

Rethinking Common Property, Community and Collective Action: Nature and Peasant Politics in India

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Introduction

How does the expansion of state and market forces in the process of 'development' affect the capacity and chances for success of collective action in village communities? In what ways do supralocal collective actors such as social movements alter the terrain on which issues of collective action are fought out? I will address these two questions in this paper with reference to the management of common property in natural resources in India. In doing so, I will argue that the institutionalist perspective that has now come to dominate the common property literature is inadequate in explaining collective action around common property because it does not situate it within wider state and market forces nor in the context of broader political struggles such as those represented by social movements around natural resources.

Much of the recent research on 'common property resources' (CPRs) has moved away from the radical individualism of Garrett Hardin's 'tragedy of the commons' framework to focus on the role of communities and institutions in managing common property and averting the tragedy. As exemplified in the works of Michael Taylor and Elinor Ostrom, this move emphasizes factors 'endogenous' to the community of users in determining the capacity of institutions to effectively avert tragedy. In the burgeoning literature on common property, case studies have inevitably focused on policy recommendations for wise common property management based on descriptions of how communities have managed common property on their own. The chief achievement of the institutionalist common property literature has been to foreground the capacity of 'community' and individuals constituting 'user groups' to beat Hardin's odds and provide solutions to collective action problems around common property. However, the search for new institutions, indeed institutional innovation generally, has been seen in the literature as something that happens without reference to political dynamics.

In this paper, I will argue that a crucial asymmetry exists between the community and the outside world. As a result, despite exhibiting precisely the features highlighted by Ostrom as constituting institutional capacity leading to successful and enduring common property regimes, a tragedy of the commons may occur because of state and market forces. Endogenous features of community may not be sufficient to overcome the forces of the state and the market, and external allies may be necessary to provide information regarding state strategies and to extend pre-existing notions of community. I will make my critique and present an alternative framework to conceptualize links between common property, community and collective action based on the experience of peasant communities in India and their relations with social movements around the question of 'the environment'.

The Institutional Response to Hardin

Since the appearance of Garrett Hardin's seminal article on "The Tragedy of the Commons" twenty-six years ago, those interested in common property have been divided into two camps. Hardin's postulate that users of a common property, pursuing 'rational self interest', would inevitably overuse and degrade the commons confirmed what policy makers and bureaucrats had always thought: that their power was necessary to save resource degradation on the commons since the commoners could not govern themselves. In an early critique, Ciriacy-Wantrup and Bishop argued that Hardin had confused common property, *res communes*, which by definition 'belongs' to a group "in which a number of user are co-equal in their rights to use the resource," for open access, *res nullius*, where no rules of exclusion operate.¹ Building on this theoretical intervention, Ostrom has identified a set of conditions for the successful management of a commons. The rules of membership to this group should be well specified. In addition, there should be effective membership and resource boundaries, balance between appropriation and provision rules, rules of monitoring, arenas of participation and conflict resolution for members of the user group, credible sanctions against those who break the rules, and finally autonomy from the external state.² Each one of these mechanisms are to be maintained by a series of 'binding contracts'. These contracts are enforced by institutions which "reduce uncertainty by providing a structure to political, social and economic exchange."³

Today, an expanding institutionalist literature has begun to argue that if user-groups are able to devise specific mechanisms, they could manage common property successfully over centuries. Complementarily, communitarians have argued that these mechanisms can be devised with relative ease if the community meets a set of specified criteria. An impressive array of cases, spanning the Swiss Alps, the Spanish huerta and the zanjera system from the Philippines are today well known examples of long standing successful common property regimes (CPRs).⁴ Perhaps the most significant progress in the common property literature, one can safely say, has been to establish the ability of communities to devise quite innovative mechanisms to manage common property, and to specify the conditions of community that would facilitate them. The institutionalist tradition in particular has given to individuals, often in rural and otherwise marginalized communities, an agency in recognizing and solving dilemmas over common property use hitherto denied to them in Hardin's formulation, and has shown a way other than privatization of the commons or empowering the external state in wise and restrained use of common property. There is now a danger, however, of granting too much agency to communities, to the neglect of the crucial asymmetries that exist within them, and between them and external actors such as the state and non-local users of the resource. In particular, too much attention has been given to the in/ability of individuals to cooperate over a variety of tasks deemed necessary for successful common property resource management, and not enough to the ways in which the external state and market forces affect the conditions for and scope of such cooperation. This omission potentially would lead to faulty prescriptions for managing common property, and for making CPR management a cornerstone of a sustainable development policy. At worst, it might invite undue blame on the commoners for not having generated adequate collective action, and thus justify either the privatization or the statization of a common property.

¹ S. Ciriacy-Wantrup and R. Bishop, "'Common Property' as a Concept in Natural Resource Policy", *Natural Resources Journal*, vol. 15, 1975: p 714.

² Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990: p 90.

³ Douglass North, "Institutions and a Transaction-Costs Theory of Exchange", in J. Alt and K. Shepsle eds., *Perspectives on Positive Political Economy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990: p 182.

⁴ For examples of these and other cases, see, James Acheson and Bonnie McCay eds., *The Question of the Commons*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987.

