievements of the GVM is to inculcate egalitarian values within village communities. It has directly challenged (in non-violent manner) the caste-based discriminations at the village level, and has been largely successful in making people of different caste groups sit together on common platforms and participate in its project activities.

I have shown that the GVM's watershed and JFM interventions have also created conflicting situations *between* village communities over the use of common local resources. The GVM's watershed projects (coupled with lift irrigation schemes) are directly beneficial for the landed social groups (as in any other watershed or agricultural development project), but poorer farmers and near-landless people tend to gain through wage employment in project activities. The GVM's watershed projects and the formation of new institutions (e.g. VDCs in project villages), it can be argued, have not benefited the poorest residents of villages the most in terms of economic gains, but the GVM has definitely created multiple poles of power in Udaipur villages (as the narratives from Ratanpura and Chirawa suggest). Village communities are largely dependent on the GVM for their developmental needs, but this is a viable option for them in the short run as they try to make use of the opportunities provided by various elements of a development regime (state agencies, *panchayats* and other NGOs).

The GVM's interventions in Udaipur villages, especially since the mid-1990s, have created patronage relationships between the organisation and rural communities. In the renewed role of 'delivering' development, the GVM functionaries have tried to enrol the rural poor into its developmental activities. They consolidate their position in the villages where they are operational for a while and venture into new villages (through incentives like lift irrigation schemes for its loyal clients). The GVM para-workers play a key role in this patron-client relationship. For them, association with the GVM provides a steady source of income. Some of these para-workers of the GVM have also contested *panchayat* elections and are successful in challenging the traditional systems of power and authority in their respective villages (e.g. in Ratanpura). Yet, in its quest of delivering development 'professionally' and rapidly, in the recent years, the time-consuming and challenging tasks of altering local power relations have now come to be abandoned in favour of meeting annual targets of land treatment and watershed activities.

Indeed, consciously avoiding direct confrontation with the state and maintaining distance from activist organisation have helped the GVM in gaining wider acceptance in the official development circles as well as in securing development funds from corporate sector more recently. However, increasing 'professionalisation' has led to the marginalisation of low-paid para-workers within the organisation. It remains to be seen to what extent grassroots NGOs are able to keep touch with the grassroots while sustaining the challenge of the increasing administrative costs of running their development projects in 'professional' manner.

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Chapter 6
'Village Republics' and People's Movement

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the rainwater harvesting and water conservation initiatives of a grassroots organisation called Tarun Bharat Sangh (hereafter TBS) based at village Bhikampura in Alwar district of north Rajasthan. TBS, which is inspired by the Gandhian notion of 'village republic' (village self-rule and self-reliance), has worked in Alwar district of northern Rajasthan for close to 30 years and received fame at the international level for its work on rainwater harvesting. TBS claims to have revived the traditional practice of rainwater harvesting through building large number of *johads* (small concave-shaped earthen dams to check soil and water run-off) in Alwar villages. Further, TBS claims to have *rejuvenated* some seasonal rivers in Alwar district and strengthened the natural resource base of several villages on a sustainable basis (to fight the ravages of recurrent droughts) by constructing a series of small water harvesting structures based on 'traditional wisdom' and through voluntary labour or *shramdaan*.

TBS celebrates the spirit of 'community' and considers itself as a grassroots movement rather than a conventional NGO in the sense that its activities are largely focused on reviving traditional rainwater harvesting systems. Starting its work in the mid-1980s of building small water harvesting structures in Alwar villages, TBS is now engaged in creating a network of organisations throughout India demanding people's control over the management of their common resources and protesting against the water policy of the central and state governments (which promote privatisation of water resources) or ambitious schemes of the central government, such as the interlinking of rivers (which, according to TBS, will further weaken people's control over the management or use of water resources). TBS was for a while also engaged in protests against illegal mining of soapstone in Alwar villages, and this led to the closing down of a large number of soapstone and marble mines in Rajasthan. Most of the TBS workers are ordinary (but generally young and educated/literate) village residents, and all the activities of TBS are managed in a

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populist and *informal* manner (with considerably less paper work) with emphasis on people's mobilisation, awareness campaigns and protest marches, etc. TBS activities are spread over 700 villages in Rajasthan (primarily in Alwar district), where it has built over 2500 water harvesting structures (big and small), and it can be considered as an important member of the development regime in the state dedicated to soil and water conservation.

Although TBS is engaged in building small structures to prevent soil and water run-off, it refrains from describing its activities as 'watershed development'. In fact, TBS ridicules 'watershed development' as practised by the government agencies or several technocratic NGOs, involving 'expert' or scientific knowledge, and describes its activities as *paani ka kaam* (literally, work for water), building on 'traditional knowledge', 'indigenous technology' and 'community participation'. The water harvesting initiatives of TBS are widely acclaimed as the people's movement for the control and use of water resources in rain-fed areas by a large section of the development regime. Surprisingly, TBS is applauded by actors ranging from left to right – *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (the famous anti-dam movement) to the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII). The Indian Government has rewarded TBS for innovations in participatory rainwater harvesting.

The leader of TBS, Rajendra Singh, has received the world-famous Ramon Magsaysay Award (in 2001) as well as the Stockholm Water Prize (in 2015), and many high-profile foreign dignitaries, researchers, journalists and film-makers visit Alwar villages and TBS *ashram* (or headquarters located in Bhikampura village). The activities of TBS are also praised by a wide range of civil society organisations, environmental activists and some renowned technocrats in India, and it has attracted a lot of publicity through the print and electronic media, which project TBS initiatives as a 'success story' of 'traditional wisdom' and community-led rainwater harvesting for drought proofing.

To what extent does TBS's claims of being 'alternative' hold true? I address this question by analysing TBS's ideology and examining how it uses the discourse of 'traditional knowledge' and 'community participation' to maintain exteriority vis-à-vis the development regime. I discuss its main agenda and activities and its operation in its 'field of action' (Alwar villages). I explore TBS's relationships with rural social groups and the other elements of the development regime dedicated to water conservation and watershed development in rural Rajasthan.

I problematise TBS's claims of strengthening community-based natural resource management and revival of 'traditional wisdom'. I arugue that in order to maintain its grassroots identity and celebrate 'traditional wisdom', TBS describes all its water harvesting structures (including anicuts and bunds with straight embankments, constructed using stone and concrete) by a generic name of *johad* (small earthen dam with a curved embankment).[1] The 'voluntary labour' often results in low wages for the poorest members of village communities, and TBS interventions

[1] An anicut is a small dam (with straight embankment) made of concrete and stone, which is constructed on a rivulet or streambed for plugging a drain. A *johad* is a concave-shaped earthen dam, which is built to store rainwater run-off. *Johad*s are usually built on common lands at the foothills,

create a system of dependency and patronage rather than people's empowerment or 'village republics' as TBS proclaims. While TBS has played a crucial role in mobilising people and helping them to undertake rainwater harvesting in the absence of state support, I contend there is a lack of democracy within the organisation.

Since mid-1990, TBS has attracted funds from foreign donors and development agencies including Swedish International Development Agency (hereafter SIDA), Swiss Development Corporation, ICCO, and Ford Foundation, besides the multilateral organisations, such as the UNDP. Interestingly, most of these donors have approached TBS rather than the other way round, owing to its popularity and distinct identity of promoting 'traditional knowledge' and community participation in water harvesting in its initial years (1985–1995). Of late, TBS's relationship with some of its foreign donors is not comfortable for its unconventional style of working or 'delivering development'. TBS is criticised by foreign donors for ignoring the capacity building and skills enhancement of its staff and not maintaining systematic accounts of project funds, apart from not addressing the questions of 'gender' and *equity* in its water harvesting activities. Furthermore, some foreign donors (e.g. ICCO) have started to condemn TBS for not treating the entire watershed area on a comprehensive basis as is done in conventional watershed development projects. The relationship of TBS with the local administration and the Government of Rajasthan is largely confrontational because TBS has built several structures on revenue (government) lands without taking official permission. PAWDI, a joint project of TBS and the DWD&SC funded by SIDA (mentioned in Chap. 4), failed due to TBS's protest against the corruption and misappropriation of project funds by government officials. All these issues make TBS an important case study to understand the larger politics of development in rural Rajasthan.

This chapter is divided into four parts. I start with a general profile of Alwar district and a brief history of irrigation system in late colonial and early post-colonial period. Presented next is a synoptic view on the genesis, organisational structure, ideology and agenda of TBS. Following this, I highlight TBS's Gandhian lineages and use of religion and folk knowledge in achieving high moral ground and distinct identity as an agent of development. Then I provide some examples to explain the problems of conflict *and* cooperation in management and development of natural resources under TBS's direction. This is followed by a critical analysis of TBS's claims of 'drought proofing' and 'community self-reliance'. I end this chapter with a discussion on TBS's relation with the wider development regime (media, donors and state).

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and unlike anicuts, they collect water from much smaller catchments and are very cheap to construct.

6.2 Alwar: A Brief Profile

Alwar district, located in the north-eastern part of Rajasthan, is characterised by ridges of rocky and precipitous hills. The main range, a continuation of Aravallis, runs due north and south of the district (Imperial Gazetteer 1908: 424). There are several seasonal rivers and streams in the district, and it is home to Sariska Tiger Reserve. Alwar was a princely state (under British suzerainty) before independence, ruled by Naruka Rajputs, an offshoot of the Kachwaha Rajputs, the ruling dynasty of Jaipur (ibid: 425). Due to its proximity to Delhi, Alwar has been successful in establishing some industrial areas, but the majority of the population residing in rural areas (almost 85 %) is still dependent on agriculture and allied activities for sustenance. A large proportion of the male population from the villages migrate to cities in search of wage employment. Some villages are exclusively inhabited by members belonging to same caste/tribe, but most of the villages are multi-caste.

Agriculture in Alwar, as in other semi-arid regions of Rajasthan, is heavily dependent upon rainfall, and the main sources of irrigation are wells and tube wells. These days, electric motors and diesel pump sets are used to draw water from wells and reservoirs, but earlier, a leather bucket worked by a rope attached to a pair of bullocks and running over a wooden pulley was used to draw water from wells (Imperial Gazetteer 1908). Apart from wells, which are the main source of irrigation, a small area is also served by bunds (large reservoirs) and canals. While there is reference to irrigation dams and reservoirs in the Imperial Gazetteer (1908) and the Rajasthan District Gazetteer of Alwar (1968), there is no reference to *johads* (small earthen dams) in these documents.

However, we do find reference in both these documents of the importance of bunds or irrigation dams (which are fairly large in size in comparison to earthen *johads*) in preventing soil and water run-off, improving sub-soil storage of water and recharging groundwater. The Imperial Gazetteer (p. 432) mentions about 175 irrigation dams in Alwar State. A regular Public Works Department was established in the state in 1890 for their maintenance and for the construction of new dams and bunds. This clearly indicates that the so-called traditional water harvesting system was not limited to small earthen dams or *johads*, and the feudal regime in that time was involved in the extension of secured irrigation facilities through fairly large-size bunds and reservoirs, besides privately owned wells. People were dependent on financial support by the feudal State in the periods of droughts and famines, and we find references of financial support to cultivators to dig temporary unbricked wells and repair or deepen masonry ones (ibid: 435).

The District Gazetteer (Alwar) of 1968 (p. 212) notes that there are two important types of bunds: submerging and storage. The primary function of submerging bunds is to store water which is soaked into the soil. Such bunds are generally shallow, and by the time sowing season starts, the bed gets dry on the surface and can be used for cultivation. Most of the bunds in the district belong to this category. Storage bunds (or irrigation dams) are meant to store rainwater which can be utilised for irrigation during the winter season (*rabi* crop). The District Gazetteer (ibid)

describes storage bunds as of 'greater value' to the farmers. This indicates that historically, *johads* or small earthen dams, which cater to a very small area, co-existed with fairly large-sized bunds for irrigation and other purposes. As such, we do not find any evidence to support the claims made by TBS that small earthen dams were traditionally the preferred mode of rainwater harvesting and that they provided an effective solution to water crises in periods of drought. The Irrigation and Agriculture departments in Rajasthan have been involved in the construction of concrete anicuts as well as earthen dams, albeit organisations like TBS took up this task on an extensive scale in Alwar district since the mid-1980s, and were able to cover many villages which had not been touched thus far, by the state agencies dedicated to water and soil conservation.

6.3 The Genesis of TBS

Tarun Bharat Sangh (meaning the Youth India Association) was formed as an NGO in Jaipur, the state capital of Rajasthan, in 1975.[2] The organisation basically comprised urban intellectuals, university teachers and students in Jaipur, inspired by the ideas of Gandhi (selfless service and simple living) and Jay Prakash Narayan (popularly known as JP).[3] The initial emphasis of TBS was to organise camps and training programmes to motivate and mobilise youth towards socially constructive activities, based on Gandhi's writings on 'the constructive programme' that had

[2] In the year 1975, a devastating fire amidst the cluster of hutments within the campus of Rajasthan University (Jaipur) brought to the forefront a handful of voluntary workers who helped with the rehabilitation of fire-affected families. A group of teachers and students of the University and other volunteers decided to organise themselves as a response group in the event of natural calamities, thereby giving birth to TBS. It was formed on 25 March 1975 and got registered as an NGO under the Societies Act on 30 May 1975.

[3] The formation of the TBS is co-terminus with the socialist movement aspiring for 'total revolution' in the country under the stewardship of Jay Prakash Narayan. JP was an ardent follower of Gandhi and a renowned leader of the *sarvodaya* movement and its *Bhoodan* campaign, which promoted voluntary distribution of land by big landowners to landless workers and tillers. He actively participated in the Civil Disobedience (1933) and Quit India (1942) movements under the leadership of Gandhi and was one of the founding members of the Congress Socialist Party, a left-wing group within the Congress. After independence, he got disillusioned with the practical experience of Nehruvian socialism and decided to abandon active politics and dedicate his life to the *sarvodaya* movement led by Vinoba Bhave. He set up his *ashram* in Hazaribagh district of Bihar (now in Jharkhand) and engaged in village reconstruction. He was bestowed with the Magsaysay award in 1965 for public service. He returned to active politics again in the late 1960s to agitate against the corrupt and dictatorial rule of Indira Gandhi and led a nationwide movement (also known as JP movement) against the Congress rule, which led to the imposition of emergency in India during 1975–1977. JP's health deteriorated during his prison detention in 1975, and he died in 1979. The first non-Congress government came to power at the centre after the general elections in 1977 under the leadership of Morarji Desai and guidance of JP. For details on 'total revolution', and JP's views on *sarvodaya* and socialism, see his writings *Towards Total Revolution* (1978, in four volumes) and *Socialism, Sarvodaya and Democracy* (1964).

been taken up by JP. Rajendra Singh,[4] posted at Jaipur, in the Department of Youth Affairs of the Government of India, came in contact with TBS around that time and became its active member. The scope of activities of TBS gradually expanded to include building of primary and informal education centres in Jaipur to educate the children of labourers in the city (Pangare 2003). The canvas of operation increased with time, and camps were also organised in rural areas. Influenced by the Gandhian notion of village 'self-reliance' and 'self-rule', Rajendra Singh was particularly perplexed with the widespread diversity between the rural and urban areas in terms of the basic needs of education, health and water. He finally decided to resign from his government job in 1985 to provide altruistic service in rural areas.

