

Draft for comments and criticism only: not to be cited without the authors' permission

STRUCTURED VARIATIONS ON A THEME : COMPETING CLAIMS ON THE
"COMMONS" IN TEMPERATE AND TROPICAL FOREST LANDS

W.R. Burch Jr.

Ramachandra Guha

This paper compares patterns of conflicts over woodland in the United States and India. We concentrate on woodland not owned by local communities but by the state and its constituent agencies.¹ The main focus of this paper will be on competing definitions of the common good, the ways in which these definitions are articulated and presented by the concerned social groups to the state. As such, we are concerned as much with changing and competing social perceptions as with formal institutional mechanisms.

At one level, the United States and India share much in common. They are both large, ecologically and culturally complex democracies; democracies is the operative word here, for the contending play of social forces we are about to describe could only have come about in a relatively open political setting. The Soviet Union is comparable in terms of size and cultural and ecological complexity, yet there is no evidence of a matching magnitude of debate - historically or in the present - on the form and direction of natural resource management. Moreover, in both India and the U.S. the public debate about the use and misuse of nature seems to have come in cycles. Thus the history of environmental consciousness can be broken down into 3 distinct stages:

¹ The large area of private forest in the U.S. falls outside our purview; in India, virtually all forests are state owned and managed.

(i) An early conservation movement, associated more with personalities than institutions, that was preoccupied with the pace and direction of industrialization; (ii) An intervening period (following World War II) when there seemed to exist a normative consensus on industrialization and economic growth, and ecological concerns were relatively peripheral; (iii) The reemergence of environmentalism since the late 1960's, this time as a social and political movement able to mobilize large numbers of people.

There are obviously significant differences as well. While in both countries the forest has been preeminently an arena of contention, the histories of settlement have followed radically different time frames. The brutal conflict between the American Indians and English colonists was anticipated several millennia before by the equally brutal extermination of indigenous hunter gatherer populations by the invading Aryans, a clash vividly captured in the sacred text of the conquerors, the Hindu epic Mahabharata. For most of recorded history, however, the Indian subcontinent has been dominated by a complex agricultural civilization with relatively high population densities. In contrast, the North American continent was sparsely populated till the arrival of the white man, while the technologies of rapid resource exploitation brought by the European have heralded an ecological transformation of unprecedented scope and intensity: a transformation that was accomplished (if that is the word) in centuries rather than, as in India, in millennia. More recently, India was under foreign domination for close on two centuries. High population densities, the history of colonialism, and the fact that it is still predominantly an agrarian society all distinguish India from the most powerful country in the industrial world.

The paper is in three parts. The first part identifies the four main sets of actors in the forest management debate, and outlines their social roots as well as environmental philosophies. The second part examines how these different philosophies lead to different demands on the state vis-a-vis the management and

use of the "commons" and the ensuing conflicts between different sets of users. The concluding section suggests that class struggles over nature are a pervasive feature of both industrialized and industrializing societies. The focus throughout will be on the similarities and differences in the two cultural contexts.

THE ACTORS AND THEIR MEGATHEORIES

Although the common property resource we are concerned with is controlled by the state, in both countries 4 sets of actors are of critical importance. It is their definitions of use that affect eventual management. In each case, the specific management proposals advanced by the group seeks support from an underlying "megatheory." of how society and nature should interact. While in reality strong normative prescriptions, these theories often claim the sanctity of science in presenting themselves in universalistic terms.

1. The Wilderness Ethic: While their practical emphases concern the preservation of unspoilt nature, defenders of the wilderness are prone to advance moral, scientific, and philosophical arguments to advance their cause. Although the initial and possibly still the dominant impulse is the aesthetic value of wilderness, as a temporary haven from the workaday world, this sentiment has found strong support from recent biological and philosophical debates. Biological diversity as an essential component of direct and indirect, known and yet to be discounted survival value for humanity as well as emphasis upon the intrinsic "rights" of non human species of animals and plants, has been prominent in recent international debates on wildlands preservation. The quite specific interests of biologists and nature lovers in the preservation of wilderness are now submerged in the megatheory of "biocentrism", that validates strong action on behalf of the rights of non human nature.