Over the last century and a half, common property regimes of considerable longevity, in spite of exhibiting the features of community specified by Taylor and Singleton, have collapsed.⁵ I have elsewhere identified the expansion of the powers of the modern state pursuing 'development' and the entry of new users of resources previously managed as common property as factors rendering community as a collective actor inadequate in managing common property in the face of novel odds.⁶ The same set of factors also undermine Ostrom's institutionalist framework: altering the condition of effective autonomy from the state makes irrelevant all the other mechanisms for the successful and durable self-management of common property. I will focus on these mechanisms identified as crucial to long term 'successful' common property management. Placing them in the context of hill agriculture in the state of Uttar Pradesh in India, I will show the extent to which local users were able to generate these mechanisms in using common forests. I will then trace the process by which these hill communities lost their capacity to maintain these mechanisms. Finally, I will discuss how each of these mechanisms became issues in popular politics pitting users of resources against the state. The overall purpose of this paper is to argue a) that state capacity is the crucial variable on which the viability of endogenous mechanisms hinges; b) that an asymmetry exists between communities of resource users and the state in developing societies; c) that this asymmetry limits the capacity of users to create effective mechanisms to govern a commons; and d) that social movements respond to this asymmetry by creating new notions of community and by redefining the rights of users that can be legitimately demanded of the state. In effect, I will introduce to the commons literature social movements as innovators of institutions for governing common property.

Institutions and Common Forests in the Himalayas

I shall now describe the institutions that performed these above-mentioned functions in the hill economy of Uttar Pradesh (UP), India. This is aimed to form the backdrop of 'initial conditions' against which the history of state expansion will be later assessed.

Clearly Defined Boundaries and Rules of Membership: In the new institutionalist perspective, "individuals or households who have rights to withdraw resource units from the CPR must be clearly defined, as must the boundaries of the CPR itself."⁷ Membership to the community of resource users has to be restricted first in order to limit the net pressure on the resource. Secondly, small group size makes it possible for members to interact with each other, be aware of each others' preferences, and thus make monitoring of behaviour and imposing sanctions on rule breakers easier. In other words, membership rules are needed to keep demand on resources low and to facilitate stable relationships between members by providing 'assurance' to each user about the others' preferences. As Bardhan notes, these rules are more liable to hold when entry and exit options are not available to members.⁸

⁵Michael Taylor and Sara Singleton, "The Communal Resource: Transaction Costs and the Solution of Collective Action Problems", *Politics & Society*, vol 21, no 2, June 1993.

⁶See Subir Sinha, "Common Property, Community and Collective Action: The Limits of Endogenous Solutions", Paper presented at the Midwest Political Science Conference, Chicago, April 14, 1994.

⁷Ostrom, *op.cit.*, p 91.

⁸Pranab Bardhan, "Analytics of the Institutions of Informal Cooperation in Rural Development", *World Development*, vol 21, no 4, 1993. Bardhan also subscribes to the principles articulated by institutionalists such as Ostrom.

Rural communities devise a variety of ways to 'keep outsiders out', and also to decide which insiders have what sorts of rights to use common resources.⁹ In several cases, such as in the Swiss Alps, these rules are formalized in charters, giving the community the appearance of 'microconstitutions'.¹⁰ In the Himalayan villages of UP, while a variety of resources such as irrigation, pastures and forests were managed as common property, not all villages had explicit rules of membership to the community. At the same time, it was clear to members of a village which resources were theirs, and this was clear to those of other villages as well. Conventional boundaries between villages and their forests were formalized in the British land revenue settlements of 1823.¹¹ These boundaries were not challenged as long as each village had sufficient common forests. In several villages, these boundaries were respected as recently as the 1980s, even though they were not recorded in the revenue settlements of the 19th century. Neighbouring villagers could use these forests, not as a right but subject to the pleasure of the village which 'owned' them.¹² The legitimacy of boundaries thus followed a logic distinct from official and formal records.

Not all villagers in all villages had equal rights to the forests. Membership rules included a stipulated number of years of residence in the village, a demonstrated willingness to share the costs and responsibilities of forest protection and regeneration, and to participate in the public affairs of the village. In several villages, however, fresh immigrants had immediate rights to the common forests on the payment of nominal fees. The quantum of forests annually allotted to a household was flexible, and could be increased to meet requirements of house-building, for making agricultural implements and to meet ceremonial and funereal purposes.

Until recently, the size of rural communities was also small. The rate of growth of rural population in the hills was low, though towns began to spring up in the hills subsequent to the annexation of the area by the British in the 1820s. Internal migration between villages was limited to those motivated by matrimony. Likewise, there was little migration into villages from outside the hill area, though of course local towns continued to grow. Until the 1920s, rural outmigration was also limited, since villages were self-sufficient in providing subsistence from local resources. As a result of limited exit and entry options, communities retained a small enough size and stable membership to facilitate the management of common forests and other common resources. Both the boundaries of the common forests and the membership of communities, therefore, were recognized by villagers and respected by members of other collectivities.

Appropriation and Provision Rules: Institutionalists rightly point out the importance of rules that govern the time, place, technology and quantum of resource use, rules that are sensitive to local conditions as well as to other rules of providing labour, material and money for the use and upkeep of the common resource.¹³ These rules would provide a uniformity in resource use across users, as well as specify the balance between rights to the resource and responsibilities

⁹One example of such an arrangement comes from the Tigray in Ethiopia, where only those contributing food for pilgrims going by their villages had rights to the chigurafgoses communal tenure. See Dan Bauer, "The Dynamics of Communal and Hereditary Land Tenure among the Tigray of Ethiopia", in McCay and Acheson eds., *op.cit.*

¹⁰This idea of 'microconstitutions' is Ostrom's. See E. Ostrom, "Microconstitutional Change in Multiconstitutional Political Systems", *Rationality and Society*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1989.

¹¹A.E. Osmaston, "Panchayat Forests in Kumaon", *Indian Forester*, vol 58, 1932.