There is no systematic account of the happenings between 1985 and 1986, which mark the transition period in the TBS story as its base got changed from Jaipur to Bhikampura village in Alwar district. However, the TBS narrative goes like this: Rajendra Singh, along with four friends of his, on the occasion of Gandhi's birth anniversary on October 2, 1985, left for Kishori village in Thanagazi *tehsil* of Alwar district with a mission to dedicate their lives, skills and talent for the betterment of the poorest sections of the village community. It may look eccentric for them to have come to a village without having planned the work that they wanted to do, but I have no reason to doubt their altruistic motive as we find many examples of people educated in urban areas who have decided to live in villages of Rajasthan to offer selfless service for the betterment of lives of village people.[5] This band of youth took shelter in the open veranda of a temple near the bus stand of Kishori village. An acquaintance from Jaipur but belonging to a village near Kishori arranged for their accommodation in the outskirts of Bhikampura village (where the present TBS *ashram* is located, and this village is close to Kishori), and using Bhikampura as a base, the group started a primary health care and informal education centre. However, it was beyond the comprehension of the villagers as to why an outsider would like to offer selfless service without any motive for personal gain or hidden agenda. It took them a few days to establish initial rapport with the villagers, when a woman whose child was suffering from cholera got relief by life-saving drugs and medication given by Rajendra Singh (Shaha 2003). Gradually, they won the confidence of some older people by talking to them about everyday issues. They came to know about the problem of recurrent droughts and water scarcity in the village. The preceding year witnessed a severe drought in Rajasthan, and the decreased water availability and salinity had adversely affected both the problem of drinking water and agriculture in this region. The consequent decrease in agricultural productivity and fodder availability had eroded the livelihood opportunities leading to forced

[4] Rajendra Singh originally hails from Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh. In his college days, he was associated with 'Sangharsh Vahini (the student wing of JP movement), before coming to Jaipur for his job with the Government.

[5] Another example that one can cite is of Aruna Roy, a former bureaucrat, who has dedicated her life for the cause of the 'right to information' movement in rural Rajasthan. This movement is spearheaded by an organisation called the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), which is trying to bring transparency and accountability in the work of rural local bodies like the panchayats, and government offices dealing with development-related tasks.

migration from the area of up to 70 % of the population (Pangare 2003: 5). They also noticed that the majority of the young male population had migrated to cities like Delhi and Ahmedabad in search of gainful employment, which is usually construction work or rickshaw pulling.

Mangu Patel, a peasant from Gopalpura village (the neighbouring village to Bhikampura), motivated this group to undertake water harvesting activities. He confronted them by saying that 'you educated young men; you do not want to work but only talk….You want to earn your living from mere talk. If not, then bring *phavda* and *gainti* (tools for digging) tomorrow morning and I will tell you where to make a start'.[6] He actually wanted them to remove silt from a *johad* (small earthen dam) on a common land, which had become redundant for years of neglect. This was followed by heated argument among the five of them, and two of the members decided not to offer any physical labour and go back (ibid, 2001). Rajendra Singh decided to stay back and help in de-siltation work and renovation. The first *johad* was de-silted before the monsoon of 1986, entirely through voluntary labour, although the labourers were remunerated through food, approximately 8 kg of wheat per day, thanks to grant from Christian Aid for drought relief (TBS: Dialogue on Sariska, undated). The benefits of rainwater harvesting were immediately visible in the form of availability of water and grass for cattle and increase in groundwater level in wells located near *johad* (although it is difficult to establish a direct correlation between *johad* and groundwater table, which could be affected by a variety of reasons, including the heavy rain in that season). Rajendra Singh, then in his late 20s, found the mission of his life (to promote rainwater harvesting in Alwar villages), and he went back to Jaipur to ask the senior functionaries of TBS to help him establish an *ashram* in Bhikampura village.[7] The governing body of the TBS preferred to hand over the leadership of the organisation to Rajendra Singh. The TBS as we know today is the restructured version from 1986 when it changed its base from Jaipur to Bhikampura village in Alwar.

Rajendra Singh got support from some educated youths from the nearby villages who were willing to work with him for water conservation. They were unemployed, and the opportunity to work (with the hope of getting some money) was the main motivating force for them to join TBS.[8] They became the key functionaries of TBS in the years to come. Rajendra Singh was also able to generate funds (although meagre) from private donors and charitable foundations (especially using his contacts in Jaipur, and with the support of *sarvodayi* leaders and Gandhians in Rajasthan and Delhi, with whom he worked during the JP movement) and established an *ashram* (called 'Tarun ashram', which can also be called the 'headquarters' of the

[6] http://www.indiatogether.org/manushi/issue123/rajendra.htm. Accessed (15/05/2014).

[7] *Ashram* is a special institution in Gandhian philosophy. The concept of *ashram* as public sphere (open to all) as opposed to the western concepts of 'civil society' or coffee houses (open to literary classes) was popularised by Gandhi during the struggle for freedom. Many social activists and followers of Gandhi run their activities through *ashrams* along the lines of Sabarmati or Wardha *ashrams* established by Gandhi in India or Tolstoy Farm in South Africa.

[8] As revealed in informal conversations with key TBS functionaries.

organisation) in village Bhikampura. The story of *johad* construction in Gopalpura village spread through word of mouth to the nearby villages, whose residents started to contact TBS to build small water harvesting structures of various kinds: small and big earthen dams (*johad)*, submerging bunds (locally known as *bandhs*) and anicuts, field bunds (locally known as *medbandhi*), small ponds to collect rainwater for cattle (locally known as *dhav*) and small man-made lakes (locally known as *talab* or *talai*) on both private and common lands.

TBS activities expanded to other villages as they started to receive funds for constructing water harvesting structures (mainly from private donors). TBS is reported to have worked in more than 700 villages of Rajasthan (albeit most of its water harvesting activity is concentrated in Alwar). However, in several villages, only one structure (and sometimes, only a field bund) has been made (Kumar and Kandpal 2003). The demand for building water harvesting structures is huge in villages, and it is estimated that TBS receives around 1500 requests for the building of structures every year, but it is able to build only around 300 structures annually (Pangare 2003). It is pertinent to note that *johads* are cheaper to build in comparison to concrete anicuts, and the demand for anicuts is more in the villages for their durability and usefulness in irrigation purposes. The storage capacity and catchments of anicuts are much larger in comparison to *johad* (see Gupta 2011). At best, *johads* serve the purpose of arresting water and soil run-off and help in groundwater recharge, but water can be lifted for irrigation from anicut reservoirs using pump sets. However, TBS refers to all its water harvesting structures by the generic name of *johad* in front of the larger development community in urban areas, media or donors to maintain its unique identity as a grassroots organisation promoting 'local knowledge'. This seems to be an interesting use of discourse (of 'traditional knowledge' and community participation) by TBS to maintain *exteriority* from the development regime and at the same time to get funds from it.

6.4 Organisational Structure, Ideology and Agenda of TBS

For all practical purposes, Rajendra Singh is the prime authority in the organisation. TBS is registered as an NGO, and as such, there is an executive committee to direct the activities of the organisation. For several years, Siddhraj Dhadda (until his death in 2006), a renowned socialist leader and close associate of JP, was the President of TBS and Rajendra Singh General Secretary. TBS started with a modest beginning, and the intake of staff (or activists in TBS parlance) has risen gradually with the increase in funds, especially from foreign donors since the mid-1990s onwards.[9] Most of the TBS functionaries come from a rural background and belong to villages of Alwar district. The majority of them have received some formal education and possess small landholdings. Being associated with TBS since the mid-1980s, some

[9]The annual turnover of the organisation in 1986 was merely Rupees 15,658, and it increased to Rupees 2,57,63,274 by 2000–2001 (TBS Annual Report 2001).

of them now occupy key posts in the executive committee, and they look after the day-to-day activities of the organisation although all the important decisions are taken by Rajendra Singh. TBS calls its workers *karyakarta* (or activists who are paid honorarium, which again depends on the availability of funds). From the late 1990s (when TBS started receiving large amounts of funds from foreign as well as domestic agencies) it has also recruited some 'professionals' (holding degrees in social work, rural development or forest management) as per the requirements of donor agencies (like New Delhi-based Rajeev Gandhi Foundation, UNDP or CAPART) to work in the projects funded by them. However, there are no civil engineers working with TBS, and it does not employ any external technical staff to construct and design its water harvesting structures. Some TBS functionaries have learnt the basics of designing bunds and anicuts through experience, and TBS also relies on the knowledge of local masons in the villages. Gopal Singh, a key TBS functionary (who never received any formal training in civil engineering but had been working as a mason before coming in contact with TBS), plays a key role in designing all the big and concrete structures. A few TBS functionaries (on condition of anonymity) informed me that their honorarium is much less in comparison to what they would get in other NGOs and given a chance they would like to move on. This indicates that while Rajendra Singh describes TBS as a grassroots movement (rather than an NGO), not all TBS functionaries feel the same way, and for them ideological commitment of selfless service to rural communities is not the primary concern.

The ideology and agenda of TBS are shaped by its leader Rajendra Singh, and the rest of the functionaries simply follow the ideas expressed by him. TBS functionaries perceive their task as '*pani ka kaam*' (work for water conservation) and compare it with the Gandhian emphasis on '*khadi and charkha*'.[10] Rajendra Singh believes that had Gandhi been alive, he would have taken the task of water conservation, because it is the need of the times. He remarked,

> Water is the lifeline of the rural economy, and it should be conserved to increase the livelihoods of the rural community. Water is the only common thread that can bind the community together and channel its energies towards the betterment of all.[11]

In this narrative, there are implicit assumptions about 'rural communities' as conflict-free entities. Inequalities (based on caste, class or gender) are undermined in communitarian approaches like the one followed by TBS. It is pertinent to note that it is not the poorest but relatively better-off village residents (generally, medium farmers) who approach TBS to sponsor water harvesting activities in their villages. They are able to mobilise the poorest in construction activities (because of the perpetual demand for wage labour in the villages) and are also able to enforce the regulations of 'voluntary labour', when it actually translates into lower wages for the poorest.

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[10] *Khadi* is hand-spun cotton, and *Charkha* is a spinning wheel. Gandhi promoted the use of *khadi* to inculcate the feeling of self-reliance under the colonial regime.

[11] Informal conversation with Rajendra Singh at TBS ashram on 04/12/ 2003.

TBS consciously avoids the more mainstream concept and practice of 'watershed management'. It does not comprehensively treat a watershed area (by an array of physical activities such as gully plugs, check dams, contour bunds, etc.) and only engages in the construction of water harvesting structures in villages. TBS also does not provide any financial support for digging wells or lift-irrigation schemes. TBS functionaries proudly say (in a rhetorical fashion) that '*hum pani dharti mein bhejne ka kaam kartey hain, nikalne ka nahin*' (literally, our work is concentrated on recharging groundwater, and TBS does not support activities of extracting underground water).

The demand for water harvesting structures is ever increasing but in the initial years (late 1980s and early 1990s), TBS functionaries conducted *padyatras* (public marches/processions) to make contacts with the new villages and create awareness regarding water conservation and afforestation. TBS workers also held *shivirs* or camps to discuss social evils like alcoholism, dowry, etc. besides water conservation activities. During the *padyatras* and *shivirs*, TBS workers identify key village residents who can take responsibility for mobilising the rest of villagers to construct water harvesting structures in their villages (in the early years, most of the structures constructed were earthen *johads,* primarily on common lands). To be able to claim that they act on the collective interests of the villagers, TBS functionaries motivate villagers to formulate *gram sabhas*. These bodies, although carrying the same name as the statutory Panchayati Raj institution of *gram sabha* (body of all village adults), are different from them. *Gram sabhas* promoted by TBS are like user groups formed during the construction phase and are meant to act as a link between TBS and the villagers, with one member of each household (generally male) of the village represented in it. These days, the villagers first approach TBS, and only then do TBS functionaries visit the villages and discuss issues related to construction of water harvesting structures with them in public meetings.

The selection of sites (for water harvesting structures) in TBS programmes is demand driven and arbitrary (as against conventional watershed projects, where 'needs' are predetermined by the project implementing agencies). Site selection is influenced by certain criteria that would help minimise costs, for example, width of stream/length of structure, catchment area, rock base or the ready availability of construction material near the site. Site selection is ultimately based on agreement between the benefiting individuals and TBS workers. TBS workers eschew the principles of civil engineering in designing their cost-effective water harvesting structures (earthen dams, anicuts, etc.), privileging 'conventional wisdom' or commonsensical knowledge (as against 'technical and expert knowledge'). I observed that several newly built concrete anicuts broke down in flash floods during the monsoon of 2003, and this suggests that concrete structures constructed by TBS are not very durable, although cost effective and cheap. Design and quality of structure are usually influenced by the direct beneficiaries (persons contributing towards the cost of structures). For structures on common lands, the *gram sabha* leaders (who have taken the responsibility to mobilise the contribution) interact with TBS workers to finalise design (depending on how much villagers are willing to pay). On private structures, it is the family heads that interact with TBS functionaries.

There are no hard and fast rules to determine villagers' contributions. The details of this arrangement are discussed in the meetings of *gram sabha,* where TBS functionaries participate as catalysts or advisors. The idea behind this contribution from the villagers is to inculcate the feeling of 'ownership' of all in the water harvesting structures and to prepare the village community to engage in 'constructive programmes'.[12] TBS believes that the over-dependence of the rural communities on the state agencies during the last five decades has bereft them of their capacities to work collectively for their own good.[13] The community contribution for structures on common lands (*johads,* anicuts*,* bunds, etc.) ranges between 25 and 33 % of the total estimated cost. Nowadays, in most cases of community structures, 33 % contribution by villagers (in the form of 'voluntary labour') is raised. TBS also repairs old structures built by government, and for this, contribution amount may be fixed equally for each household, or some (who are relatively well off) may contribute more. For all community structures, once the rate of contribution is decided in public meetings, leaders or office-bearers of *gram sabha* start collecting money, following which construction work starts. TBS's share of the money is a proportion of the amount raised by villagers. For all labourers engaged in earthwork in common structures, 33 % of wages are deducted at source towards contribution at the time of payment. In the making of private structures (field bunds, anicuts or earthen embankments), the direct beneficiaries negotiate with the TBS workers, and in most cases, the TBS contribution amounts to around 33 %. Budgeting for structures (on common lands) is based on approximate figures. Sometimes, the total of villagers' contribution and the TBS share can fall short of the total amount finally required for construction. To complete the construction work, the villagers then conduct a second round of meetings and mobilise the remaining amount. In some cases where villagers were not able to raise the additional funds, TBS did not put in extra money, which resulted in poor quality of structures. For concrete anicuts, generally speaking, only those people come forward who see direct benefit from the structures and have ready cash to pool in.