While the triumphant march of the wilderness ethic in American society has been widely celebrated and documented, the social history of wildlife conservation efforts in the Indian subcontinent remains to be written.² When it is, we suspect it will reveal some sharp points of contrast. Indian pioneers were not solitary explorers like John Muir, but a class of ex hunters turned naturalists from the Indian nobility. They have held a brief not for nature itself but for a few very specific big game animals which symbolize their feudal and martial background. As a consequence, management efforts have revolved around setting up parks for a few species such as the tiger and rhinoceros; satisfied with these efforts, they have not, unlike their American counterparts, attempted in any significant way to inculcate a wilderness ethic in the general public.

It may safely be said, however, that in both countries the leaders of the wilderness movement have been influential elites enjoying a disproportionate influence on government policy. They share with the bureaucratic-political leadership a similar educational, cultural and ethnic background, and this has in no small way helped them influence the designation and management of wildlands. Although the separation between the wilderness enthusiasts and the general public is almost total in India, with the latter showing virtually no interest in, and occasionally some hostility to, their campaigns, in the United States too one can discern a significant divergence between the so called wilderness "purists" and the majority of visitors to the National Parks. For the purists wilderness is sacred space, and they would like to enforce their own strict definitions of permissible use on the majority, for whom the opportunity for recreation takes precedence over the wilderness "experience."³

² A useful beginning has been made in Richard Tucker, "Resident Populations and Wildlife Reserves in India: the Prehistory of a Strategy," in Patrick West and Stephen Brechin, editors, *Resident Populations and National Parks in Developing Nations: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Ann Arbor 1987).

³ See Alison Chase, *Playing God in Yellowstone* (New York 1986)

4 Timber Harvesters: The second important category of resomcejjsers are those who view the forest as a source of industrial raw material. In terms of their management preferences, they are the polar opposite of the wilderness purist. While the latter stands for a "hands off management style that would involve the minimum possible interference with natural processes, industrial demands on the forest often involve substantial and occasionally irreversible modification of natural ecosystems. Socially, they can be further distinguished as members of a new and rising elite, and not, as are many wilderness leaders, as belonging to an older and somewhat declining elite. If an aesthetic appreciation of nature is a hallmark of old wealth elitists, environmentalism of all kinds is low with new wealth.

The industrial view of nature is simply instrumental. The forest is a source of raw material for processing factories, and the pursuit of profit dictates a pragmatic and flexible attitude towards its management. Yet, in response to the environmentalist challenges of the last two decades, some industrialists have been quick to develop their own megatheory of resource use. They call for a return to nineteenth century laissez faire economics, and the withdrawal of state control over forests. They uphold the "rationality" of the market as an efficient allocator of resources, an institution one of whose strengths (in their eyes) is that it avoids the wrangles and lawsuits that inevitably arise around natural resources managed by the state.

There is a strong element of duplicity in the cries of born again free marketeers, for in less fortunate circumstances industrialists are the first to seek the protection of the state. A striking but by no means untypical example is the recent proposal to open the Arctic Wildlife Refuge in Alaska to oil exploration by private corporations.⁴ This characteristic hypocrisy of capitalists is no reason not to take their rhetoric seriously, for it has been accompanied by a strong intellectual revival of a free market ideology.

⁴Timothy Aepfel, "Agency Recommends Opening Alaska Refuge to Oil Exploration," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 21 April 1987.

Emboldened by the Reagan Revolution, economists have been making sharp attacks on environmentalists for their lack of faith in the wonders of technology and their attempts to lock up resources for future generations ("what has posterity done for me," they indignantly exclaim). The magic of the market seems to have cast its spell on the present Indian administration too (let us not forget that the Wall Street Journal approvingly nicknamed the Indian Prime Minister "Rajiv Reagan"), and there, as in this country, there has been an aggressive campaign to privatize the public domain.

The Backcountry Folk : We refer here to rural populations who depend on the forest for a variety of economic needs, both subsistence and commercial. In India these would include hunter gatherers, shifting cultivators, pastoralists, artisans, landless laborers, and small and big farmers; in this country, farmers, shepherds, and stockmen. Some major differences are evident here. A large proportion of the rural population in India lives close to a biological subsistence margin, and access to fuel, fodder, and small timber is critical to the risk minimization strategies adopted by subsistence farmers everywhere. Although subsistence is a cultural as well as biological concept, and American farmers and stockmen doubtless feel deprived compared to their own "reference group," it can be said in general that for them denial of access to public lands and forests does not represent as immediate a threat to social survival. Coupled to these stark differences in economic levels and nutritive status are different histories of settlement. Most Indian villages have stayed on one site for centuries, and the collective consciousness their inhabitants stretches far back into the past; state usurpation of the forest is a comparatively recent phenomenon, and is resolutely opposed by peasants who cling tenaciously to traditional conceptions of ownership and use. Undeniably, American farmers are also in many cases opposed to state intervention; yet their opposition stems primarily from a frontier myth of unlimited

⁵ J.C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (New Haven 1976).

access to land, and the moral virtues of self sufficient individuals and households; not from a collective sense of place in which the forest is an integral part of communal life.