¹²Marcus Moensch, "Turf Management in a Garhwal Village" in John Bruce and Louise Fortmann eds., *Whose Trees?*, Boulder: University of Colorado Press; 1991.

¹³Ostrom, *op.cit.*; p 92.

towards it. In the UP hills, parts of the common forest were closed to users annually to allow for regeneration and even within those parts open to use, annual decisions were taken by the village council regarding the age, height and species of specific trees that were available for use. Each household had more-or-less equal allotments of wood for their purposes, a rule made stable by the near uniformity in landholdings in hill villages. At the same time, these rules were flexible enough to increase the allotment for households engaged in building new homes or repairing old ones, as well for meeting funeral requirements. One practice in areas deficient in wood was "lakdi dena", or 'giving the gift of wood', in which other houses made contributions to enable a bereaved family meet its wood requirements for the cremation. Indeed, participation in such a practice of giving was part of what made a household a member of a community.¹⁴ As for technology, until the arrival of commercial forestry in the mid-19th century, different forms of axes and blades were used to gather forest produce such as wood and fodder. In other words, apart from widespread popular cultural veneration of the forests and of specific tree varieties, there were technological limitations on the quantum of resource use.

While appropriation rules point to users' rights to the resource, provision rules indicate their responsibilities towards them. Community labour was - and still is - used to fence in the common village forest. In villages that were sufficiently wealthy to appoint a guard, all users were expected to contribute towards his payment, and to make ceremonial contributions during festivals. Apart from these specifically appointed monitors, individual users were vigilant of infringements by other fellow users as well as encroachments by those deemed to be 'outsiders'. Since there were multiple common resources, including irrigation channels and pastures as well as collective community labour for specific agricultural tasks, rights of forest use were enmeshed with a wider set of responsibilities towards the community and its common resources.

Arenas of Participation and Conflict Resolution: Institutionalists require that those affected by the appropriation rules should be able to participate in a process to alter them, and recourse to mechanisms to resolve conflicts between each other and the external state. In the UP hill villages, as noted above, forests were not the only arenas of collective and cooperative behaviour among members of village communities. Villagers interacted over common water channels, collective seasonal migration, common pastures and a number of agricultural tasks. In addition, several festivals were observed by the village as a community. Village councils resolved disputes regarding the use of resources, the enforcement of caste norms, and of generally exercising the authority of the community. Multiple levels of interaction between members made monitoring and sanctioning users easier. At the same time, they provided 'assurance' to members about each others' preferences and priorities over resource use. In other words, multiplex relations provided information needed by members to coordinate collective action on many fronts, and to pre-empt conflict. Though definitive information on the matter is sketchy, there are indications that elected village councils were operational in several part of the hills.¹⁵ It was in these councils that collective choice arrangements were debated. With the increasing reach of the colonial state, specifically its Revenue and Forest Departments, village councils became the institutions that mediated relations between the community and the external state.

As far as the forests were concerned, the village councils were empowered to take a variety of decisions regarding closing and opening forest tracts for use by members. These councils looked after the day to day affairs of the forests and their upkeep. In wealthier villages, they appointed

¹⁴ Contributing towards funeral expenses has been a marker of community in other contexts as well. See James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985; ch. 1.

¹⁵ Census of India, 1961, vol. XV, pt VI, Village Survey Monograph #5, Village Thapli, Tehsil Pauri, District Garhwal; p 2.

guards or otherwise devised rotational rules for users to keep guard over the community forests. They made decisions on applications for membership, for increased allotment of forest produce to households and the nature and quantum of fines to be imposed on defaulters.

Effective Monitoring: Monitoring is crucial in the institutional perspective because unregulated individuals are liable to pursue unrestrained self-interest, an assumption common with Hardin, and also because users need to be aware of the current condition and status of the common resource. In the UP hills, Traill notes after his initial survey of 1823, explicit contracts were not required since people were known to keep their word.¹⁶ There is no mention in his early account of any litigation in the local courts concerning disputes over forest use, suggesting that these disputes were few in number and that local community authority systems, such as village councils, were capable of handling them at the local level. No specialized monitor seems to have been appointed to record the behaviour of individual users, and the community as a collectivity performed this function. Restraint in resource use, a function of low local and external demand, safe levels of technology, and the cultural significance of certain trees, as well as culturally coded systems of regeneration, resulted in extensive forest resources, and the need to monitor the status of forests was not felt.

With extensive deforestation in the late 19th century and the formalization of village councils in the 1920s and 1930s, the need for monitoring became more keenly felt. Stone walls were raised around village forests to restrict access. More prosperous villages appointed forest watchers, and less prosperous ones devised methods of rotating the task of monitoring among member households. For the first time, close accounts were kept of transactions involving common forests. This indicates a transition from a stage where infringements and encroachments on the common forests were negligible, with no need of monitoring mechanisms, to a stage where several villages made the transition to effective monitoring systems. There are examples in which individual villagers other than appointed forest guards reported to the forest council if they discovered forest offences on their own. Additionally, the office bearers of the council made surprise checks into the forests to see that guards were performing their duties satisfactorily.¹⁷ In other words, there were systems of monitoring offenders and the monitors, and since office bearers of the councils were elected periodically (though not in all villages), there were checks on the corruptibility of council leaders.

Credible Sanctions: Institutionalists believe that each member of the community as a potential breaker of rules needs to be reined in by a system of graduated and credible sanctions. In other words, members of the community must believe that their infractions will be detected, punished and that this punishment would be considered legitimate by other members of the community. These sanctions may well be formal, with fines or other punishments fixed for each act of infringement. On the other hand, informal sanctions, may be more diffused and thus easier for the offender to accept and for the community to implement.