TBS programmes are not primarily involved in reworking gender relations. Even though TBS workers claim to encourage women to participate, I found little evidence of participation by women in the '*gram sabha*' meetings that I attended in Bhaonta village (one of the 'trophy' villages of TBS). TBS maintains that rather than promoting the token representation of women in the meetings, its focus is on activities that directly benefit women (e.g. '*johads*' and tree conservation provide fodder and fuel on a sustainable basis, and these are the activities managed primarily by women). On the issues of gender, Rajendra Singh maintains that

[12] Term first used by Gandhi in his pamphlet entitled *The Constructive Programme: its meaning and place*. Gandhi described this important programme in the following manner: 'Thirty-four years of continuous experience and experimenting in truth and non-violence have convinced me that non-violence cannot be sustained unless it is linked to conscious body-labour and finds expression in our daily contact with our neighbours. This is the constructive programme. It is not an end. It is an indispensable means and therefore is almost convertible with the end' (cited in Pinto 1998: 131).

[13] As informed by Kanhaiya Lal Gujar, a senior TBS functionary, on 05/01/ 2004.

> Treating women as a separate category (as opposed to men) is a western way of looking at social relations. In the Indian family system, a woman is the axis of the family. […] Searching for water accounts for a significant part of women's daily labour in India, and *johads* and rainwater harvesting directly contribute to reduce their drudgery."[14]

Rejecting the charge that their approach to gender is conservative (owing to the absence of women in public meetings), TBS insists that it does not aim to 'wait' until the participatory arena becomes more representative or until gender relations are altered; it believes it is more practical to find ways that can achieve concrete results more quickly.

TBS believes that if villagers themselves tackle the problem of water shortages by building small water harvesting structures, they would be able to harvest at least two crops in a year. This, in turn, would enable a 'respectable' and 'dignified' life in their own village as they will not be forced to the drudgery of living in slums in big cities.[15] '*Pani ka kaam'* is part of TBS's programme of total village reconstruction, along with other social issues like informal primary education and fighting alcoholism. Making a start from water conservation works, TBS has gradually taken up issues related to forest conservation and 'illegal mining' in Aravalli hill ranges. For the past 10 years, TBS has also engaged itself with issues related to national and global significance like the National Water Policy and campaign against the interlinking of rivers in India.

TBS (in keeping with Gandhian and agrarian populists in India) tries to spread the message of '*gram swaraj*' (village self-rule, indicated by sovereignty and self-sufficiency) and '*gram swabhiman*' (village self-respect). TBS believes that 'self-respect' could be gained only by becoming self-sufficient (as against 'state dependent') in terms of requirements for water, food, fuelwood and fodder. TBS is in continuous touch with Gandhian and '*sarvodayi*' thinkers and activists in the country. It also exchanges ideas with individuals, agencies and research institutes, both national and international, engaged in decentralised control over natural resources, such as the Gandhi Peace Foundation and the New Delhi–based Centre for Science and Environment and Ford Foundation. Medha Patkar, associated with the anti-dam movement (Narmada Bachao Andolan), cites TBS initiatives as an example of 'people's sovereignty over water', an alternative to pro-capitalist dam-building policies of the Indian state.

Recently, TBS conducted a nationwide campaign to promote *pani ka kaam* and to reassert community rights over water.[16] They have also helped in the formation of a 'river parliament', the *Arvari Sansad*, by mobilising people from about 70 villages in the catchments of Arvari river, a seasonal river in Alwar district, to discuss and make policies on water conservation and management of natural resources in these villages (more on this later in this chapter). The latest initiative of Rajendra Singh

[14] Informal conversation at Tarun Ashram (04/12/2003).

[15] Informal conversation with Rajendra Singh at Tarun Ashram (12/12/03).

[16] TBS issued a series of pamphlets to create awareness about water conservation works in different parts of the country and also established a network of people and organisations in the name of *'Jal Biradari'* (Water Community).

and TBS is *Jal Vidhyapeeth* (Water University), where people can learn the basics of rainwater harvesting and spread the message of water conservation throughout the country.[17] The idea of this kind of university emerged during *Jal Yatra* (nationwide tour) that Rajendra Singh conducted in 2003 to promote rainwater harvesting throughout India and to create a network of organisations and individuals from different states that are engaged in rainwater harvesting or watershed development activities.

6.5 The TBS Ashram

TBS does not have an 'office' but an *ashram*, located in Bhikampura village, which is about 20 km away from the *tehsil* headquarters (Thanagazi) and almost 70 km from the district headquarters (Alwar). *Ashrams* are a unique institution of Gandhi's civil society (see Sinha 2008). Rudolph and Rudolph (2003:392) provide a comparative analysis of the Western notion of civil society (epitomised in 'coffee house') and Gandhian notion of civil society (epitomised in 'ashram') in the following words:

> The Gandhian ashram expanded the concept of a public sphere from emphasis on the discursive exchanges of educated man to exemplary performances whose enactment would trigger mass discussions. Satyagrahas were not just large-scale assertion of non-violent resistance. They were vehicles for launching dramatic action that would politicise millions of people including uneducated rural and urban folks, altering them to issues, engaging them in public debate. The ashrams were set up in the context of educating and encouraging a public to assert human rights where they were restricted by the racist regime of General Smuts in South Africa or the colonial regime in British India. To conduct that education, the ashram set an example—not a quiet, private example, such as that of Kalidasa's peaceful and shady forest retreats—but one whose simplicity, hardship, and political self sacrifice were meant to be publicly visible.

The TBS *ashram* is the centre of all its activities and venue of congregations, training camps and assemblies. The *ashram* provides accommodation and food for TBS activists, and some key TBS functionaries reside here although they visit their homes and families regularly. There is also a small *ayurvedic* dispensary in the ashram. The building of the *ashram* expanded as the funds came in, so one could easily see a lack of systematic planning in the architecture. Undoubtedly, life in the TBS *ashram* is very simple by any standards. The majority of TBS workers come from a rural background and belong to diverse castes, tribes and religious groups. The opportunity to live together and transcend the barriers of parochial identities helps to create a 'shared identity' revolving around *paani ka kaam.* This can be seen in the common kitchen at the TBS *ashram* and the mandatory requirement for residents to wash their own dishes. To override the reservations of purity and pollution, Gandhi

[17] Interestingly, the governing body of this Jal Vidyapeeth, which is based at Tarun Ashram, Bhikampura, includes retired and serving members of premier management and technology institutes, like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs).

in his *ashrams* promoted common dining in a single row and every resident to see to the cleaning of his own dishes (Rudolph and Rudolph 2003: 396; also see Thomson 1993). In rural Rajasthan, it is still not very common for a so-called upper-caste person to eat food cooked by a Muslim and served by a person belonging to a scheduled caste (former 'untouchables'). TBS *ashram* rejects caste- and religion-based discriminations or practices and like Gandhian *ashrams* prohibits consumption of non-vegetarian food, alcohol and tobacco on the premises. A common identity of being a member of the *sanstha* (literally, organisation) and living together in an *ashram* binds all the activists albeit individual activists are driven by their own interests of securing employment with TBS. This shared identity is largely shaped by Rajendra Singh, and the wider development regime (including media) has promoted TBS activities as a successful example of 'community-driven' and 'traditional' rainwater harvesting: an alternative to 'state dependency' and 'official' watershed projects.

'Tarun Ashram' also provides a platform for farmer-to-farmer interactions (which are of course mediated and facilitated by NGO functionaries or government officials who coordinate these 'exposure trips'). During my stay in Tarun Ashram in 2003–2004, groups of farmers from the adjoining states of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat and from areas as far as Pondicherry visited TBS *ashram* and Alwar villages. In their speeches and talks with farmers, TBS functionaries denounce the development policy of the state for its 'urban bias' and reiterate the rhetoric of *gram swabhiman* (village self-respect). In his speech to a team of farmers from Madhya Pradesh (who were the 'beneficiaries' of a watershed project sponsored by the Government of Denmark), Kanhaiya Lal Gujar said,[18]

> We peasants need to protect our self respect by undertaking cooperative activities like rainwater harvesting and taking control of the task of development of our natural resources. Else, urbanites will keep on exploiting us. Why is it that the prices of the goods produced in factories, such as cloth and iron, always increase, but that of crops produced by us often decrease? Why is water in reservoirs and lakes located in rural areas supplied to cities and towns when our fields remain thirsty? […] Rural development cannot be learnt in institutions located in urban centres, and English educated urbanites undertaking these courses can never truly understand the dynamics of village communities and rural social life. TBS has turned many poor peasants into community development experts. We need village workers and activists for rural development programmes, and not English educated urbanistes.

Like in Gandhi's *ashrams*, people from all walks of life are welcome in 'Tarun Ashram'. Apart from farmers and peasants, 'high-profile' visitors from diverse backgrounds and ideologies have come to the *ashram* or Alwar villages – foreign dignitaries (e.g. Prince Charles), foreign donors (office-bearers of UNDP, Ford Foundation, ICCO, SIDA, etc.), constitutional heads and parliamentarians (e.g. the President of India), social activists and academics (e.g. Sundar Lal Bahuguna of 'chipko' movement fame, Medha Patkar of Narmada Bachao Andolan, Vandana Shiva, the famous eco-feminist, and M. S. Swaminathan, the 'father of green

[18] Excerpts from the speech given at Tarun Ashram on 07/12/2003.

revolution' in India), Gandhian activists and heads of research organisations (such as the New Delhi–based Centre for Science and Environment). The visits by such renowned people reinforce the shared identity based on *paani ka kaam* amongst TBS workers and give them some sense of worth for the rainwater harvesting work that they are undertaking.

During the visits by members of the wider development regime (journalists, academics, NGO functionaries or project functionaries of watershed development programmes from different parts of India), Rajendra Singh always reminds villagers that these people have come to learn from you and to appreciate what you (villagers) have done to conserve rainwater. Further, TBS tries to achieve high moral ground by referring to its water conservation activities or *paani ka kaam* as *punya ka kaam* ('good deed' in Hindu mythology). In Rajasthan, digging of community wells, storage tanks or construction of water reservoirs have traditionally been considered as 'good deeds'. These were among the most favoured philanthropic activities in feudal times, and TBS equates its rainwater harvesting activities as 'good deeds' and its key activists (who reside in *ashram*) as *jal yoddhas* (water crusaders). Like Gandhi, who made extensive use of religious symbols for his mass movements, TBS incorporates (and sometimes *invents*) religious symbols and practices in its nature conservation activities.

6.5.1 Religious Symbols in Nature Conservation

In front of the main building of 'Tarun Ashram', slogans are written for water and nature conservation. Interestingly, there are two paintings at the entrance of the main building in which a god is depicted in the form of a tree and Earth in the form of a goddess. The following titles are given to these paintings respectively: *Per mein hai bhagwan, iska karo samman* (literally, 'Gods reside in trees, and therefore, trees should be respected') and *Prakriti se jitna lo, utna hi usko lautao* (literally, 'Give back to nature as much as you derive from it'). When any new water conservation work is started by TBS, a *bhoomi poojan* is performed.[19] TBS maintains that they respect the traditions and customs of village community by performing this ritual. The ceremony is generally performed by simply breaking up a coconut fruit at the site of construction in the presence of TBS workers and villagers and by distributing *gur* (jaggery) or sweets. In some villages, if the majority of villagers insist on performing the ritual of *pooja* (prayer) by a Brahmin priest, TBS does not object to it. TBS always lets it be known that rainwater harvesting or *pani ka kaam* is a sacred work, and it uses the ritual of *bhoomi poojan* to give a sacred touch to its interventions.

[19] A traditional practice of offering prayers to 'Mother Earth' before starting up new construction activity. This practice is very common throughout the country in both villages and urban areas.

TBS organised a massive *padyatra* in 1989 in Alwar villages to promote tree plantation, which culminated on the day of Raksha Bandhan,[20] when TBS workers tied *rakhis* to trees. This is a symbolic action (initiated by TBS and inspired by 'chipko movement') to create awareness for the cause of forest protection. Another example of the use of religious symbols by TBS in forest conservation is *dharadi* (or tree worshipping). It is a common practice in several Rajasthan villages to believe particular species of trees to be sacred for the extended kin group or clan. These particular species of trees (e.g. *Neem*, *Khejri* or *Pipal*) are worshipped by the members of that clan on certain auspicious occasions. TBS decided to organise a s*ammelan* (conference) of villagers in the TBS *ashram* in 1997 to generate awareness about this folk tradition. Rajendra Singh (1997:1) in line with anti-modern thinkers such as Shiva (1992) proclaims that the Western education system and modern science would consider 'tree worship' as superstitious and would deny any positive role to traditions and 'traditional knowledge'.[21] TBS believes that folk traditions and wisdom can be creatively used for nature conservation, and documentation of local practices like *dharadi* can help in the efforts to promote traditional wisdom. TBS emphasises the 'non-economic' (cultural) meaning of natural resources like trees and tries to motivate people to take up tree plantation and afforestation activities.

TBS, as Gandhians, maintains that religion can play a positive role in collective action. TBS has tried (although with limited success in some villages) to revive the practice of *Dev bani* (or sacred groves). In feudal times, many villages in this region used to have small woodlands, generally surrounding a temple of local deity. TBS workers and several villagers informed me that cutting of trees in these woodlands, known as *Dev bani* (literally, deity's woods), was considered a sin for the reason that it will make the local deity angry and bring misfortune to the cutter. While cutting of trees in *Dev bani* was prohibited for everyone, effectively, in most cases, these small woodlands were exclusively used by the priests of the temple for the supply of fuelwood and for maintaining a serene environment around temples. Property rights over these woodlands were ambiguous – in most cases they were the property of the temple. After independence, the Forest Department became the custodian of these woodlands, and in some cases, the government allowed the large temples to retain their rights. Some elderly villagers and priests of the temples in Garh Basai village informed me that the control by Forest Department (a secular body) diluted the religious sanctions attached to these small woodlands. Generally speaking, the woodlands under the (private) control of temples have survived better than those under the control of the Forest Department (unlike the priest of a temple, the forest guard is not always present to keep vigil over tree fellers, and sometimes, the guard himself is involved in tree felling). My respondents (both TBS functionaries

[20] Hindu festival (but also celebrated by Muslims in some parts of India) in the monsoon season on which women tie a band (called 'rakhi') on the wrist of their brothers and ask for their support and protection.

[21] A booklet entitled *Dharadi: Naye Sandharbhon Mein* (Dharadi: In the new context), published by TBS (1997).

and villagers) maintained that the increase in population and the resultant stress on limited natural resources was the main reason for the depletion of forest cover, including the so-called sacred groves.