At the same time, in both countries rural claims on the forest are legitimized by a similar social philosophy, one that might be termed agrarian localism. In India, it draws sustenance from a long history of peasant movements as well the heritage of Gandhian activism, which has always given theoretical and practical primacy to village interests; in the U.S., from an equally long history of agrarian independence and "self sufficiency" whose refrain to the state (in myth if not in reality) has been "get off our back." The underlying populist themes of small versus big, rural versus urban-industrial, and local versus national have repeatedly surfaced in both contexts.

4. Scientific Foresters We come finally to the social group who have actually held territorial control over forests and wildlands, for over a century in India and nearly as long in the U.S.⁶ They adjudicate the competing claims of the interest groups dealt with above, and hope to do so in a "rational" and "objective" manner. Historically, foresters saw themselves as heralding the transition from laissez faire to state directed capitalism, in which they were, along with other professional groups, the "leading edge" of industrialization.⁷ Conservation was, and is, for them the "Gospel of Efficiency", and scientific expertise and state control its prerequisites.⁸ This belief that they are acting in a "scientific" and value-neutral manner is shared by wildland managers, who believe as religiously in the inviolability of the concept of "carrying capacity" as do foresters in "sustained yield."⁹

⁶The National Parks Service is included in this category; in India, there is no separate agency for the management of wildlife sanctuaries, and the forest department controls both commercial forests and parks.

⁷ Cf Thomas Haskell, editor, *The Authority of Experts: Studies in History and Theory* (Bloomington, Indiana 1984).

⁸ Samuel Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Mass. 1958).

⁹ W.R. Burch, Jr., "The Ecology of Metaphor", *Natural Resources Journal*, 1981.

In this manner, the megatheories of these competing groups have served to legitimize their actual claims on forests and woodland. The territorial aspirations of foresters are advanced by claims to a monopoly over scientific expertise; the aesthetic longings of nature lovers are legitimized by talk of biological diversity and environmental ethics; the profit motive of capital masquerades as a philosophy of freedom and choice; and the demands of agrarian populations are juxtaposed to an ideology of the rights of the "little man." This is not to say that theories are simply a mask for interests, for in many instances proponents (especially foresters) may be simply unaware of the fact that an allegedly "universal" and "objective" philosophy is both partial and value laden. All the same, it is important to note that normative (moral) and positive ("scientific") arguments are invariably found together, and there is little attempt by adherents to separate one from the other.

Finally, let us note the varying positions on state control of forests and wildland. Two groups are unambiguous in supporting state control over the commons, even if they insist that the state accept their definitions of acceptable use. Thus defenders of wildlife, see an interventionist and powerful state as indispensable in both designating wildlands and in keeping out intruders; as John Muir put it, the only thing that stood between his beloved California wilderness and destruction was Uncle Sam's cavalry.¹⁰ As for foresters, state control is virtually a sine qua non; it allows scientific experts the room to plan rationally and at a nation wide level, to carry out their brief in defining and implementing forest management plans for the "greatest good of the greatest number." Agricultural interests, for their part, while clearly expecting the government to take their side against their historic enemies, are not so sanguine about state control; they argue in favor of "local" management, even if the American version resembles open access and the Indian version (at least in theory) "common"

¹⁰ John Muir, "The American Forests", *Atlantic Monthly*, July 1897, pp153-54. Wilderness elites in India would also like legislative change to vest the forest staff with far greater punitive sanctions.

property more strictly defined. Finally, industrialists are characteristically opportunistic about the question of state ownership of the commons; calling in good times for privatization, in bad times for state control and the provision of subsidized raw material.