In several villages of the UP hills, villagers denied that there were frequent cases of people breaking rules of using common forests in the first place. This was partly the result of the divinity attached to certain tree species and to specific forest tracts, and the fear of divine retribution directed at those operating in contravention of norms. In some villages, sanctions were imposed in an informal way. Village Mokh Malla, for example, had two common forests, and use rules were such that one forest was opened for use while the other was closed. In the tract opened for use by a decision of the village council, trees that could be cut for use were

¹⁶G.W. Traill, "Statistical Sketches of Kumaon", *Asiatic Researches*, 1821.

¹⁷Vishwa Ballabh and Katar Singh, Van (Forest) Panchayats in Uttar Pradesh Hills: A Critical Analysis, Anand: IRMA Research Paper, 1988; p 17.

specified by species, size and height. One member was caught stealing wood from the closed forest, and was first reprimanded. When he persisted with wood theft, the council imposed a monetary fine on him, which he refused to pay. The village council then informed the culprit's brother, who was serving in the Indian army, and also wrote a letter to his commanding officer. Failing still to extract the fines from the culprit, the village council falsely implicated him in a revenue litigation. Since interacting with the bureaucracy of the modern state is anathema to the hill peasant, this punishment of defiance of community rules of using the forests had a deep impact. Since this case in the late 1970s, the village has not seen any other cases of members breaking norms of forest use.¹⁸ It should be clear from this example that in order for informal sanctions to be effective, there has to be a set of shared beliefs about what is just and unjust, fair and unfair, and, most importantly, what authority is considered legitimate.

Effective Autonomy from the State: Under this condition, the community has to have the decisive authority in matters including the management of common resources, and that this authority is not challenged by external governmental authorities. In the UP hills this situation existed not because of a conscious policy of the external state but because of its incapacity. Traill's account of 1821 describes the precolonial state as weak and lacking the capacity even to collect adequate revenue. It is important to note that while all land belonged to the king, all manners of essentially illegal transactions and transfer of land took place between individuals. Several common forests, likewise, technically belonged to the king but were effectively managed as common property by village communities. This informality in property relations leading to distinction between the ownership and effective control of resources extended to pastures and small scale irrigation channels as well. Recalling the above-mentioned observation regarding the low volume of litigation pending in the pre-colonial judicial system, one can deduce that the effective authority of the community over matters such as the management of common forests derived from its effective autonomy from a weak state.

From the above section it should be clear that village communities in the UP hills developed all of the mechanisms that are required in the institutionalist perspective for the successful management of common forests. Admittedly these mechanisms were informal in nature, but they seem to have been effective, and in any case hill communities seem to have adapted to the presence of the stronger colonial state by formalizing their boundaries under the provisions of the 1823 Revenue Settlement and then the Forest Legislation of the 1920s allowing the creation of Forest Councils with formal rules and procedures. However, state intervention in the economies of the forests was not universally enabling. Hill communities moved from a situation of effective autonomy from the state to one in which the relations between them became marked by a radical asymmetry. It is the process of changed relationship between the community and the state, and its impact on the institutional mechanisms governing common forests that I will turn to in the next section.

The End of Endogenous Community Capacity

Though Ostrom and the institutionalists list effective autonomy from an external state merely as one of several factors leading to long-enduring and successful common property regimes, I have posited that this condition underpins all of the other mechanisms. Changes in the relations between the state and the community would affect the conditions for collective action around common property in the following ways: If the community's rights to determine the rules of membership are transferred to an external authority, then its capacity to enforce these rules will also be undermined, since the external authority potentially may overturn the decision of the community on appeal. This in turn would reduce the capacity of the community to impose credible sanctions, and to collect fines from encroachers and rule breakers. The introduction of new technologies of resource use would alter the quantum of overall resource use. The external

¹⁸ Interview with Panditji, May 28, 1992.

state may well take over the administration of resources such as irrigation waters and forests, causing an incongruence between appropriation and provision rules. This imbalance between rights and responsibilities of the community towards a common resource would adversely affect its capacity to monitor use of the resource and coordinate its maintenance.¹⁹ I will now argue that precisely such a process, of changes in the nature and capacity of the external state leading to the unhinging of local common property management mechanisms, unfolded in the UP hills. I will first present a narrative of changes in the political economy of the hills over the last one century and a half, and then analyze them according to Ostrom's criteria for successful common property management.

Beginning with the incorporation of the hill districts into the British empire in 1822 and the subsequent introduction of new market forms, at least four distinct sets of interests marked the intervention of the state in the economy of the hills, each one of them affecting, in turn, the mechanisms of governing the commons. These interests can be listed as below:

Agricultural Revenue: The accelerated process of clearing forests in the Himalayan foothills for the expansion of agriculture marked the first phase of British intervention in the natural resource economy of the hills increased the pressures on the forests of the UP Himalayas.²⁰ In the second phase, beginning in the 1840s, a system of forest contracts was introduced in which the rights to felling in specific forest tracts for fixed durations were publicly auctioned. Contractors were eager to get quick short term returns to their investment, and it was well known that they regularly exceeded the physical limits of the tracts they had 'bought' and practiced indiscriminate felling. Already by the 1850s, severe deforestation was being reported in areas where contracts had been awarded. This system of contracts persisted well into the 1970s.

The other method employed to enhance agricultural revenues was the introduction of new crops. In the 1840s, potatoes were introduced, and noting the similarities between the UP hills and Darjeeling, the British initiated tea plantations. The post-colonial state introduced another commercial crop, onions. Changes in the species mix of local agriculture ruptured the cropping cycle and upset the balance between field, fallow and forest that had marked hill agriculture so far. More forests were felled for the planting of commercial crops than for the extension of subsistence agriculture and food crops.