TBS advances the notion that depletion of forest cover has led to the erosion of topsoil and increased run-off of rainwater, which in turn is responsible for recurrent droughts.[22] It has attempted to revive the practice of *Dev bani* in some villages as it believes that religious sanctions are an important mechanism to involve community in development of natural resources. It has helped in tree plantation on revenue lands and common lands and designated these patches as *Dev bani* in villages like Bhaonta, Gopalpura, Garh Basai and Jogianwala.[23] These are the villages where TBS has its presence for a long time, and as a result, new forest cover has been created in recent years by the efforts of TBS (through sponsoring pit-digging activities). However, in several other villages, where TBS wanted the village community to undertake tree plantations entirely through voluntary labour, it has remained unsuccessful in inspiring the villagers as they do not see any direct or immediate benefits of tree plantations on common lands.[24]

6.6 Cooperation and Conflict: Some Village Narratives

In this section, I present stories from four villages to highlight the processes of negotiation, cooperation *and* conflict in water conservation activities of TBS. My basic aim is to problematise the notion of 'community' in 'community-based natural resource management' and argue that TBS's claims of revival of village-based institutions for rainwater harvesting need cautious reading. I also highlight the tensions between TBS and the state and the lack of state support in rainwater harvesting as one of the main reasons for the rise of TBS in the region.

6.6.1 Bhaonta: A Story of a 'Trophy Village'?

About 23 km south-east of the *tehsil* headquarters of Thanagazi are the twin villages of Bhaonta–Kolyala. There are three caste groups in the village: Gujar (OBC), Rajput (General) and Balai (SC). While Gujar are the numerical majority (almost

[22] There is no unanimity within the scientific community over the argument that recurrent droughts are directly linked to the depletion of forest cover and cutting of trees. There could be several reasons for the occurrence of droughts, including climate change and decrease in average annual rainfall in the region.

[23] Interestingly, a fine was slapped by the district administration for planting trees on revenue wasteland Gopalpura village in 1989, which was later revoked by the intervention of higher authorities.

[24] My interviews with several TBS *karyakartas* and villagers confirm this.

75 % of households), Rajputs have relatively larger landholdings (roughly 2–3 ha per household). Balai (as a caste group) are the poorest in the village, and the majority of them are marginal farmers or near landless. Most of them work as wage labourers in Delhi or are involved in carpet weaving and goat rearing. In 1987, TBS first came into contact with this village through one of its activists, who had some relations here. TBS first started the desiltation and repair work of an old *johad*, in which only one family (Gujar) which owned a field close to that *johad* came forward to offer voluntary labour. Gradually, some youths from this village (including Kanhaiya Lal Gujar, who later became the General Secretary of TBS) started discussions with Rajendra Singh and came forward to undertake more water harvesting works in Bhaonta–Kolyala. Since then, TBS has done extensive rainwater harvesting and water conservation work (both private and community structures).

While the highest amount has been spent by TBS (its contribution being 75 % of the total costs on structures on common lands) on two community bunds (concrete), in which all the villagers contributed (poorest villagers in the form of labour and relatively well-off in the form of cash), TBS has provided financial assistance (approximately 50 % of the total costs) for many earthen dams and anicuts on private lands that mainly benefit relatively well-off Gujar and Rajput farmers. Balais, who are near landless, have benefited only from wage employment during construction activities and increase in fodder and grass for goats as a result of rainwater harvesting. In other community-owned structures (apart from the two bunds) *only* those villagers who perceived direct benefit from the structures (owing to proximity to their fields) have contributed towards construction costs. Generally speaking, the direct beneficiaries of TBS interventions of over a decade are those farmers who already possessed most fertile lands (with their own wells) or those who could afford to dig new wells and install diesel-operated pump sets to extract groundwater and irrigate new fields which were previously non-arable for the lack of water supply.

Bhaonta–Kolyala can be described as the 'trophy village' of TBS. Two of its senior functionaries belong to this village, and TBS brings all its high-profile visitors here to show the most successful example of their water harvesting works. The TBS *gram sabha* in the village was formed in 1987–1988. The village community (at the behest of TBS) has undertaken afforestation activities and declared the forestland surrounding the village as *Lok vanyajeev abhyaranya* or 'people's wildlife sanctuary' (as opposed to wildlife sanctuaries designated by the Forest Department). This is TBS's strategy to assert autonomy from the state machinery dedicated to forest conservation and to demonstrate that village communities are responsible enough to manage and take care of their local natural resources. The *gram sabha* constituted by TBS has laid down conventions and rules for the use of resources. A self-imposed moratorium on tree felling and hunting has been adopted besides restriction on open grazing (for the first 3 years) in the areas where new tree saplings have been planted. The Forest Department of Rajasthan has appreciated these efforts of TBS and the village community. The President of India has awarded a cash prize and certificate of appreciation to the *gram sabha* of Bhaonta–Kolyala in 2000. The award money has been deposited in a village common fund and has been used to

construct a small concrete bund on community land as per TBS instructions. The Prince of Wales also visited this village and appreciated the work done by TBS. In just over a decade, since TBS initiated water harvesting activities in Bhaonta–Kolyala, it has come to the limelight and is often described as a successful example of 'community-based natural resource development' or 'drought proofing' through traditional rainwater harvesting (see UN-IAWG-WES 1998).

However, the celebration of 'community' and 'traditional knowledge' in the case of TBS requires cautious reading. TBS does not directly address the issues of inequality within the village community. In a rhetoric fashion, it reinstates that '*paani ka kaam* is for the benefit of all'. The depiction of total *consensus* or harmony in TBS narrative is misleading. My respondents in Bhaonta told me that within the village, there are differences over the use of prize money received from the President. Some villagers wanted to replace an old earthen bund by a concrete anicut. They made the accusation that the final decision was taken by TBS functionaries without any meeting of the *gram sabha*. They also informed me that the current treasurer of the *gram sabha* has misappropriated common funds for his private use. This indicates a lack of trust between the members of Bhaonta 'community'.

The register of *gram sabha* suggests that people from the neighbouring village are involved in cutting down trees from the forest rejuvenated by TBS and the people of Bhaonta–Kolyala. TBS initiatives for forest conservation and afforestation have drawn new boundaries between village forest and common lands, which were until recently quite blurred. Kanhaiya Lal Gujar informed me that because of the TBS's backing, it is now possible even for people belonging to the Balai community (former 'untouchables') to exchange blows with the upper-caste 'encroachers' from the neighbouring villages trying to destroy the common property of Bhaonta–Kolyala. However, the attendance register of *gram sabha* indicates that the attendance is quite poor, with women and Balais virtually absent in the meetings. My interviews with some members of the Balai community reveal that the *gram sabha* (formed by TBS) is almost non-operational apart from maintaining a 'visitors' book' in which high-profile dignitaries write their comments. TBS claims that rainwater harvesting has made Bhaonta–Kolyala 'drought proof' and prevented outmigration from this village. Upon asking if this is really true, a young Balai man in Bhaonta said,

> I have only 2 *bigha* land and it is not possible to survive merely on it. I go to Delhi for six months and work as a wage-labourer in the construction industry. I am not sure if the underground water level has gone up in the last ten years or so. […] As far as most of the Balais are concerned, wage employment during construction of water harvesting structures sponsored by TBS has been the biggest benefit but this is at best only a temporary relief. We need to go to Delhi in order to survive.[25]

[25] Excerpts from interview on 23/11/2003.

6.6.2 *Hamirpur and Samra: A Story of Intra-Village Conflicts*

Hamirpur village is located downstream of Arvari River, whose origin is near Bhaonta village. TBS has built around 300 small or big water harvesting structures in the basin of Arvari River (TBS Annual Report 2002). Hamirpur is a fairly large village with Meenas (ST) being the numerically dominant community. There are 12 hamlets out of which 8 are exclusively inhabited by Meenas and the rest by Jogis (OBC) and Balais. Like Bhaonta, this is one of the villages where TBS interventions started in 1987 and continued for a long time. TBS has built a total of 49 water harvesting structures (including 22 field bunds, 3 anicuts, 13 bunds and 11 *johads*), out of which 16 structures are on common lands. The first contact of the village with TBS was made by Rudamal Meena, who first heard about TBS's water harvesting work from his relatives in Gopalpura (the village where TBS first started desilting *johad)*. Foreseeing the opportunity of personal gain from rainwater harvesting works, Rudalal Meena went to Bhikampura and invited Rajendra Singh to his village. TBS intervention started with field bunding in his fields in 1987 and since then has escalated its activities in Hamirpur. For all the water conservation work on private lands, TBS has contributed nearly 50 % of the total costs and for all the community structures 75 % of the total costs.

A concrete anicut was built on the course of Arvari River by TBS in Hamirpur in 1998. In terms of villagers' contribution (in cash or kind), most of it came from the families (Meenas) cultivating fields in the vicinity. Although no systematic records have been maintained of villagers' contributions, my interviews with Rudamal Meena and TBS workers responsible for this area reveal that major contributors were 40 Meena households. The site of the structure was selected to benefit Rudamal the most. About 1 ha of his land that has come in the submergence area of the reservoir can now be used for cultivating winter crop (when the water recedes). The anicut came in the news when, after its construction in 1998, the Government issued fishing permits to private contractors. The village residents (with the support of TBS) campaigned against it and got the permit cancelled. This event inspired TBS to constitute Arvari Parliament, a congregation of about 70 villages along the basin of the river to assert people's control over the use and control of their natural resources (more on it in the next section).

Although the TBS work in the village started in 1987, the *gram sabha* was formed only in the year 1997–1998 when the construction of the large anicut started. The office-bearers of this *gram sabha* constituted by TBS belong to the extended family of Rudamal Meena. The President of India has also given a certificate of appreciation and a cash prize to the *gram sabha* of Hamirpur, besides that of Bhaonta. When I visited the village in January 2004, the *gram sabha* was already dysfunctional. The reason was the conflict between Rudamal (leader of the *gram sabha* formed by TBS and a supporter of Congress party) and the *sarpanch* (who belongs to the rival BJP) of the *gram panchayat* over the issue of sharing the dais with the President when he visited Hamirpur in 2000. The security staff and organisers of the award-giving ceremony only allowed one representative to come to the

stage. TBS recommended Rudamal to go to the stage and collect the prize. The *sarpanch* of *panchayat* of Hamirpura took it as a personal insult and since then has turned against TBS and any of its activities in the village.

While it was the conflict between democratically elected rural local bodies and TBS-formed village bodies in Hamirpura, in the neighbouring village of Samra, the *gram sabha* formed by TBS became dysfunctional over the issue of a monetary fine imposed by it on a villager for cutting down trees on the common land. He refused to pay the penalty and challenged the legality of this *gram sabha* and its power to impose fines. This suggests that creation of people's institution is not an easy task, and the rosy picture of 'community-based natural resource development' in communitarian or neo-populist discourses (and in TBS narratives) often turns out to be conflict ridden. Organisations like TBS which claim to have *revived* the spirit of 'community' and collective action frequently negate inherent conflicts and difference within 'community', even though it is often their presence and actions that provide a new dimension to such conflicts. However, they do play a positive role in helping village residents who have been neglected by the development machinery of the state, which I have explained below in the case of Kraska village.

6.6.3 Kraska: A Story of Nature Conservation Refugees

Kraska village (spread in three hamlets) is situated in the core zone of Sariska Tiger Reserve and inhabited by Gujars and Meenas. In 1972, when Sariska was declared a 'tiger reserve', the government issued an eviction order, and all the agricultural land was taken over by the Forest Department after giving nominal monetary compensation to villagers. Since then, agriculture has been banned in the village. The village residents were given lands (uncultivable) in compensation in a deserted place (about 20 km away from Kraska village), and force was used by the Forest Department to evacuate them from this village. Many of the original inhabitants sold the lands they got in compensation and returned to Kraska. Gradually, the Forest Department has also come to terms with the situation and stopped harassing villagers.[26] Villagers practice animal husbandry because agriculture is banned by the Forest Department in the tiger reserves. Kraska is situated on the top of a hill, and to sell their milk products, villagers have to walk 4–5 km downhill. Two handpumps installed by the government are the only source of drinking water in the village, besides a community well which often runs dry. Sometimes, villagers have to walk 3–4 km downhill to fetch drinking water from a spring when the handpumps and well run dry.

TBS first came into contact with this village in 1989 during a *padyatra*. At that time, there were two *johads* in the village (basically used for the water needs of their livestock). The villagers requested TBS to construct new *johads* and repair old ones.

[26] All information is based on my conversations with villagers at Kraska village on 10/01/2004 and also confirmed by TBS worker Nanagram and Jagdish Gujar.

The contribution (25 % of the total cost) for building these structures was raised from the villagers, and TBS contributed 75 % of the total costs. Households with relatively larger livestock contributed more (through cash). These structures being earthen, the Forest Department did not raise any objection to their construction. My interviews with village residents reveal that these *johads* have come as a boon for them. Owing to the easy availability of water, they have been able to enhance their livestock, and milk production has increased substantially, except in the intermittent periods of drought and lean rainy season. Villagers feel grateful to TBS for having helped them when the wildlife conservation policy of the state made them refugees in their own home.

While the Forest Department facilitated TBS-sponsored activities of small earthen dams in the Sariska Tiger Reserve, the Irrigation Department was at loggerheads with TBS over the construction of a big earthen dam on the channel of River Ruparel, a seasonal river in Alwar district. The next story highlights this conflict between the Irrigation Department and TBS.

6.6.4 Laha Ka Baas: A Story of Blame Games

Laha Ka Baas (hereafter, LKB) village in Thanagazi sub-district of Alwar became the centre of conflict between the TBS and the Irrigation Department of Rajasthan in 2001 when the TBS decided to build a large earthen bund (80 m long and 12 m high) on a channel of river Ruparel. The construction work started in March 2001, and the residents of LKB decided to invite the then chief minister of Rajasthan Ashok Gehlot to inaugurate it. In an administrative drill preceding the chief minister's visit, the local administration declared that the structure was constructed 'illegally' as no prior approval was sought from the local administration for its construction and that it will negatively affect the flow of water downstream. Consequently, in June 2001, the Irrigation Department served a notice to the TBS that the LKB earthen dam has been constructed in violation of the Rajasthan Irrigation and Drainage Act of 1954. It asked TBS to immediately stop the construction work and demolish the completed portion within 7 days. The TBS refused to obey the orders, and as a result the Irrigation Department officials landed in LKB with earthmovers to demolish the structure. The villagers responded by laying siege to the structure, and sensing the tense situation, the officials halted the demolition.

This incident brought LKB and the TBS into the limelight in an unprecedented manner. The New Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), sympathetic to the cause of traditional water conservation techniques and grassroots environmentalism, launched a concerted media and civil society campaign against the government's attitude to curb local initiatives for water conservation and people's control over their natural resources (Kashwan 2006). At the request of the TBS, a team of eminent technocrats and agricultural scientists led by the CSE visited the site and declared that the structure will not negatively affect the availability of water in the villages located downstream and projected it as a marvel of 'indigenous

technology' and the first step towards *jal swaraj* (self-reliance in water).[27] The team met the Chief Minister and requested him to stop its demolition by the irrigation bureaucracy. Due to the chief minister's intervention, the demolition was stopped in July 2001. However, and ironically, 2 years later in July 2003, the structure was breached in flash floods. The Irrigation Department was quick to ridicule the very idea of building a water harvesting structure based on traditional wisdom or 'rural engineering' (Kashwan 2006). On the other hand, the TBS attributed the breach to the collapse of six small check dams built upstream by the government under drought relief work earlier that year. While the Irrigation Department maintained throughout the controversy that the structure was built without obtaining their prior permission, the TBS and the CSE proclaimed that people should be allowed to take control of local natural resources without having to seek the authorisation of governmental organisations.