A TYPOLOGY OF FOREST CONFLICT

Competing social constructions of the "commons" give rise to a series of conflicts. A typology of potential and actual conflicts is presented below. It is important to remember that these conflicts are very rarely "face to face" but are played out by proxy. As the body in actual control of the contested resource, the state plays a mediating role, with individual parties in any dispute calling upon it to take its side.

Conflict 1 : Wilderness versus Forestry

(a) U.S. : This is of course the conflict between preservationists and utilitarians that has plagued American environmentalism since the turn of the century. It can be viewed as primarily a conflict between different sets of elites (old wealth and old professionals versus new wealth and new professionals) each of whom are trying to impose their vision of the higher uses of nature on the rest of society. It has been further complicated by the emergence of wildlife specialists as a professional-bureaucratic strata with interests that conflict both scientifically and politically with the forestry establishment.

A subsidiary conflict, within the American wilderness movement, is of some significance. Although the majority of Americans see the wilderness as a source of recreation and leisure, a vocal and influential minority views many elements of popular use as constituting desecration of a wilderness that for them is sacred space. They have very restrictive and rigorously defined notions of what is permissible activity in

wild areas; setting up, as it were, a system of controls wherein large sections of the commons would be inaccessible to the public.

(b) India : As yet this is not a very visible or significant conflict. The forest department has both territorial and administrative control over national parks and sanctuaries.

With the opportunities for career and social advancement presented by the burgeoning international concern and funding for endangered species management, forest officials have been quick to adopt wilderness rhetoric.

Conflict 2 : Wilderness versus Rural Interests

(a) In both countries, this is potentially the most serious conflict. John Muir's hostility to domestic livestock and sheep is well known - "hoofed locusts", he called the latter, believing, rightly or wrongly, that they represented a grave threat to the wilderness.

Modern American environmentalists have taken over Muir's disapproval and transformed it into a generalized contempt for agriculture. Quite distant from the survival base of society, most wilderness enthusiasts can only romanticize and poeticize about natural phenomena; in their minds, aesthetic issue should always get priority over basic health and subsistence issues regarding nature. An agrarian life, they believe, is the most boring and dull form of human existence; given a choice, they would outlaw it entirely in favor of the two poles of city and wilderness.¹¹ This contempt is often returned, with interest, by farmers, who deplore interference by wilderness purists and their attempts to vest unused land in the public domain.

(b) India : Here the clash is more deep rooted, intense, and violent The game laws introduced by colonial foresters were bitterly opposed by tribal and village populations for whom hunting was an integral part of their cultural and ritual life as well as an

¹¹ See Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven 1982), ; Linda Graber, *Wilderness as Sacred Space* (Washington 1976), ; Daniel Jansen, "The Future of Tropical Ecology", *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics*, 1986. This pejorative view of agriculture is peculiar to the wilderness movement; for an alternative view, in which an ecologically sound agriculture can form the basis of cultural resurgence, see Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America* (San Francisco 1986)

important source of protein.¹² Latterly, the designation of wild areas as game sanctuaries has led to the physical eviction of the inhabitants of villages sited in the new reserve. The restrictions on access for fuel and fodder mandated by the management of parks have also caused acute distress to peasants living in the vicinity. Crop damage by raiding elephants and rhinoceros, and man eating and cattle lifting by tigers and leopards, are also cited as inevitable if unfortunate byproducts of a conservation strategy oriented towards big game species. As the benefits of conservation flow primarily to rich urban tourists (both Indian and foreign), the class bias of the wilderness movement has legitimately been called into question by several environmentalists.¹³

Conflict 3 : Wilderness versus Industry

(a) U.S. : Although a relationship of some ambiguity, for the most part it is an adversarial one. Industrialists are the prototypical "developers," bringing with them the juggernaut of technological progress; environmentalists trying desperately to keep them and their machinery out of the wilderness. In rhetoric if not in substance, wilderness organizations identify commerce as the greatest enemy.

(b) India : Although, given the much higher population densities and the relative scarcity both of industrial raw material and wilderness, one would expect this conflict to be more intense in India in fact the relationship is far more complex. Wilderness lovers identify rural populations as their main enemy, and rarely if ever call commercial forest operations into question. The relationship between these two segments of the ruling elite is a far more harmonious one; their demands on the state, while quite

¹² Cf Verrier Elwin, *The Baiga* (London 1939); W.V. Grigson, *The Maria Gonds of Bastar* (London 1938).