Industrial Revenue: Until the 1830s, timber did not figure in the list of products that the hills exported to the plains. The system of awarding forest contracts, however, was geared towards meeting urban timber demands. By the 1870s, numerous towns had sprung up in the foothills around forest based industries such as sawmills and turpentine factories demanding pine resin. Newly established railway links articulated the hill economy with a much wider national economy. Subsequently, paper mills increased the industrial demand on forests, as did the

¹⁹In the Chandrabhaga watershed of the UP hills, the irrigation department of the Indian government approached villagers and supplied them with steel sluices and lime for lining the small irrigation channels. Within a few years, the intricate system of members taking responsibility for cleaning the channels of blockages broke down. Villagers argued that since the irrigation department had asserted its ownership over the channels by providing new materials, the responsibility for maintaining them also belonged to it. Ravi Chopra et al, "Guhls: Irrigation Networks in the UP Himalayas", Paper Presented at the SSRC/Ford Foundation/ IISc Conference on Common Property, Collective Action and Ecology, Bangalore, August 1991.

²⁰Richard Tucker has pointed out that while this process began under the later Mughals, it intensified in the early decades of colonial rule. See his "The Forests of the Western Himalayas: The Legacy of British Colonial Administration", *Journal of Forest History*, July 1982.

increasing number of sugar mills that required wood to fuel the furnaces in which sugar was purified.

This trend of giving industrial demands primacy over local agricultural ones where resource use was concerned was taken further under the post-colonial state following an agenda of 'development', in which the idea was to enhance the revenue-generating capacity of each area within the country. A large network of roads was built to better link the area with external markets and to facilitate tourism, both of which placed added pressures on the forest. To the already mentioned industrial uses was added demands from paper mills, units making stationary and manufacturers of export-quality sports goods such as cricket bats and tennis racquets. After the financial crisis of the 1960s, hill forests, like every other natural resource from across the country, were diverted towards earning foreign exchange.

National Security: "National Security" was often cited as a justification for the state to take over the management of the forests, and had a manifold impact on the forests. Since the colonial state wanted to control relations with Tibet and Nepal, new urban centres such as military cantonments and administrative towns were created, increasing non-agricultural demands on forests. Following the Great Mutiny of 1857, a major and widespread threat to British colonial rule in India, a vast network of railway lines was constructed. The UP hills provided wood for the railway sleepers in north India. Though 'conservancy' measures had been introduced from the 1860s, they were dropped to meet the accelerated demands of WW I and WW II, during the course of which large quantities of forests were felled.^{2 1}

Following India's disastrous defeat to China in the war of 1962, an extensive road network was developed in the hills to enhance war preparedness. Along with expanded rail links, the roadways further integrated the forests with the national political economy. Clearly, national security interests affected forests in three ways. First, they gave primacy to larger interests in the use of the forests than local agricultural ones, and justified the transfer of control over them to extra-local authority. Second, they made direct non-agricultural demands over forests, leading to a transfer of resources. Finally, they provided the infrastructure for a wider circulation of forests and their commodification.

Bureaucratic Rationality: In the preceding section, I had noted that the precolonial state in the UP hills was a weak and ineffective one, incapable even of enforcing its own rights over forests and of collecting revenue. A major transformation after the British annexation in the 1820s was that the colonial state claimed its rights over these forests and agricultural lands, and had a far greater capacity to enforce these rights. The 'fingers' of the colonial state were a modern bureaucracy. The control of the imperial bureaucracy over the hill forests was established in a number of phases. Until the 1850s, the administration was involved in 'settling' the claims of local villages over lands and forests, making formal what were so far informal claims. It also auctioned forest tracts to timber contractors. From the 1860s, a series of Forest Laws were enacted, and a forest bureaucracy was created. The forest acts classified the forests into 'protected', 'reserved', and 'civil' forests, and the rights that villagers had to each of them were clearly spelt out. Initially, common forests were not recognized at all. An exhaustive list of 'forest offences' were drawn up, with fines and prison sentences for each of them specified.

Simultaneously, a program of 'scientific forestry' was initiated which would enable the colonial state to strike a balance between generating revenue and checking resource depletion. It would be safe to say that the second objective was frequently bypassed in favour of the first: until 1981, the Forest Research Institute, the flagship institution for the research and development of scientific

^{2 1}Ramachandra Guha, "Forestry in British and Post-British India", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 29 Oct-12 Nov, 1983.

forestry policy in India, had not conducted a single study on the impact of commercial forestry either on the forests or on those who inhabited them.^{2 2} That the primary duty of the forest bureaucracy was to maximize revenue is equally clear in almost all policy documents pertaining to the forests.^{2 3}

The legal entity of community forests was recognized only in the 1930s, and new community forests were constituted. However, in a typically knee-jerk reaction to popular peasant movements in the hills, the colonial state opened these forests to 'all bona fide residents' of the hills, including, apart from peasants, townsfolks and residents of local urban centres whose interests in forests were non-agricultural. Moreover, most of the newly registered community forests were created on already degraded forest lands, convincing more contemporary foresters of the inefficiency inherent in community ownership and management of forests. In addition, these legally reconstituted 'village forests' were far smaller than those suggested by earlier descriptions.^{2 4} Both these trends, of defining 'national development' as something threatened by the local interests of peasants, and of creating a hierarchy of priorities in which the needs and powers of local people was marginal intensified in the post-colonial state, which used the British forest administration as the template on which to formulate its own policies. After independence in 1947, further forest legislation increased the power of forest bureaucracies, expanded the list of activities that would be defined as 'forest offenses', increased the punishments to be handed out to offenders by functionaries of the centralized state, and broadened the state's power of defining what constituted forests in the first place to include "any land whatsoever."^{2 5}