The dramatic end of LKB controversy left several questions unanswered on the TBS's approach to rainwater harvesting. An evaluation report of the TBS activities written by Kumar and Kandpal (2003) for the Swedish International Development Agency, one of the main donors of the TBS, reveals that during the 2 years (2001–2003) when the LKB bund was intact, the access to water was highly iniquitous. Only two well-off farmers from LKB village and one from village Bhagdoli could afford to lift water to cross the ridge using submersible pumps (ibid). The groundwater recharge was towards Bhagdoli village, and 25 borewells were sunk in that village by relatively well-off farmers. Individual farmers invested over Rupees 16,00,000, almost double the total cost of construction of the dam, on various methods of irrigation and lifting water in the two villages within the period of 2 years (ibid). In its blind celebration of 'traditional wisdom' and 'people's control over local resources', the TBS did not provide any support to small and medium farmers for water extraction so as to ensure fairness in the distribution of water. As such, small and marginal farmers could not gain much from the groundwater recharge. This reflects that the issues of equity and fair distribution were sidelined by the organisation in its attempt to rejuvenate 'traditional' rainwater harvesting methods and indigenous knowledge.

6.7 'Drought Proofing' Alwar Villages

Within development circles, large dams are now viewed in a critical light for their environmental costs and problems of human displacement. However, small water harvesting structures (which certainly do not entail high environmental costs) are rarely scrutinized for their viability in solving the problem of water scarcity in rainfed areas on sustainable basis (Gupta 2011). The new traditionalist discourse

[27] http://www.cseindia.org/html/extra/dam/index_news.htm (Accessed 05/07/ 2007). Notably, the CSE has been working closely with the TBS since the 1990s on the issues of traditional rainwater harvesting and grassroots environmental action.

primarily focuses on the different traditional methods of water harvesting practiced in India with a hope that the revival of these systems and methods will solve the problem of water scarcity in rain-fed areas. Environmental activists, several grassroots organisations, international development agencies and media largely highlight watershed development and rainwater harvesting as a 'solution' to the problem of water availability in rain-fed areas and effective mechanism to check recurrent droughts. Anil Agarwal, the founding director of CSE, writes, 'water harvesting and groundwater recharge together can definitely drought proof the country and create local food security which big dams cannot' (2000: 22).

In the TBS narrative on small water harvesting structures, there are two important claims made: first, the 'drought-proofing' ability of numerous small water harvesting structures constructed by TBS in Alwar villages, and second, that a series of small water harvesting structures do not hamper the overall flow of water downstream in a river basin. These are the issues that need to be verified on the basis of technical knowledge of hydrology, and I have relied on two studies done by subject experts to verify the claims made by TBS (Sharma 2002, and Ray and Bijarnia 2006). The study by Sharma (2002) suggests that there is no logical correlation between 'drought proofing' and increased availability of groundwater, as claimed by TBS. Analysing the cropping patterns in the twin villages of Bhaonta-Kolyala, Sharma (ibid: 15) found that the availability of more water gives three options to farmers: increase the amount of water application to crops, change the cropping pattern towards more water-intensive crops or increase the area under irrigation. This means that all the extra water stored by the water harvesting structures during seasons of high rainfall is quickly utilised in the first season of drought. For this reason, Sharma (ibid) is apprehensive that in the areas where inadequate rainfall is experienced for longer stretches than just 1 year, it is difficult to envisage drought proofing by the small water harvesting structures built by TBS. Further, Sharma (ibid: 22) argues that a localised downstream impact (negative) can take place in a watershed area even if the overall downstream impact is minimal. In Bhaonta-Kolyala, the majority of structures built by TBS are built only in the watershed area of one stream, and there is negative impact (of local nature) downstream. These findings suggest that the upstream-versus-downstream debate is irrelevant if the unit of analysis is the entire river basin. Nevertheless, there is supposedly a negative impact on the availability of water in the villages or areas situated downstream if a water harvesting structure (like anicut) is constructed to plug a drain (rivulet). This creates conflict between the upstream and downstream villages. For example, TBS constructed a concrete anicut on the main streambed passing through Leeliya village, which has become a bone of contention between the village residents of Leeliya and the adjoining village of Keetla (situated downstream).

In their study of groundwater recharge in two villages, Bhaonta-Kolyala (upstream) and Samara (downstream), separated by a distance of approximately 20 km in Arvari basin when rainwater is harvested simultaneously in both locations, Ray and Bijarnia (2006) conclude that there are several factors (including average annual rainfall, rock structure and drainage system) responsible for the recharge of groundwater. However, the most significant factor determining the availability of

water on a sustainable basis is the (mis)match between production (recharge) and consumption of groundwater. In Bhaonta village, located upstream, after the rainwater harvesting work done by TBS, the consumption of groundwater far exceeded its recharge in the late 1990s, which again pushed it into an unsustainable or dark zone (ibid: 2383). While TBS's approach to rainwater harvesting is basically 'village centric' and not watershed based, its claims of 'drought proofing' are unfounded. TBS does not claim that the structures built by it are 'technically' any superior to those built by the government but that TBS work has generated 'community self-reliance' and 'collective action' for natural resource development. TBS presents its work as 'people's initiatives' or 'community driven' and sees itself as playing only a catalytic role. My respondents in several villages informed me that in most cases, for the maintenance and repair of all community-owned structures, they are dependent on TBS for help (in the form of cement or monetary support). Rajendra Singh maintains that TBS is like *baisakhi* (crutches) to village communities and once the communities gain back their 'lost pride' and confidence to undertake collective action, TBS withdraws itself from these villages. Below, I critically evaluate these claims made by TBS.

6.7.1 People's Institutions and Collective Action: Myths and Realities

TBS champions the power and ability of 'community' to manage its local natural resources, but in practice, we do not find any such examples of a durable people's institution (*gram sabha*) or collective action (repair of water harvesting structures) upon withdrawal of TBS support. People's participation through 'voluntary labour' does not translate into 'community self-reliance'. For marginal farmers and landless people, 'voluntary labour' simply means lower wages. A poor woman labourer in Jogion ki Dhani village, working for the construction of an earthen dam on community land, complained to me in the following words:

> After one-third of my wages is deducted, there is hardly anything left to take home. We have been pursuing our *sarpanch* [head of panchayat] to build an earthen dam. He gave us assurance before panchayat elections but nothing happened. We then approached TBS for construction. They agreed to it but they pay us much less [one third of the wages are deducted at source][28]

This suggests that the notions of 'village self-respect' and 'voluntary labour' are not ingrained in Alwar villages but *imposed* by TBS. Beyond doubt, paper work and formal procedures and the overhead costs of structures built by TBS are lower in comparison to that of governmental agencies, and several evaluation studies conducted by the main donors of TBS (SIDA and ICCO) also confirm this (see Pangare

[28] Interview at Jogion ki dhaani village on 18/11/2003. While an unskilled labourer in governmental projects was getting approximately Rupees 70 per day around that time, it was Rupees 45–50 in TBS-sponsored projects.

2003; Kumar and Kandpal 2003). However, TBS's experiments in 'direct democracy' and collective action of a higher order in the form of a 'river parliament' have failed to generate people's interest in the long run. Recall the incident of protest against fishing contracts in Hamirpur village (mentioned in the previous section). TBS organised a congregation of villagers from around 70 villages along the Arvari River and decided to constitute rules and regulations for the management and development of natural resources in the region. Some important rules included restraint on water use by not switching to water-intensive crops (such as sugarcane and green chilli) and boycott of chemical fertilisers. A formal setup of 'river parliament' was conceived in the form of two representatives from every village, who would then choose office-bearers. In practice, the representatives and office-bearers were selected by TBS functionaries. It was decided in the first session to hold at least four sessions of the parliament every year, but that could not happen due to lack of any interest shown by the people.

There is also little observable compliance with the rules related to restraint on water extraction or use of chemical fertilisers in Alwar villages. In fact, the use of urea and other chemical fertilisers has increased in Bhaonta village (the 'trophy village' of TBS) during the last decade (Ray and Bijarnia 2006). Nor is there unanimous support for TBS in Hamirpur village for the so-called river parliament. When TBS decided to construct Arvari parliament building on revenue (government) land in Hamirpur village in 2001 (from the prize money awarded by the President during his visit), the revenue officer served a notice to TBS and asked the villagers to remove the structure. Upon failing to do so, the local administration demolished the building (without any resistance from the village residents). My interviews with residents of Hamirpur show that most of them were not even aware of this construction, and this suggests that what TBS calls 'people's power' is actually a part of TBS's strategy to consolidate its own position as an agent of development in Alwar villages.

6.8 TBS and the Wider Development Regime

As I have mentioned earlier, TBS has been put into the limelight by the media (both foreign and national), and it has played a significant role popularising the ideas of 'drought proofing', 'community self-reliance' and 'traditional wisdom' in the context of TBS interventions. The media has been instrumental in making TBS a 'success story', but at the same time, by giving too much publicity, it has made the organisation a victim of 'rumours'.[29] While watershed development and rainwater

[29] During the drought in Rajasthan (1999–2002) the government initiated several construction activities to generate seasonal employment. Ironically, more than 4 million Rupees were spent on constructing an airstrip near Kishori village, where there was not even a primary health centre. A small anicut built by TBS on government land was also destroyed during the construction of this airstrip. A local newspaper spread the rumour that this airstrip has been built for VIPs that very

harvesting has become the mainstay of rural development in rain-fed areas of India since the early 1990s, the popularity of discourses of 'community-based natural resource management' and 'indigenous knowledge' within the international development circles are largely responsible for the publicity that TBS has attracted. This is also the reason for the rapid increase in foreign funds that TBS started gaining since the mid-1990s. The large amount of funding from foreign donors has made TBS 'scale up' its water harvesting activities (without any systematic planning of how to use these funds). While TBS has resisted the illegal mining activities in Alwar villages and the mine owners,[30] it does not refrain from accepting funds from big industrialists, ex-Maharajas (in fact, TBS is running a joint programme in collaboration with a charitable trust established by the ex-Maharaja of the erstwhile princely state of Jodhpur on water conservation in the desert part of Rajasthan) or industry associations. Rajendra Singh believes that historically, *Baniyas* or the business-caste people were referred to as *mahajans* (or esteemed persons) because they used to give certain amount of their wealth as charity for socially useful or communal purposes.[31] This practice has declined over the years, and people have become more selfish and greedy. The willingness to accept funds from business houses and opposition to the idea of 'class conflict' is one of the reasons that Rajendra Singh is invited to seminars and conferences on 'private partnership' in the water sector, organised by industry associations like the CII (Confederation of Indian Industries).

Accepting funds from the Swiss Embassy, SIDA, Ford Foundation, Oxfam, UNDP and Inter Church Cooperation (ICCO), TBS categorically states that it will use the money on its own terms and discretion and will not accept any interference from the donor agencies in project implementation. The reputation and publicity already gained by TBS prior to the entry of international agents allowed it power with respect to international development aid. Rajendra Singh informed me that the Swiss Embassy and ICCO withdrew funding to TBS after it refused to involve the development consultants suggested by these agencies in project implementation.[32] On the other hand, my respondent from ICCO informed me that they have stopped funding because TBS has not kept any proper records of the money spent and also its approach is not 'gender sensitive'. An evaluation study conducted by ICCO in 2003 (report authored by Ganesh Pangare) also suggests that there is a lack of direction or focus in the scaling-up process of TBS activities, and avoidance of an integrative and comprehensive land-water management on a watershed basis has

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often visit the TBS *ashram*. TBS finally released a statement denouncing any role in the construction of this airstrip.

[30] TBS believes that soapstone and marble mines have created environmental hazards. Irresponsible dumping of waste from quarries has turned huge proportions of land unfit for cultivation. Further, mining activities consume large amounts of underground water leaving fields in the vicinity dry. For further information on TBS's protest against mining activities along the Aravalli hill ranges, see the booklet titled *Aravalli Ke Aansoo* published by TBS (1998).

[31] Informal conversation at Tarun Ashram on 02/12/2003.

[32] Telephone conversation on 25/07/2005.

resulted in uneven gains between and within villages (Pangare 2003: 39). The report (ibid: 40) appreciates the TBS philosophy of opposition to 'result oriented iron-cast project plans formulated as part of a top-down blueprint approach' but highlights the unsustainable institutional arrangements (like *gram sabhas* formed by TBS) and poor maintenance of structures, amongst other reasons for concern for TBS in its attempt to scale up its water harvesting activities.

The relationship of TBS with the state (most powerful actor in the development regime) is quite complex and should be seen at different levels (local, provincial and national). TBS opposes 'state dependency' and the bureaucratic style of functioning (for operational inflexibility, corruption and red tape). TBS's experience with irrigation bureaucracy is conflict ridden, and the state Irrigation Department has served notices and penalties (which TBS refused to pay) for 'illegal' construction on several occasions. The joint project (PAWDI) with DWD&SC also failed due to differences between the officials and TBS over use of project funds. Corruption charges made by TBS against government engineers led to their suspension from service. The LKB controversy (explained in the previous section) and the demolition of Arvari parliament building ('illegally' constructed on government land) have brought TBS into direct confrontation with the local administration. However, TBS has worked amicably with the Forest Department to facilitate cooperation between the village residents and forest officials in the core and buffer zones of Sariska Tiger Reserve. TBS has also constructed *johads* and small check dams in the core area of this National Park for the benefit of the inhabitants and wildlife. The Forest Department gave special permission to TBS for these construction activities, making exception to the official rules. This demonstrates that formal rules can be moulded to suit local requirements and that flexibility and empathy on the part of government officials is not always impossible.

While dealing with the state, TBS is always conscious of its grassroots identity. When the President of India's office invited some representatives from Bhaonta and Hamirpur villages and volunteers of the TBS to receive the award of appreciation, TBS insisted that the President himself should come to the village to present this award. TBS believes that the true recognition of the efforts of the village community is in going to the villages and learning from their experiences. TBS manages programmes funded by government agencies but at the same time opposes the government on many fronts including its scheme of 'interlinking of rivers' or archaic laws governing irrigation and management of water which give very little freedom and control to people to manage their local resources (such as the one cited in LKB controversy).

The relationship between TBS and the wider development regime is mediated by Rajendra Singh. His charismatic leadership and popularity are responsible for the expansion of organisation (in terms of staff and funds). The generally hostile relationship between TBS and the local administration (including *panchayats* in several villages, which see TBS as parallel power structure) is reshaped and redefined by the popularity that TBS has gained at national and international levels. When TBS and Rajendra Singh got international acclaim in the form of Magsaysay Award in 2001, and on the insistence of the Government of India, charges of 'illegal'

construction of water harvesting structures were dropped against them by the state government.[33] These instances provide evidence of something that is both an asset and a problem for the TBS, namely the role played in its activities by Rajendra Singh. On the one hand, it indicates the lack of democracy within the organisation; at the same time, it shows Singh's reputation is crucial in solving disputes with contending social actors and state agencies.