¹³ Centre for Science and Environment, *India: The State of the Environment 1982: A Citizens Report* (New Delhi 1982); R. Sukumar, "Elephant-Man Conflict in Karnataka," in Cecil Saldanha, editor, *The State of Environment in Karnataka* (Bangalore 1985); Ramachandra Guha, "Ecology in its Variety, Not Elitist Concern for Animals", *The Statesman*, Calcutta, 17.10.1984.

different, do not clash so long as they are met from different portions of the forest estate. Thus commercial operations are given precedence in the management of secondary forests; preservation of game species in the management of primary forests. Indeed, in a manner analogous to the British capitalist's fetish for country houses¹⁴, the Indian industrialist, equally unsure of his social position, tries to ape the lifestyle of the landed gentry; thus the campaign for wildlife has found moral and financial support from big business.

Conflict 4 : Foresters versus Rural Peoples.

(a) U.S. : In general, the foresters have tried to accommodate rural needs (excessively so in the eyes of the wilderness purist). However, they have taken the trouble to define these needs on their own, in the best traditions of the Progressive movement. Like the Western irrigators and proponents of "scientific" agriculture¹⁵, the rallying cry of American forestry (at least in part) was "Science in the Service of Jeffersonian Democracy." Provision of services to the "yeoman" farmer has historically been an important element in the forester's calling, even if the nature of the services and the nature of the farmer has changed radically in the intervening decades.

India : The situation could not be more opposed. Although the state has retained control over forests for a century and a quarter, in the long sweep of agrarian history this is an insignificant period of time; to this day, the forest department is viewed as little more than an interloper by a majority of peasants. "Forest administration," a British official in the Lower Himalaya ruefully remarked in 1907, "consists for most part in a running fight with villagers."¹⁶ That, in a nutshell, is the story of Indian

14 Cf Martin Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (Cambridge 1981).

15 Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity and the Growth of the American West* (New York 1985).

16 "Note on forest administration for my successor," by McNair, Deputy Commissioner, Garhwal, dated February 1907, in Forest Department file 11/1908, Uttar Pradesh State Archives (UPSA), Lucknow.

forestry. Villagers not merely deplore the commercial orientation of forest operations; they actively contest the legitimacy of state ownership and control. Organized peasant movements against state forestry have been both widespread and frequent; on a day to day basis, villagers often meet their requirements by circumventing the forest laws.¹⁷

Conflict 5 : Foresters versus Industry

We have suggested above that state forestry mirrored a general transition from unregulated to regulated capitalism. In both India and the U.S., the scientific, political, and management agenda of foresters has in consequence stressed the production of roundwood for industry.¹⁸ In general, the relationship has been cordial and cooperative, with private enterprise being the "means" by which scientific forestry objectives are obtained. However, the relationship has followed market patterns; in boom periods of high timber prices industry has pressed for privatization, in depressed periods industry has sought divestment of timber lands and large public subsidy.

Conflict 6 : Town versus Country

(a) U.S. : In the U.S. the conflict between town and country has marched to the more steady hymns of fascination for the wilderness. The town was a center of rustics full of the cliches and narrow prejudices of characters in a Sinclair Lewis novel. In that realm of vision the true conflict of town and country was disguised. Local town elites have been only too willing to sell out to multinational corporate visions. And the real struggle has been between equally transitory enterprises, differentiated more by size

¹⁷ See Ramachandra Guha, "Forestry in British and Post British India: A Historical Analysis," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Bombay, 29.10. and 5-12.11.1983. ; idem, "Forestry and Social Protest in British Kumaun, c.1893-1921," in Ranajit Guha, editor, *Subaltern Studies IV* (New Delhi 1985).

¹⁸ One important difference is the absence of private forest ownership in India; till very recently, industry depended exclusively on state forests for raw material.

and ownership than by an interest in sustaining the community or the resource. The long history of debates between foresters and resource scholars since the turn of the century is clear evidence that in spite of all the talk about sustained yield forestry and sustainable communities, the real interest was in which size firm and which set of professionals were going to determine the nature of forest practices.¹⁹

John Nichols trilogy of a small town in the American southwest has a good deal more truth than fiction in its descriptions of elites in resource dependent small towns with an eager willingness to sell local values for personal and corporate gain. Unlike many such novels he clearly indicates that such greed is not confined to elites but is equally pervasive in the underclass with its opportunistic search for a fast and easy gain and a willingness to share in the latest real estate scam. Indeed, of his wide array of characters from "good" guys like Sierra Club wilderness supporters and U.S. foresters and wildlifers to the usual western small town parasites, only a few, older hispanic peasants seem to have any sense of value for the quality and ties of place.