The net demand on forests increased further in subsequent years, and with it the expansion in the authority of the state over them. After the Rebellion of 1857, which was a serious threat to colonial rule, large quantities of trees were felled to provide sleepers for the construction of an extensive railway network for the rapid deployment of troops. The Forest Acts, the first of whom came into effect in 1865, created and empowered a new forest bureaucracy, and progressively curtailed the claims of local communities over forests. In addition to the expansion of external authority over local forests, forests were increasingly diverted from local agricultural to national industrial and commercial uses. The program of 'scientific forestry' undertaken by the colonial state and embodied in the Forest Research Institute continued to focus on making forest products more marketable, and in generally meeting the needs of forest based industries located in the plains.^{2 6}

The colonial and then the developmentalist state in India can thus be seen to have interests in forests, including common forests, quite different from those of the commoners. While previous systems of managing common forests were geared towards meeting the demands of local agriculture and subsistence, these forests now became part of larger strategies of national security

^{2 2}Pointed out in Centre for Science and Environment, The State of India's Environment: A Citizen's Report, New Delhi: CSE, 1982.

^{2 3}See the National Forestry Resolution, New Delhi: Government of India, 1956; also the Report of the National Agricultural Commission, New Delhi: Government of India, 1976.

^{2 4}G.B. Pant, Forest Problems in Kumaon, Nainital: Gyandodaya Prakashan, (orig. 1922); p 76.

^{2 5}K.P. Kannan, "Forest Legislation in India: Its Evolution in the Light of the Forest Bill, 1980" in Walter Fernandes and Sharad Kulkarni eds., Towards a New Forest Policy: People's Rights and Environmental Needs, New Delhi: Indian Social Institute; 1983.

^{2 6}Until 1981, the Institute had carried out not a single study of the impact of commercial forestry on India's forests. Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), The State of India's Environment: A Citizen's Report, CSE: New Delhi, 1982.

and economic development. The locus of decision making correspondingly shifted out of the locality to the centre. The increased reach of the modern state into the community affected the conditions for cooperation and collective action that had made viable mechanisms for the successful management of the common forests. It might be helpful to go down Ostrom's list and analyze how each one of these mechanisms was affected by the expansion of the external state.

Clearly Defined Boundaries: In the pre-colonial period, owing to the existence of a weak state, forests close to villages were managed as common property, while the control of villagers over forests further away was weaker and resembled open access situations. In any case, local needs were met from both common and more-or-less open access forests. The boundaries of the common forests changed dramatically with the creation of protected, reserved and civil forests. After 1930, the newly reconstituted forest councils had jurisdictions over much smaller areas. Moreover, externally a stronger state came into being, more capable of enforcing these boundaries. With the entry of contractors and external commercial interests, and subsequently by throwing forests open to all 'bona fide' citizens of the hills, the criteria specifying community membership were undermined: literally anyone could secure the right to use the forests.

Appropriation and Provision Rules: With the onset of commercial forestry, local rules regulating the use of forests along time, place and technology became irrelevant. Forest contracts no doubt were tract-specific and time bound, but contractors had the incentive and the technology to fell more forests than peasants striving for subsistence. Moreover, they had no obligations to contribute money or material for the maintenance or regeneration of the resource. As the forest and agricultural departments of the post-colonial government cut short many of the rights and took over many of the responsibilities so far residing with the community, the commoners lost the incentive to look after forests on their own. From the 1950s onwards, hill peasants themselves began to participate in free-riding and generally behaving in ways that would cause Hardin's tragedy of the commons. The balance between appropriation and provision rules was thus ruptured.

Collective Choice Arrangements: Operational rules governing the use of the forests were changed decisively without the participation of the commoners. At most, they could petition the state to extend their claims over forests, but the state believed that use of the forests was a privilege and not a right, which could be withdrawn in accordance with larger state interests. The reconstituted forest councils depended heavily on the forest and revenue bureaucrats to formulate effective policy. After independence, 'planned development' led to further centralization of all decision making, including those affecting forests. At best, village councils were given the responsibilities of implementing state policy. This led to a decay of already existing collective choice arrangements.

Monitoring: As the system of community management of common forests began to unravel, voluntary monitoring by individuals of each others' resource use also lost its effectiveness. Due to the gradual impoverishment of the hills as a region, villages lost their capacity to hire forest guards of their own. More importantly, their authority did not extend to new users, most of them contractors from urban areas and from the plains. The latter were both more profligate in their resource use and had political access to the state. Hill dwellers had believed till the last century (as, incidentally, did early colonial officers) that their forests were eternal. The tragedy of the situation was that their awareness of deforestation and its impact on their everyday life coincided with the slipping away of effective authority to do anything about the deteriorating conditions of the common forests. With the reclassification of forests into new categories, the state took over the function of monitoring resource use and entry into the forests.

Graduated Sanctions: There was a move from informal and culturally coded sanctions against rule-breakers to formal legal fines and punishments imposed by the state. An extensive list of forest offences and corresponding set of fines was drawn up. Local councils had lost their

authority to impose sanctions. As common forests had shrunk in size, rules of restrained forest use began to lose their legitimacy since they could not enable peasants to meet local needs. From the 1950s, there began the trend of peasants taking their chances with the forest guards and entering reserved and protected forests, an act made more legitimate by the fact that timber merchants were awarded contracts to clear fell tracts of state-owned forests at literally throw-away prices. Since most forest councils had anyway lost the capacity to monitor resource use and impose sanctions, peasants began to indulge in behaviour that would precipitate a tragedy of the commons.