6.9 Summary

In this chapter I have presented a case study of one of the most renowned grassroots organisations in Rajasthan that has received international fame for its water conservation activities, apparently based on 'traditional knowledge', 'indigenous technology' and 'community participation'. Not denying the exemplary role played by TBS in popularising rainwater harvesting, demanding people's control and management of their local natural resources and helping thousands of village residents in Alwar to build small water harvesting structures to secure better access to water for irrigation, I have problematised and challenged TBS's claims of providing *alternatives* to the mainstream watershed development and of being *exterior* to the wider development regime. TBS does not plan its water conservation activities on the basis of 'watershed approach' (comprehensive treatment of an entire watershed area with an array of techniques to arrest soil and water erosion) but simply provides financial support (and technical supervision) in the construction of small and medium water harvesting structures of various kinds. TBS claims to promote 'indigenous technology' for rainwater harvesting, but this implies that it does not involve civil or agricultural engineers in its construction activities. TBS refers to all its water harvesting structures as *johads* and its water conservation activities as *paani ka kaam*. Consequently, TBS has created a niche for itself in wider development circles in recent years, wherein issues like community participation, 'traditional knowledge' and collective action have come to occupy centre stage.

Unlike other NGOs in Rajasthan, whose inspirations to initiate watershed development activities have come from state and international development agencies, TBS started building small earthen dams during drought period in the mid-1980s following demands made by village residents. TBS does not have 'professionals' as its full-time staff, and TBS functionaries are generally ordinary (but mostly educated and young) villagers. Taking inspiration from Gandhi and JP, TBS functionaries live a simple life in the TBS *ashram*, and they are paid less in comparison to salaries offered in the NGO sector in general. However, owing to the high rate of unemployment in rural Rajasthan, and the prospect of a steady source of income (in the form of honorarium), a large number of people are willing to join TBS as

[33] In 2004, Rajendra Singh was included as a member of a high-powered committee to ensure integrated development of water resources of the state by the Department of Irrigation, Government of Rajasthan.

karyakartas (functionaries). Some of the functionaries (who joined TBS in the mid-1980s) have consolidated their position in the organisation over the years by remaining loyal to Rajendra Singh, who is the main decision-maker and who controls the entire organisation for all practical purposes.

TBS claims to have generated collective action for water harvesting, but it underplays the question of equity in its water conservation activities. Village residents bargain and negotiate with TBS to get the best deal for themselves in collective and individual capacities. I have shown that TBS makes use of religious symbols and sanctions in order to gain high moral ground and make its conservation programmes durable. TBS interventions have created a new sense of 'we-feeling' in some village communities (which are frequently visited by high-profile dignitaries and which have received wide publicity for their water conservation activities under the guidance of TBS). At the same time, TBS interventions are crucial in creating conflict-like situations between villages and within villages over the use of water resources.

I have argued that TBS has been successful in maintaining distance from its donors and literally enjoys a free hand as far as running its activities is concerned. Some donors have withdrawn their funding from TBS for its lack of transparency, poor organisational capacities, not treating the entire watershed area on a scientific basis (from ridge to valley) and its unwillingness to take issues of gender and equity on board. TBS ridicules these donors (and consultants who work for them) by maintaining that 'only villagers can truly understand village affairs' (and not the urban-educated development practitioners and engineers). TBS champions 'indigenous technology' and makes claims of 'drought proofing' Alwar villages on the basis of the so-called indigenous technology. However, studies by subject experts and my interviews with the village residents confirm that its claims of drought proofing Alwar villages are unfounded. Further, the structures built by TBS are not necessarily superior or more durable than those constructed by the watershed and irrigation departments. In fact, some newly built concrete structures (anicuts) were breached in flash floods in 2003.

The relationship of TBS with the state is quite intriguing. TBS has criticised the water policy of the government and has blamed the state for neglecting the interests of peasants in rain-fed areas of the country. TBS has been served notices by the Irrigation Department for 'illegally' constructing hundreds of water harvesting structures, but at the same time DWD&SC tried a joint venture with TBS (e.g. PAWDI project sponsored by SDC). Interestingly, TBS has received national (presented by the President of India) and international awards (like Magsaysay) for its water harvesting initiatives but at the same time has been at loggerheads with the Irrigation Department and the district administration. Lastly, amongst the village residents of Alwar, I argue, TBS is not popular for being a Gandhian (and grassroots) organisation promoting 'village self-reliance', 'community participation' or 'traditional knowledge' but for *subsidising* water harvesting activities (of landed social groups) and providing *wage* employment (to poorer people) and jobs (to its *karyakartas*).

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Chapter 7
Conclusion: Notes on the Politics of Rural Development in Rajasthan

In this chapter I reflect my views on the issues related to development governance that I discussed at the start of this book. My observations are based on evidence from the three case studies (DWD&SC, GVM and TBS). I present my arguments in the form of concluding notes on the heterogeneous development regimes; overlapping institutional terrains, institutional forms and practices; depoliticisation thesis and 'anti-politics' machine; partnership; participation; 'community' and 'social capital' and questions of 'equity' in watershed interventions.

7.1 On Heterogeneity of Development Regimes

Contemporary development regimes, as Ludden (2005: 4051) suggests, inhabit histories they do not control and operate among forces and tendencies that 'do not form one dominant trend'. The conundrum of development governance in recent times can be explained by empirically testing the nature of the contemporary development regimes. I started this book by stating that one of the most significant changes that we have witnessed during the last two decades with regard to development policy and practice is that the state has lost its privileged position and unchallenged authority in the arena of rural development. Needless to say, the state remains the most powerful actor (in terms of financial resources and the scale of its activities) of development in the rural areas of India, but non-state actors (including international development organisations and donors) have come to occupy a crucial place in the development regimes. The presence of several actors with different styles of *delivering* development and diverse agendas, I suggest, makes the watershed development regime quite *heterogeneous* in nature. DWD&SC, GVM, TBS and international donors are independent in terms of their respective mandates, agendas and priorities but influence each other simultaneously, engage in partnerships and sometimes compete with each other in the arena of watershed development. Rather than

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treating the 'global' and the 'local' as binary opposites, this study highlights the dynamic relationship between these categories.

I have made an attempt to understand DWD&SC, GVM and TBS in articulation with each other and with international donors. NGOs have their own 'minds and agendas' (Ludden 2005: 4048), and there are spaces of autonomy for non-state development actors (in terms of prioritising their activities or implementing rainwater harvesting projects). They influence government policies on water management (through partnership, protest and advice) and receive a large chunk of their funds from foreign and international donors, national foundations and central government to run their development projects and activities. I have shown that 'service delivery' NGOs like the GVM carve a niche for themselves in the watershed development regime by blaming the state agencies for corruption and apathy and by popularising the so-called community-based natural resource management (as against state-led). An activist organisation like TBS, another important component of Rajasthan's watershed development regime, consolidates its position as an agent of development by projecting itself simply as a catalyst in 'community-led' development process or 'people's movement' for local control of natural resources, by naming its projects as *pani ka kaam* and by calling all its water harvesting structures (even concrete anicuts) as *johads* (which is a colloquial term to describe small earthen dams).

The notion of 'heterogeneous development regime' allows us to understand the politics of development in the countryside and the power of different actors but at the same time does not foreclose the possibility of exploring the *interplay* between the constitutive elements of a development regime (as opposed to more deterministic accounts of development interventions). In Chap. 2, I have argued that the post-development literature represents a repressive view of the operation of power through development and propagates the idea that a singular historical force (generally, the World Bank and other international development agencies) directs power. More recently, post-development authors like Brigg (2002) make use of Foucault's notion of 'apparatus' or *dispositif* and his concept of 'normalisation' for understanding the operation of power in development projects. Brigg (ibid) suggests that the *dispositif* may generate contradictory effects and the elements do not have tight interdependent relations. We find heterogeneity of elements in the notion of development *dispositif* advanced by Brigg (ibid), and the power effects of its constituent elements are less deterministic when compared with earlier formulations of 'development apparatus' advanced by other post-development thinkers (e.g. Ferguson 1990). However, there is a 'pyramidal organisation of relations of power' in a *dispositif* (Foucault 1979: 177, quoted in Brigg 2002: 433). Although it is the apparatus as a whole that produces power, the *dispositif* is imagined as an ensemble of elements arranged in a vertical fashion from top to bottom in much of the development literature inspired by Foucault (e.g. Goldman 1996). Unlike a development *dispositif*, which is pyramidal (with a 'head' and a 'base'), the notion of a 'heterogeneous development regime' as propagated in this book does not entail rigid hierarchical relations of power between the various elements such as the WB, DWD&SC, TBS, GVM or other international donors.

Undoubtedly, the World Bank or international donors hold effective power (especially, financial) but are not able to simply exercise their power *over* other elements of the watershed development regime (like the DWD&SC, GVM and TBS) in an unrestrained fashion. These agents have their own power, and what is evident from my study is *diffusion* of power in the interplay between the various elements of watershed development regime in Rajasthan. My observations suggest that the power effects of development regime are indeterminate: it is contingent upon the actions and interests of various stakeholders.

Besides the heterogeneity of the development regime and its indeterminate power effects, my empirical observations also indicate the heterogeneous nature of the 'state' itself. I validate Akhil Gupta's (1995) point that we should refine our analysis to incorporate the *heterogeneity* of what the state does. I have mentioned in Chap. 4 that the guidelines for watershed development are formed by the central Ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development. These two ministries have different mandates and motives for funding watershed development activities. Further, the priorities of senior officials in DWD&SC are quite different from those of field-level staff. Some officials are 'corrupt' while others are 'honest'. Some officials perform their duties enthusiastically, while others simply refrain from making field trips to dusty villages. Varying responses of differently positioned officials to the recent restructuring of DWD&SC in Rajasthan suggest that the notion of the state as a 'unified entity' needs to be challenged. I have shown in Chap. 4 that the GVM had a very diverse experience of working with the different government departments in Rajasthan. In the case of TBS, I have demonstrated that there are contradictions in the role of various entities of the state. The Irrigation Department of Rajasthan seems to be in perpetual conflict with TBS and has served notices to it for 'illegal' construction of several water harvesting structures on government lands, but the President of India and a delegation of parliamentarians have rewarded TBS for its water conservation activities.

These illustrations from the recent watershed development and water conservation initiatives in rural Rajasthan indicate a trend, which is aptly summarised by Ludden (2005: 4051) in the following words: 'development has entered a confusing phase of flux and uncertainty'.

7.2 On Overlapping Institutional Terrains

While 'institutional design' (Ostrom 1990) aims to impose rationality on the social order, my evidence is that it is the other way around. I argue that the processes of institutional evolution are complex, ad hoc and shaped by dynamism of social life in Rajasthani villages, rather than principles of design and crafting incorporated in game-theoretic models (cf. Cleaver 2002; Mosse 2003). In three different institutional settings I have demonstrated that the 'rules of the game' are invariably formed by 'external' agents (DWD&SC, GVM and TBS) who wield effective power (in terms of finances and activities undertaken). The government officials and the

functionaries of TBS and GVM respectively decide the 'rules of the game', such as the contribution by the villagers towards construction costs or management of community pastures. The dynamic processes of bargaining, competition, conflicts and cooperation over the development and use of natural resources result in ever-changing institutional forms and practices.

My empirical findings indicate absence of formalised modes of interaction in Rajasthani villages and a kind of 'messiness' in terms of institutional forms and practices with regard to watershed development and rainwater harvesting. The differently positioned rural social groups negotiate with an array of development actors, and these processes of negotiations give rise to new institutions – formal or bureaucratic (watershed committees of DWD&SC), informal (*gram sabhas* of TBS) and a mix of both (VDCs constituted by GVM). The rules with regard to people's contribution towards project costs are frequently negotiated (especially in the case of soil and water conservation structures built on private lands) between the recipients and agents of development.

The three case studies presented in this book suggest that new institutions like the 'village common funds' created by GVM and DWD&SC and by TBS (in a few villages) have either remained unutilised or have created disputes in the instances where they have been used. I have shown in Chap. 4 that the funds for income generation activities for landless and marginal farmers in watershed projects have remained unutilised as engineers and officials of DWD&SC are neither trained in initiating income generation activities nor do they have any motivation to live in villages for a longer duration (to start these activities). Only recently, the Government of Rajasthan has issued a circular to transfer these funds to respective *panchayats*. In the case of TBS, which has established a 'village common fund' in two of its trophy villages, Bhaonta–Kolyala and Hamirpur, my interviews with key respondents from these two villages suggest that the utilisation of money from these funds has become a bone of contention between villagers. These illustrations indicate *divisive* nature of institutions and suggest that institutional forms like village common funds are bound to create conflicts within a given community and between the development actors and rural social groups.

Apart from the institutional *forms* (which remain the focus of approaches influenced by new institutionalism), I have tried to understand institutional *practices* in the case of watershed interventions in Rajasthan. I have argued above that 'rules of the game' are mostly formed by 'external' agents and as such, when these agents leave a village after the completion of watershed or rainwater harvesting activities, 'the rules' are quite frequently broken by the relatively powerful as well as the poorer residents of a given village. Community pastures developed by DWD&SC have been destroyed in the wake of drought (especially, 1999–2001), or in some cases encroached upon, soon after the watchmen were removed upon completion of the project. In other instances, where there is a higher degree of 'rule following' (e.g. on open grazing or cutting of trees) by the residents of the village that has developed its common resources, they could be violated by the residents of neighbouring villages (as in Bhaonta–Kolyala of TBS).

One thing that is common in the case of both TBS and GVM is the use of religious sanctions for conservation purposes in order to gain *legitimacy* to compensate for the lack of *de jure* power by these actors. Recall the practices of *kesar chrikav* employed by GVM, declaration of patches of woodlands as *Dev Bani* by the TBS or *bhoomi pujan* conducted by TBS at the kick-start of rainwater harvesting activities. This suggests that development actors adopt a *combination* of institutional practices to uphold their power and position in their fields of interventions. Further, non-state development actors co-opt these cultural practices and give *new meanings* to them. For example, calling all its water harvesting structures *johads*, depicting trees in the form of a god or a congregation on *dharadi* are a part of TBS's strategy to maintain its distinct identity of a grassroots organisation engaged in *reviving* 'traditional' practices of water conservation. This makes redundant the binary opposition between 'traditional' and 'modern' institutions (Agarwal and Narain 1997) and shows 'the invention of tradition' as an important strategy employed by non-state actors to advance their agenda of nature conservation.

The efforts of collective action on a large scale, for example, the institution of 'river parliament' formed by TBS, have largely remained symbolic. My findings indicate that the rules of restrained use of groundwater, self-imposed moratorium on cropping water-intensive crops or boycott of chemical fertilisers are not followed by the village residents. The main concerns for peasant-farmers in Alwar district is higher crop yield and higher returns on their harvests. Their concerns do not match with those of TBS, which wants to create a niche for itself in the development regime by projecting itself as a Gandhian organisation, inculcating the values of 'self-discipline' in extracting groundwater. I argue that the rules were made to impress others in the regime rather than the villagers themselves.