Nichols' work mirrors a significant difference between the U.S. and Indian forest communities. In spite of all the talk about sustained yield forestry and getting benefits to the local people, most forest communities have been transient locales of opportunism rather than peoples with a sense of their unique place and culture. The question has not been one of community, but whether many small mills would cut out and get out faster than one large, absentee owned mill. The results seem to be about the same.

In the Pacific Northwest of 1987, the better technology and capital of larger firms means they can produce more with less workers. In the northwoods of Maine, the less profitable jobs of timber cutting are left to small operators who are wholly dependent upon the larger mills. In both cases the depth and permanence of communal ties and

¹⁹ J.H. Drielsma, *The Influence of Forest-based Industries on Rural Communities*, unpublished Ph D thesis, Yale University, 1984.

loyalty are not unlike descriptions of logging towns in the New York Adorondacks early in the 19th century. In the U.S. it is misnomer to talk about forest communities, unless they have a high infusion of condo gentrification or other means of economic sustenance, most of them are like central city slums, staging areas for those on the way out, or holding reservoirs for those who have lost their place in the materialist queue.

(b) India : Here the conflict between subsistence (rural) needs and commercial (urbati-industrial) needs is at the core of the forest management debate as more generally of the environment debate.²⁰ While it is the underlying cause of Conflict 4, this conflict is mediated by the forest department, and the protagonists very rarely come face to face. At one level an economic conflict between contending use of the resources, it is a conflict invested in popular discourse with a deeper symbolic significance. Its historical roots lie in the commercialization of the economy under British rule. Central to the transformation from an elite to a peasant and mass based nationalism was a rhetoric of deprivation and disintegration of subsistence oriented village communities through colonial land, revenue, and trade policy.²¹ This transition was captured in a statement by the leader of the peasant opposition to colonial forestry in the Indian Himalaya. As Badridutt Pande put it, in days past forest resources were plentiful and the villagers had an abundance of food and drink; but under the colonial system "in place of tins of ghee [clarified butter] the Forest Department gives them tins of [pine] resin", the latter being completely useless so far as the peasants were concerned.²²

The disjunction between the use of natural resources in a peasant economy oriented towards subsistence and commercial exploitation closely informed agrarian

²⁰ See Anil Agarwal, "Human-Nature Interactions in a Third World Country," *The Environmentalist*, Vol.6, No. 3, 1986.

²¹ Partha Chatterjee, "Gandhi and the Critique of Civil Society," in Ranajit Guha, editor, *Subaltern Studies III* (New Delhi 1984); Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India, 1885-1947* (New Delhi 1983).

²² See Forest Department file 157/1921, UPSA, Lucknow.

resistance to colonial forestry. In the circumstances, the transfer of power to the party of Indian nationalism (the Congress) in 1947 raised expectations of an abrupt reversal of forest policy in the service of rural needs. But the policy of rapid industrialization adopted by the Indian state implied a further intensification of commercial forest operations, and curbs on peasant access remained in place. The continuing march of commercial forestry, and the concomitant denial of village rights culminated in a series of peasant movements in the 1970's and 1980's that have resurrected the subsistence-commerce and rural-urban dichotomies. As a participant of the Chipko movement, referring both to declining agricultural yields and fuel shortages, observed; "As it is we get but a little grain from our fields; when we could not get wood even to cook this paltry amount we had to resort to a social movement." These sentiments have informed the more general opposition to industry and city oriented economic policies, the so called urban bias in planning. Gandhi believed that "India lives on in its villages", and the theme of betrayal of the Gandhian vision is effectively used by the spokesmen of rural resurgence.

The history of forest and wildland use, legislation, and management has reflected the changing fortunes of the contending parties in these conflicts. As the trustee of the commons, the state is expected to adjudicate among these competing uses. Indeed, in democratic societies the state is itself a commons, a resource pool composed of shares of shifting worth allocated to different classes and social strata. While poised, to all intents and purposes, above civil society, in its operations the state strongly reflects the social struggles being played out "below." Government policies, whether in the realm of natural resource management or elsewhere, are a barometer, not of "public opinion" in an abstract sense, but of the relative political and ideological resources (at any moment in time) that contending social groups can call upon.