Conflict Resolution Mechanisms: In the previous common property regime, the village council was an arena for resolving conflicts and disputes between individuals, and the village headman functioned as the intermediary between the village and the state. The effectiveness of this arrangement, I had noted above, could be gauged from the fact that in 1822, there was no litigation in the royal court regarding forest disputes. With local councils losing their overall authority, they were no longer able to provide conflict resolution services to villagers. The spread of the modern state opened new arenas of conflict resolution, such as courts. However, villagers were not very well versed in the new laws, legal aid was not inexpensive, and the judicial process was notoriously slow. Moreover, since forest offences were defined in such a way as to make illegal what had been legitimate forest use by villagers while giving a legal status to forest contracts that had resulted in severe deforestation, the new conflict resolution mechanisms can be said to have a bias against the interests of the commoners and of the commons.

The process outlined above ended community autonomy within which context mechanisms for the management of common forests had functioned over centuries. The state facilitated the entry of specific market forms, introduced new users and new sets of incentives, each one of them inimical to long-term management of common forests. Pre-existing common property arrangements were based on the authority of the community vested in the headman, which was taken over by the new forest bureaucracy. The expansion of the modern state pursuing imperial interests and subsequently 'development' replaced community autonomy with a crucial asymmetry between the community and the state.

New market forms also released a new structure of options and incentives at the level of individuals within communities. Widespread deforestation led to increasingly frequent landslides and floods, serious soil erosion and the drying up of water sources, making agriculture an even more precarious subsistence strategy. Hill peasants diverted land for the production of cash crops. This resulted in the shortening of fallows and terracing fresh slopes for the cultivation of food crops. Increases in livestock population likewise indicate alternative strategies for subsistence, with the growth of local urban markets for dairy products. With extensive road links, tourism to places of pilgrimage and adventure sports increased enormously, giving rise to intense seasonal markets. Several village councils began to award commercial contracts for their forests, diverting them from direct local consumption.²⁷ Finally, it became more lucrative even to those who depended most on forests to participate in deforestation, since agriculture was becoming increasingly unproductive and alternative work opportunities were lacking. Not surprisingly, remote villages, still relatively free of state and market intervention have the lushest common forests and the most effective village councils.

The most decisive influence in the breakdown of institutional mechanisms for managing the commons therefore came with the expansion of the powers of the state. Such a trajectory is quite different from those predicted by the institutionalist theory of the state. Ostrom notes that in her approach, the state is a "ruler who recognizes that substantial benefits can be obtained by

²⁷Ghanshyam Singh, headman of village Lameri, readily admitted to awarding contracts on common forests in his village to commercial contractors. Interview, May 28, 1992.

organizing some activities" such as governing the commons. The state also makes credible commitments to punish those who break its rules. Both monitoring behaviour and imposing sanctions are in the interests of the state because "they gain the residuals."²⁸ Precisely because of such motivations, however, the state is more likely to be against common property than a proponent and defender of it. In the case of India, I have shown above that the state pursuing imperial interests and 'development' both weakened community control over forests to increase agricultural and industrial revenue, secure national interests and put in place a modern bureaucracy.

The developmental state pursued growth-based development in which rapid industrialization was to play a key role. In such a formulation of 'development', there was complementarity between the interests of the state and commercial and industrial states in the forests, which were at odds with the interests of local communities as well as with the long term survival of the forests themselves. The inability of the new latent group of 'resource users' to create new mechanisms of monitoring, sanctioning, membership and so on was partly a result of the divergent perceptions and interests of hill peasants, timber merchants, paper mill owners and the forest bureaucracy. Hill dwellers were seen as threats to the forests and irritants in the search for 'national development'; on the other hand, commercial and industrial interests were seen as revenue creators and backed by the state. I have argued above that the mechanisms that institutionalists have specified can work toward long term successful CPR management only in conditions where the state is either weak or is sympathetic to community concerns and the need for common property. While a weak state did exist prior to colonialism, since 1822 the state both increased in capacity and was placed in an adversarial relation with hill peasant communities. Therefore, these communities as constituted could not be expected to create new mechanisms to fulfil the same functions as previous institutions performed, in the face of such state and market transformations. Incidentally, since the state's interests of pursuing development lies in transferring natural resources from the control of the community to the 'national interest', it cannot be expected, on its own, to be the initiator of institutional innovation to reinforce community control over common property. To create new mechanisms to manage forests as common property, therefore, the community itself would have to be rejuvenated and the state made sympathetic to the commoners and the commons. Institutional innovation, therefore, must be located within a wider political framework constituted by the creation of a new collective political identity of resource users and the articulation of a new political ideology that challenges the vision of 'development' followed by the state. It is in this context that social movements enter as actors that, among other things, provide new institutional mechanisms around the management of common property.