Furthermore, I suggest that the presence of multiple agents of development results in *overlapping* institutions for watershed development and rainwater harvesting in the villages of Rajasthan. For example, the democratically elected *panchayats*, watershed users committee of DWD&SC, *samuh* formed by GVM or *gram sabha* constituted by TBS provide an array of overlapping institutional forms which do not necessarily sit together comfortably. Especially after the revival of PRIs in the mid-1990s, we see the processes of conflict as well as cooperation between the democratically elected bodies and those nominated by the external agents (DWD&SC, GVM or TBS). It has created a wider choice for the village residents in terms of actors whom they can approach for funding water conservation or watershed development activities, but in some villages we also witness tensions between democratically elected *panchayats* and the *samuh* or *gram sabha* of the GVM and TBS respectively, resulting in disruptions of developmental activities (as in Hamirpur village of TBS). Recall my conversation with a woman wage labourer in one of the TBS villages (in Chap. 6). She complained that the *sarpanch* did not keep his promise of securing funds for a rainwater harvesting structure in that village and so they had to approach TBS. TBS did bring in money for a large *johad,* but the deduction of 'voluntary contributions' from the wages of poor villagers by TBS leaves very little for village residents like her, whose primary interest in rainwater harvesting activities is wage employment during the period of construction.

Likewise, GVM was interested in expanding its activities in Chirawa village (Chap. 5) and convinced the village residents that their watershed project is better than the *sarkari* (governmental) watershed project. For ordinary villagers of Chirawa, working in watershed projects of GVM means slightly lower wages (roughly 10 % of the wages are deducted as against 'voluntary labour') in comparison to what they would get in a *sarkari* watershed project. However, other benefits of being associated with GM (such as child and health care centres established by the organisation) compensate for slightly lower wages in watershed activities.

The recent move of the Government of Rajasthan to transfer all watershed development activities to PRIs is a welcome shift in reducing some *unnecessary* overlap of institutions at the village level. The watershed committees and associations constituted by the DWD&SC (although most of those remained on papers only) ran parallel to the democratically elected *panchayats* for nearly a decade. It is true that in some villages the emerging (and young) leadership used the opportunities (in the form of watershed committees or user committees) offered by DWD&SC to consolidate their power in the village and later exercised it in contesting *panchayat* elections. We can also witness this trend in the cases of GVM and TBS, where some of their para-workers and volunteers, engaged in watershed development and rainwater harvesting projects in the decade of the 1990s, later on fought *panchayat* elections.

7.3 On 'Depoliticisation'

The heterogeneity of the watershed development regime in Rajasthan and the overlapping institutional terrain indicate that watershed development or rainwater harvesting programmes are part of the wider processes of political and social change in rural Rajasthan. I argue that the watershed interventions by the state as well as prominent non-state actors in Rajasthan shape and reshape the politics of development in the countryside. It is true, however, that the early round of watershed projects such as the World Bank–sponsored IWDP (discussed in Chap. 4) were designed on the principles that clearly reflect 'apoliticality' (by prioritising the role of bureaucracy over democratically elected rural local bodies) in terms of engagement with the rural social groups. The policies of the World Bank in the context of 'natural resource management' are driven by 'economic rationality' and new institutional models of collective action by a group of 'resource users'. There were no specific guidelines to make users' committees representative of all sections of village communities in IWDP. The effective control of financial resources in watershed projects remained with the official of the DWD&SC and not the user committees.

Furthermore, one could also argue that the World Bank's IWDP played an instrumental role in the creation of a separate watershed development department in Rajasthan, and hence the expansion of bureaucratic power in the countryside. It is clear that the IWDP implemented by the DWD&SC in Rajasthan brought together a wide range of development actors and experts including consultants (working for

the World Bank), government officials of several departments (soil conservation, veterinary, horticulture, etc.), statisticians, remote sensing experts and select members of rural communities (in the form of user committees). The depiction of the early phase of the IWDP project as 'success story' by the DWD&SC (in spite of its evident failures as revealed in the external evaluation conducted by the CTAE, which I have mentioned in Chap. 4) and the wide publicity it gained through press and media, helped DWD&SC to bring in more money and resources from the World Bank. This actually confirms some of the 'instrument effect' of development projects (Ferguson 1990).

However, Ferguson's claims of 'anti-politics' are unfounded in the case of IWDP in Rajasthan, because the project also provided avenues for upward political mobility to several young, educated and relatively poor villagers. It is also not clear how the expansion of bureaucratic power is ultimately harmful for the poor residents of Rajasthani villages. Undoubtedly, it is the officials of the DWD&SC and the office-bearers of user committees who are the biggest beneficiaries of IWDP. The newly established DWD&SC created employment opportunities (especially for agricultural and civil engineers), besides avenues of promotion for several officials already working in the field of soil conservation in Rajasthan. Rather than 'suspension of politics' (Ferguson 1990), we find that the users' committees formed during the first phase of the project (and before the revival of *panchayats* in the mid-1990s as a result of constitutional changes) opened up opportunities for several village residents to jump into politics.

The arguments of 'negation of politics' in *sarkari* watershed projects (Chhotray 2004, 2007) or referring of 'more and more power relations through bureaucratic circuits' in agricultural development projects sponsored by international development agencies (Ferguson 1990: 256) find little support in the case of Rajasthan. The recent restructuring of DWD&SC and more powers (both in terms of finances and project implementation) to the democratically elected rural local bodies clearly state that governmental watershed programmes themselves are sites of contestation between rural social groups and the bureaucracy. Rather than 'negation of politics' (which is at best a 'snapshot' view of watershed interventions), I suggest that watershed interventions in Rajasthan produce new political possibilities and reconfigure the relationship between the elements of a development regime and the rural communities. This is true in the case of both governmental and non-governmental programmes.

Another feature of 'depoliticisation' theses is 'NGOisation' of grassroots politics (Kamat 2002: 167). Kamat (ibid) proclaims that the structure and praxis of grassroots organisations contribute to 'reproducing the state, particularly in the era of capitalist globalisation'. I find the evidence of 'consent creation' by TBS as well as GVM for their rainwater harvesting and watershed development projects respectively (especially on the issues of villagers' contribution towards project costs). My observations also indicate a system of patron–client relationship that is emerging between these NGOs and the rural social groups (cf. Weisgrau 1997). Both TBS and GVM want to preserve their hold in the areas of their interventions. They do this by often criticising *sarkari* watershed projects (generally on the grounds of corruption

or leakage of funds). But NGOs have not been able to supersede the *panchayats* in the arena of rural development. They are powerful and influential actors in village-level politics and 'politicise' the arena of rural development by bringing in new resources, knowledge and institutional forms of power (such as Village Development Committees).

I have argued in this book that the non-state actors cooperate *and* compete with other development actors, such as the rural local bodies (PRIs). They are not simply a part of the 'anti-politics' machine, nor do they merely reinforce the 'development hegemony' of the state as argued by Kamat (2002). 'Hegemony' is an ongoing *process* of contestation between competing interests, and governmentality does not necessarily entail *repressive* form of power (Gupta and Sinha 2008).

7.4 On 'Partnership' and 'Synergy'

The mainstream international development policies are currently in favour of partnership between the state and 'civil society' actors. New institutional theorists like Ostrom (1996: 1083) argue for efforts at increasing the potential complementarities between the government and citizens' groups for 'co-production of goods and services' in developing countries. New institutionalists are upbeat about bridging the gulf between the public and the private, which they see as leading to 'synergetic outcomes'. I have argued earlier on that the notions of 'synergy' and 'coproduction' are simplistic and do not take into account the competing and sometimes conflicting agendas of the various actors.

'Multi-agency partnerships' are often recommended for better management of natural resources in poorer countries. Carney and Farrington (ibid: 102) anticipate that the partners will not 'meld together to form single monolithic institutions' but suggest that 'new processes and ways of working together' can be evolved by investing in adequate resources, time and personal commitments. In my case studies, I noted that both TBS and GVM have had the experience of partnership with the state agencies in watershed development programmes. Recall the PAWDI project that I have discussed in Chap. 4. A lot of resources and time were invested in the preparatory phase of the project, and elaborate arrangements and rules were made for 'working together', but the project was abandoned halfway. The NGOs were assigned the task of community organisation (or the 'social component' of the project), and the DWD&SC was to undertake soil and water conservation works (or the 'physical component'). As part of their task of 'community organisation', TBS encouraged the village communities to demand accountability (in terms of disbursement of funds) from the engineers of DWD&SC. The engineers, who are used to taking their share or 'cut' from project funds, could not simply withstand this transformation being brought about by their 'partner' organisation, TBS. It is not important to merely declare that the PAWDI project failed to achieve its stated objectives because state–civil society partnership hardly works (given the divergent interests

and agendas of different partners) but to understand that the project failed in the first place because of *unrealistic* expectations of the Swiss donor agency (SDC).

It is also evident that the partnership or cooperation between different actors is possible when the expectations from that partnership are not unrealistic and the state agencies show some flexibility by timely releasing funds for the project. For example, both GVM and TBS have worked amicably with the Forest Department in Udaipur and Alwar respectively. GVM helped the Forest Department in implementing the Joint Forest Management projects, and TBS worked jointly with the Forest Department in constructing small water harvesting structures inside the Sariska National Park. The concerns for 'equity' in the representation of village forest committees or the negative effects of enclosures on the poorest people are altogether different issues. Yet, the Forest Department has shown flexibility not just by providing timely funds to GVM for JFM projects but also by giving special permission to TBS to build *johads* and anicuts inside the national park. GVM functionaries informed me that the Forest Department is quite efficient in terms of timely release of funds (for JFM), but they had a frustrating experience working with the District Rural Development Agency, primarily due to highly erratic procedure of release of funds (for the watershed project that GVM implemented in Kotwara village).

The main lessons that we can learn from these different experiments of 'multi-agency partnership' are, firstly, that red tapism (especially in release of funds) is one of the major hindrances in GO–NGO partnerships. Secondly, projects based on the idea of comparative advantage or 'division of labour' between different kinds of actors are too difficult to implement as there are inherent contradictions between the agendas and priorities of the different 'partners'. Donor agencies should be realistic about GO–NGO partnerships, especially when it comes to *joint* implementation of rural development projects.

7.5 On 'Participation'

I have discussed the prospects and limitations of participatory *practices* in rural development projects in Chap. 2, wherein I have shown that participatory approaches have come under criticism for ignoring power relations and politics, for mistaking 'planning knowledge' as 'local knowledge' (Mosse 2001: 32) and for *reinforcing* rather than eliminating the existing inequalities of power and knowledge. I found these criticisms true to a large extent in the case of watershed interventions in Rajasthan. While recognising the limitations of participatory practices in rural development projects like watershed development, I believe that these interventions bring us into the centre of village politics. Many traditionally powerful individuals or groups are able to draw maximum benefits from the developmental opportunities offered by external agents, but this is not always inevitable.

Recall the narrative of Ratanpura village (presented in Chap. 5), where developmental interventions of GVM coupled with revival of *panchayats* offered the poorer and traditionally subjugated tribal people a chance to challenge the dominance of

the local *thakur*. The GVM was able to create a new system of patronage in that village through its participatory watershed projects. Needless to say that the relationship between the GVM and village residents in Ratanpura entails inequalities of power and knowledge, but it is qualitatively different from the relationship between the local *thakur* and poor tribals, which was entirely based on coercion. I have demonstrated that opportunities of political participation and empowerment offered by deepening democracy and developmental interventions of non-state actors disturb and sometimes alter the hegemonic relations at micro-level.

Common to all my three case studies is the practice of 'voluntary contributions' towards project costs as a means to ensuring people's participation in watershed projects. Surprisingly, in *sarkari* projects, unlike the GVM- or TBS-sponsored projects, the practice of 'voluntary contribution' does not normally mean 'compulsory deduction' from the wages of poor labourers, albeit people's contribution is required in *principle*. Recall the discussion on IWDP of the World Bank in Chap. 4. The World Bank guidelines placed emphasis on contributions by 'users' and were based on the logic of economic rationality. However, DWD&SC decided not to deduct 'contributions' from the wages of labourers and never supplied actual data on cost sharing to the World Bank.

In contrast to *sarkari* projects, the poorest people bear the brunt of 'participation' in terms of lower wages, in both GVM- and TBS-sponsored projects. Both these organisations believe that the rural communities will consider the project as their 'own' if they contribute in the form of 'voluntary labour'. I have shown that the poor people agree to 'voluntary contribution', as for them, 'something is better than nothing'. TBS claims that its activities are part of people's movement for self-reliance, in which TBS merely plays the role of a catalyst. However, and as I have demonstrated in Chap. 6, the notion of 'village self-reliance' is imposed by TBS, and the poorest people are burdened with the costs of 'voluntary labour' in construction activities.

Besides 'voluntary contribution' towards project costs, another facet of 'participation' is the creation of watershed committees or village development committees to ensure people's participation in project activities. I have argued in Chaps. 5 and 6 that the office-bearers of GVM's VDCs or TBS's *gram sabha* are selected on the basis of existing relations of patronage that these organisations share with the village communities. The selection of office-bearers of watershed committees in *sarkari* projects has also been arbitrary. The transfer of watershed activities to *panchayats* and the restructuring of DWD&SC have helped in the merger of watershed committees with the democratically elected rural local bodies for all ongoing and future watershed projects. Effectively, people's participation in project activities has remained nominal in all the three cases that I have studied, but these new institutions (VDCs, *gram sabhas* or watershed committees) give opportunities and platforms to some already powerful individuals for consolidating their position in the village micro-politics *and* open up new avenues for others to either enter into village politics or increase their livelihood opportunities (by strengthening their chances of gaining some sort of employment with the intervening NGOs).

To summarise, in rural Rajasthan especially since the mid-1990s, we find two simultaneous processes of enhancement of people’s participation in development activities. The non-state actors (but also governmental agencies like the DWD&SC) are involved in ‘participatory’ projects of rural development. Simultaneously, the process of democratic decentralisation or devolution of powers to PRIs is opening up the arena of political participation, and more and more developmental schemes (including watershed projects) are now under the direct control of democratically elected bodies. These two processes (‘participatory development’ and ‘participatory governance’) intersect with each other (e.g. in the case of water conservation and watershed development) and have largely changed the relationship between the development regimes and the residents of Rajasthani villages. Precisely, they have brought the ‘agents’ and ‘subjects’ of development closer to each other in an unprecedented fashion. I suggest that it is important to understand the convergence between ‘participatory’ approaches to rural development (that focuses on ‘people’s participation’ in project activities) *and* democratic decentralisation (that enables people’s participation in local governance) to critically appreciate the transformative potential of ‘participation’.