CLASS STRUGGLES OVER NATURE

In coming decades, class struggles over nature are likely to be a central feature of both industrialized and industrializing societies. The institutional expression of these struggles is the environmental movement. It is here that some of the more significant contrasts emerge. Given the quite different social histories of the U.S. and India, the respective movements have quite different trajectories.

Perhaps the key difference is that whereas in the U.S. environmentalism is fueled by the impulse of consumption, in India it is fueled by the impulse of subsistence. The standard explanation for the emergence of environmentalism in the West suggests that it is quintessentially a "postindustrial" and "postmaterial" phenomena; ecological degradation becomes apparent only after a certain level of economic development, when access to nature for leisure becomes an integral part of the consumer economy.²³ In Third World countries such as India, however, due to high population densities and a history of exploitative social regimes (both colonial and post colonial), rapid environmental degradation is built into the very process of industrialization. If in the U.S. environmentalism is a conflict over access to leisure and health, in India it is primarily a struggle over productive resources between competing groups (typically peasants and industry²⁴).

The somewhat different social bases of environmental concern have a bearing on tactics. In India, direct action is very important; attacks on officials and property, strikes, demonstrations, and physical attempts to repossess the commons, have all been reported with increasing frequency. There is a striking similarity in action and idiom with the archetypal peasant movement. In the U.S., on the other hand, activities

²³ Samuel Hays, "From Conservation to Environment: Environmental Politics in the United States Since World War Two," *Environmental Review*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Fall 1982.

²⁴ See, for an excellent review, Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain, editors, *India: The State of the Environment 1984-85: A Citizens Report* (New Delhi 1985).

such as political lobbying, and the use of the courts and the media, are relatively more important. In this manner, different motivations inform different strategies of political action.²⁵

Interestingly enough, in both countries the natural resource bureaucracy, the body in territorial control of the commons, finds itself caught between "developers" and environmentalists. It continues to uphold a philosophy of scientific management (in its sustained yield and carrying capacity variants) which it believes is superior both to local "subsistence" science regarding ecosystems and the calculus of commercial profitability. In response to criticism, the survival instinct of resource professionals leads them to blame others (Indian forest officials blame peasants for deforestation). They continue to believe in the rationality and efficacy of centralized management, pleading only that they were not given the opportunity to realize their vision. But above all, with the true territorial instincts of the social animal, the bureaucracy refuses to relinquish control of the commons.

But the environmentalists²⁶ and developers are both at the door, and even if they are unsuccessful in actually wresting control of the public domain, they will continue to be a factor to reckon with. The conflicts between the 4 main protagonists treated in this paper will continue to be an important part of the social and natural landscape in the two countries. These struggles will take a variety of forms, which include:

1. Struggles over whose perceptions of nature will prevail;
2. Struggles over who pays and who gains from the management of the commons;

²⁵ This is not to say that these two sets of strategies are mutually exclusive. There has been some dissatisfaction in recent years with the growing "professionalization" of the American movement, expressed by activists who practice a far more militant defense of wilderness; whereas in India, intellectuals and journalists have played an important role in giving wide coverage to local movements and by mediating between these movements and the state.

²⁶ In the preceding paragraphs "environmentalists" has been used rather loosely to denote wilderness enthusiasts in America and sympathizers of subsistence peasant movements in India concerned with sustainable use of nature (e.g. the Chipko movement); these we recognize to be dominant trends only. Space does not permit analysis of conflicts between different traditions within a country's environmental movement.

3. Struggles over the moral consequences of the provision of services from the commons;
4. Struggles over the relative worth of publicly and privately provided services.

In both India and the United States, therefore, "nature" and its use are the setting for a new kind of class struggle. The scene has shifted from the field and factory to the forest, and from the privately owned land and resources to the public domain, but it is evident that the conflict over nature is to a lesser or greater extent displacing earlier conflicts between capital and labor and the landed and the landless. These struggles do not seem to have the drama of earlier class struggles because they do not fit the comfortable rhetoric of academic (or party) Marxism. But just as environmental conflicts transcend, without necessarily negating, more orthodox social struggles, our task is to develop analytical categories which can incorporate the central insights of Marxism while going beyond it.