7.6 On ‘Community’ and ‘Social Capital’

While the heterogeneous nature of rural communities is now widely recognised by development theorists and practitioners (see Agrawal and Gibson 1999), it is quite common in the mainstream (new institutional) approaches to see constitutive social relationships in a given ‘community’ as ‘social capital’ (Uphoff 2005; Chopra 2005). I have discussed the notion of social capital and its use in the dominant new institutional framework in Chap. 3. In order to enhance ‘social capital’, international development agencies and donors prescribe creation of ‘self-help groups’ or ‘user groups’ in rural development projects. These policy prescriptions have now started to influence governmental programmes as well. The guidelines for watershed development of both the Ministry of Agriculture (WARSA-Jan Sahbhagita) and the Ministry of Rural Development (Hariyali) prescribed the creation of ‘self-help’ groups of landless or near-landless people and ‘user groups’ of cultivators. Whether the creation of self-help groups can actually enhance the livelihoods of the rural poor is questionable, but as I have mentioned above in this chapter, the engineers of DWD&SC find it too demanding to create and manage ‘social capital’ in the form of self-help groups.

The notions of ‘active social capital’ (Krishna 2002) and ‘political capital’ (Baumann and Sinha 2000) take us beyond the rather naïve celebration of ‘bonds of reciprocity’ and bring in the important role of *agency* and political leadership in securing better developmental outcomes for collective good. My observations suggest that differently positioned rural social groups and individuals do use their social relations, kinship networks and ‘friendships’ to enhance their livelihood chances and maximise their benefits (individual and collective) from project activities. But

generally speaking, the poorest people (collectively) within a village community are least able to influence project outcomes in their favour in absence of deliberate efforts by the external agents (or the emergent political leadership from the underprivileged classes) to serve the needs of the poorer members of village communities. Evidence from the three case studies presented in this book also indicates that conflicts over use and control of common resources are rampant across the villages. Nevertheless, it is possible for *external* agents to enhance the associational capacities (or 'social capital' in new institutional sense) of village residents to a certain extent, as we have witnessed in the cases of TBS and GVM.

Besides, when external agents enhance the associational capacities of a 'village community', they create a new kind of '*we*-feeling' and *territorial identity* at the village level, which can produce conflict situations vis-à-vis the residents of neighbouring villages. Recall the narrative of Kotwara village from the case study of GVM (described in Chap. 5). The GVM's interventions for JFM and watershed have increased the associational capacities of village residents of Kotwara. The increased 'social capital' at the village level has helped its residents to attract funds for development of their village from various sources. However, it also created disputes (often violent) with the neighbouring village of Tunder over the use of 'common' forestland. This 'disputed' land is 'officially' under the revenue village of Kotwara but has been used for cultivation by 'encroachers' from Tunder for decades. The residents of Kotwara never objected to it until the JFM project was initiated, wherein it was required to enclose this disputed land. The TBS case study presents a similar picture. The construction of an anicut on a river stream (government property) by village residents of Leeliya (with the help of TBS) can be seen as an example of enhanced 'social capital' or collective action. The residents of Keetla village (situated downstream) see this newly constructed anicut as obstructing the flow of water downstream and would have seen it demolished. The 'social capital' of the village residents of Leeliya, therefore, stands in direct conflict with that of Keetla residents.

These illustrations suggest that the new institutional prescription of forging 'friendships' within a community of resource users (Uphoff 2005; Chopra 2005) for better developmental outcomes is naïve and the process of collective action is never smooth. External agents (elements of heterogeneous development regimes) have their own interests, and they exercise power by creating new systems of patronage in a given village 'community' or between neighbouring 'communities'.

7.7 On 'Equity' in Watershed Development

The questions of 'equity' and 'gender' have come to occupy centre stage in the current development discourse. It is now commonplace in development theory that 'communities' are not homogeneous entities; that they are divided on the basis of caste, wealth and gender and that differently positioned individuals and groups have different developmental needs. International development agencies often claim

success of their interventions by reaching out to the poorer people in village communities and by incorporating 'gender' as the central concern in their projects. However, in doing so, they place unrealistic assumptions about the possibilities and merits of participatory rural development projects in altering the existing hierarchies and relations of power.

As I have mentioned before, watershed activities are inherently biased towards those with initially higher stocks of land and capital, and if we make 'equity' as the prime criterion to evaluate the 'success' of watershed projects, all projects will be 'destined to fail' (Kumar and Corbridge 2002). While arguing that development policymakers and planners need to be realistic regarding the transformatory potential of watershed projects, I am not suggesting that it is not possible to address the issues of equity or gender in watershed projects. In fact, my three case studies suggest how these issues are addressed differently by different elements of the watershed development regime.

In *sarkari* projects, the poorest are not deprived of their minimum statutory wages, and women have been given *at least* mandatory representation in watershed committees (which are now part of *panchayats*). In the case of GVM, the poorest tend to lose out due to enclosures of common pasturelands, but they get priority in terms of wage labour or relief activities at the time of drought. Furthermore, health, childcare and education-related activities of GVM also help the poorer people in the villages when their wages are deducted against 'voluntary labour'. The GVM functionaries have already started to provide high-earning (supervisory) jobs to women in watershed construction activities. This shows that GVM is attentive to the issues of gender and equity within rural communities.

Oddly enough, the issues of equity and gender at village or intra-community level are ignored the most by TBS, which claims to be leading 'people's movement' for the control and development of local resources. TBS addresses the issue of 'equity' *between* the 'state' and the 'village communities' over the control of local resources through mobilising village residents against the government's attempt to privatise common natural resources, as in the case of fishing contracts in Hamirpur village, discussed in Chap. 6. For it, the question of justice is framed in urban/rural and modern/traditional terms. However, in celebrating the power of 'community', TBS undermines the issues of equity and gender *within* a village community. TBS activists neither make deliberate efforts to encourage women to participate in village meetings nor cater to their specific needs of securing easy access to drinking water (through open-dug or bore wells). They also ignore the interests of the poorest and near-landless members of village communities by not providing even minimum statutory wages. Recall the incident of Laha ka Baas (discussed in Chap. 6), wherein the benefits from the large earthen dam built by TBS were appropriated by those peasants who were able to invest in submersible pump sets or bore wells. Poorer peasants were marginalised due to lack of financial resources to extract water. TBS did not provide support for 'community lift irrigation' scheme to cater to the needs of poorer peasants.

This demonstrates that the issues of equity in water conservation and watershed development can be addressed by the external agents to a certain extent even if

absolute 'equity' is actually unachievable in practice. TBS may be right in maintaining that it is quite unrealistic to expect the alteration of gender- and income-based inequalities through watershed development or water conservation projects, but my observations suggest that there is sufficient scope to address these issues by the intervening agencies (e.g. by catering to the specific needs of women and the poorer people within a given community).

Watershed development and water conservation initiatives of different elements of development regime have given rise to a range of new leaders or development actors in the villages of Rajasthan. Many office-bearers of watershed committees (in *sarkari* watershed projects), VDCs (in GVM's programmes) and *gram sabhas* (in TBS's water conservation programmes) have contested the elections for rural local bodies or *panchayats*. These leaders fit into the categories of 'new political entrepreneurs' (Krishna 2002) as they have adopted politics as vocation. The deepening democracy in rural India and reservation of seats for traditionally deprived castes, tribes and women have provided opportunities to several political entrepreneurs to challenge the traditional leadership in the countryside (generally comprising high-caste males or big landowners). These new leaders play a crucial role in attracting funds and development schemes for collective benefit (as well as personal gains).

Future research, I propose, should focus on two important issues: first, how are *panchayats* performing in terms of watershed (and other developmental) project implementation, and second, and more importantly, on in-depth analysis of the social and economic background of the 'new development actors'/'new political entrepreneurs'. This exercise can enhance our knowledge of how power relations in the countryside may be changed. Further, this research can illuminate exactly *how* deepening democracy and vibrant civil society might facilitate the process of poverty reduction in one of the lowest-income areas in the world. This is vital to reduce the gap between theory and practice in the field of rural development and rural poverty.

7.8 Concluding Remarks

In this book, I have shown the emergence, expansion, composition and power of the watershed development regime to understand development governance in rural Rajasthan. The analytical category of the 'watershed development regime' employed in the study emphasises the need to look beyond 'the state' and pay attention to a range of development actors that bring in resources and expertise to govern and control local natural resources. I examined the agendas, interests and exercise of power by these agents in their fields of action and analysed watershed interventions as integral part of the slow and uneven process of development and change in the countryside. On the basis of organisational 'life histories' of the most powerful elements of the watershed development regime in Rajasthan, I have addressed the 'how' of development governance in the recent times.

Meeting the requirements of water, fodder and fuelwood in the semi-arid areas of Rajasthan have always been a primary concern of the village residents and the feudal regime (*maharajas, jagirdars* and *thakurs*). However, post-colonial developments (especially, land reforms) and democratic governance systems considerably affected people's access to and control of their local natural resources (common lands, pastures, uncultivable wastelands, rivulets, forests, etc.). The rationale of governance in the countryside changed from taxation and revenue collection (through coercion) to 'rural development', securing food self-sufficiency and poverty alleviation and giving rise to qualitatively new development regimes, 'watershed development' being one of them.

In the first four decades after independence, investments by the state agencies on large irrigation projects and development of arable and irrigated lands remained a priority. This period also witnessed the rise (in numbers and power) of non-state development actors (including international) with diverse agendas and varying forms of power in Rajasthani villages, playing active roles in the management and development of natural resources. From the mid-1980s the central and state governments, having realised the developmental potential of areas with secured irrigation, scaled up investments on projects for comprehensive treatment to arable and non-arable lands in rain-fed areas of Rajasthan. Simultaneously, changes in international policy circles, linking environment and poverty, augmented investments by international development agencies and donors for 'ecologically fragile' regions, such as the drylands. By the early 1990s, watershed development and water conservation became one of the largest interventions in rural Rajasthan by a range of development agents.

The changing guidelines for watershed development, the emergence of DWD&SC and its recent restructuring, the roles and responses of various state functionaries involved in watershed project implementation and internal tensions (between engineers and non-engineers, senior and junior officials) within DWD&SC help us to understand the heterogeneity of what the state does as well as the local features of state power. I have drawn intersections between the processes of decentralised management of natural resources and democratic decentralisation. Recently, the control of funds and resources and implementing power of watershed projects have become a bone of contention between DWD&SC engineers and democratically elected *panchayats*. I argue that watershed management and development itself has become a site for the *remaking* of the state and its internal relations.

Both GVM and TBS, in their own ways, have played important roles in significantly shaping and reshaping the discourse of watershed development by propagating the importance of 'community', 'traditions' and people's participation. I have problematised 'community-based natural resource management' (practised by GVM) and 'traditional rainwater harvesting' (practised by TBS). I argue that recourse to 'traditions' and 'community' by civil society organisations help them in consolidating their position within the watershed development regime in Rajasthan: by blaming the state for corruption and apathy; by introducing, modifying or altering the institutional forms and practices to manage common natural resources and by extending, changing and replacing the existing relations of patronage in the

countryside. Watershed interventions in the past two decades have facilitated the process of emergence of non-governmental development organisations as new patrons (as opposed to old patrons, the *jagirdars*/moneylenders) alongside the new (developmental) state in Rajasthani villages. This study argues that the social relations of 'civil society' are also relations of power, exemplified by the ongoing process of contestation between different stakeholders (NGO functionaries, donors and village residents) in rural development.

Watershed interventions, I suggest, draw us into the centre of local politics in which development agents play pivotal roles. In three different institutional settings, I have highlighted the complex processes of negotiation, cooperation and conflict between the various agents of development and differently positioned rural social groups. These processes indicate *dynamism* of institutional forms and practices with regard to common property and natural resources in Rajasthan. Development agents play crucial roles in creating new institutions for the management of natural resources and politicise the arena of rural development by forming new political possibilities, alignments and leadership. It is also evident that enhancement of associational capacity of village residents (e.g. construction of anicut or enclosure of common forestland) through NGO interventions could create conflicts with neighbouring villages and/or state actors. New institutional and communitarian accounts of natural resource management seldom highlight such conflicting situations.

This study suggests that unrealistic and unreasonable expectations on the part of foreign donors regarding GO-NGO partnership or 'synergy' lead to project failures. State agencies and NGOs are not necessarily inimical to each other and do cooperate with each other, as I have shown in the cases of both GVM and TBS. The GVM has implemented one of the earliest wasteland development projects in Rajasthan sponsored by the central government, and the Forest Department bent its rule by allowing TBS to construct water harvesting structures in Sariska Tiger Reserve. Both GVM and TBS are also integral parts of consultative processes and policy-making on water resource development in Rajasthan. But *joint* project implementation proved very difficult to realise due to conflicting interests, priorities and disputes over control of funds between various partners, as I have demonstrated in the case of PAWDI.

I have explored how people's participation is enlisted in watershed projects implemented by different agencies and found that 'voluntary contributions' towards project costs is considered an important parameter of 'participation'. In contrast to *sarkari* watershed projects, the poorest people bear the brunt of 'participation' in watershed projects of GVM and TBS because of deductions from their wages in the form of 'voluntary contributions'. Yet, they agree to participate in this exercise as for most of them, 'something is better than nothing'. This also suggests a perpetual demand for wage labour in Rajasthani villages and in turn ensures the demand of watershed projects in the future, irrespective of their 'success' or 'failure'. While hardly any efforts are made by a grassroots organisation like TBS to address the livelihood concern of the poorer villagers in Alwar, funds made available for generating employment opportunities for landless and marginal farmers in governmental watershed projects have remained unutilised due to lack of incentive for engineers

to initiate these activities and their unwillingness to hire community development experts for this purpose. Until *deliberate* efforts are made by state or non-state development actors to serve the needs of the poorest, watershed interventions will perpetuate existing economic inequalities in the countryside.

Watershed projects have provided permanent or temporary employment opportunities to several educated/literate villagers in Rajasthan (para-workers of GVM, *karyakartas* of TBS, *gopals* and UC presidents in IWDP), and my findings suggest that they are one of the biggest beneficiaries of watershed interventions in the last two decades. They act as mediators between their patrons (government officials, Rajendra Singh and senior functionaries of GVM) and village residents. Those associated with TBS and GVM popularise the activities of their respective organisations in the countryside, besides helping in watershed project implementation. Watershed projects present them opportunities not only for economic mobility but also social and political mobility: many of them have contested *panchayat* elections, and they hold clout as other villagers look up to them for their developmental needs (construction of water harvesting structures, 'lift irrigation' scheme, wage employment in watershed projects, loans and other benefits).

This study has illustrated how development is delivered in rural Rajasthan today. It has also highlighted the limitations of new institutional analyses and anti-modern/post-development theories in the context of natural resources and rural development. It argues that before putting our faith in the 'bonds of reciprocity' and 'synergy' (as evident in new institutional accounts) or in 'encountering development' (as evident in more deterministic Foucauldian accounts of rural development), it is important to understand the heterogeneous nature of development regimes and overlapping institutional terrains. I have demonstrated that the interventions in watershed development over the last two decades have considerably shaped the politics of development in the countryside by disturbing the local hegemony, by increasing the associational capacity as well as creating new conflicts (intra- and inter-village), by creating new relations of patronage and by providing opportunities for emergent or new leadership. Paying attention to the politics of water conservation will certainly help us in making sense of the slow and uneven process of development in the countryside as well as in critically appreciating the dynamic relationship between the 'agents' and 'recipients' of rural development.

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