Popular Politics and Common Forests

The breakdown of community-based institutional mechanisms precipitated crises of subsistence in the UP hills. Common forests in the UP hills were used by local communities for fuel, fodder for stallfed animals, medicinal herbs, food supplements, the manufacture of agricultural implements, building and ceremonial purposes. In a broader sense, forests underpinned almost all aspects of life in the hills. Dense village forests meant that reliable water sources would be in close proximity to human habitat, since forests facilitate the seepage of rainwater into the ground to replenish springs and aquifers. Likewise, forest cover minimizes loss of topsoil through wind and water erosion. By holding together the ground with their roots, trees provide a fair amount of soil stability and arrest landslides as well as minimize the damages caused by the annual flooding of the mountain streams during the monsoons. Deforestation not only cut into the direct benefits enjoyed by villagers from forests, but also led to grave ecological imbalances. Water sources dried up, and women had to walk much longer distances to get fuel, fodder and water. Landslides increased both in incidence and in intensity. Floods began to wash away whole

²⁸ Ostrom, 1990, op.cit.; p 41.

villages. The subsistence of villages depended in good measure on having dense community forests around them; this realization created the demand for the reconstitution of common forests. It was not the incapacity of institutions *per se* but the resulting erosion of subsistence that made resource use and management issues of contest between the state and peasant society. The well-known Chipko Movement was the major way in which peasants articulated their political concerns. I have dealt with the origins of the movement elsewhere.²⁹ Here, I will argue that social movements such as Chipko want much the same mechanisms as specified by institutionalists. They demand not that the state retreat to a position of non-intervention in the economy of the forest, but that its active intervention on behalf of the interests of the villagers is critical in managing forests as common property in the new political-economic setting.

Key activists of movements such as Chipko provide mechanisms for meeting the need for new institutions by positing a series of causal links.³⁰ They explicitly link state and market forces with the breakdown of community institutions and subsequently with resource degradation and crises of subsistence. This link then expands to a broader critique of 'development'. As an alternative, they link individual action with favourable outcomes, such as reclaiming the commons and using it in a sustainable way through unions, cooperatives, women's councils, and a general alteration of social relations and relations between people, nature and the state. Finally as a mechanism for reaching these goals, they articulate agendas for reformulating and broadening pre-existing notions of 'common property' and 'community'. I will first provide some historical details of the movement; then I will address the politicization of the mechanisms for successful CPR management.

With the intensification of deforestation in the 1960s, key activists and grassroots organizations who had prior interactions with these communities initiated the formation of labour cooperatives that would place competitive bids in forest auctions, and use local trees for local small-scale industries.³¹ At this point, activists had already begun to recreate a community that claimed priority in matters of allocating the benefits of the forests. This can be seen as an attempt to alter the asymmetry between diverse users that had developed since the last century, and thus to reverse the crisis of subsistence. However, the links between multiple resource use, institutional incapacity and resource depletion had not been understood, and were developed in the aftermath of the devastating floods of 1971-2. Activists found on investigation that villages that had almost completely been swept away also had the least forest cover. The conflict between development priorities and local needs came into sharp relief in 1974, when the state refused permission to peasants to use ash trees to make farm implements, but awarded the same forest tracts to the Symond Company to manufacture tennis racquets and cricket bats.

Chipko reformulated ideas of community at two levels. Internally, the relations between members that constitute a community in the first place were altered. Externally, the relations between the community and the state were changed. It is in this new incarnation that the community is able to generate mechanisms to articulate and manage a new commons. The

²⁹Subir Sinha, *Common Property, Community and Collective Action in India's Environmental Movements*, Ph.D. Thesis, Northwestern University (forthcoming); Chapter 5.

³⁰I am using the term 'key activists' here in distinction to 'political entrepreneur'. While a full explication of my formulation is irrelevant for the purposes of this paper, suffice it to say that while I see political entrepreneurs as super-rational pursuers of self-interest, these activists are linked to the rank and file through a moral authority arising from a credible, often public, abnegation of self-interest. They perform the same functions as political entrepreneurs; however, they are motivated by different intentions.

³¹Suffice it to say here that these relations included interactions during the anti-colonial and anti-alcohol movements.

notions of community were extended and revised in the UP hills through a combination of strategies. Activists analyzed deforestation in terms of the relations between the state and UP hill areas in general (rather than the relation between the state and individual villages), and footmarches undertaken by them identified and articulated this latent community that stood in the same structural relationship with the state. The second strategy, to make this notion of community more tangible, was holding summer camps, where local activists from all over the hills congregated to discover for themselves their common problems and to seek common solutions. The invocation of a historical memory of past struggles in which the region as a whole had participated was a key strategy for identifying new possibilities for cooperation in the context of more recent state and market expansion.

With resource degradation, the declining productivity of land and male migration to the plains, women's labour burdens had increased dramatically.^{3 2} In areas of extensive deforestation, female suicide rates shot up. Chipko provided women with new ways to channel their collective lament. Informal women's groups were formalized into 'mahila mangal dals' (or women's celebratory groups). Activists encouraged women to demand re-elections for village forest councils and to contest them. Some of the most successful village forests that I visited, such as in Papriana and Gopeshwar villages, are managed exclusively by women, though of course, several other successful panchayats have other gender equations.^{3 3} By challenging the gender-oppressive nature of the old community, the system of authority that had previously managed common property locally was radically transformed.

The movement from autonomy to asymmetry in the relations between the community and the state was at the heart of the issue of resource overuse. Having defined a new and spatially much larger community, Chipko attempted to recreate autonomy at two levels. At the first level, it created autonomous ways of reversing deforestation. The Forest Department was more interested in using commercially valuable tree varieties in its afforestation and reforestation programs that did not have much local use and therefore could not inspire much local enthusiasm. As an alternative, activists set up a series of nurseries. Members of van panchayats would debate their requirements, discuss their conclusions with these organizations, and these tree varieties would be provided to them free of cost.^{3 4} The other level at which autonomy was to be recovered was the demand made by some Chipko activists for the creation of a separate province within the Indian union comprising the eight hill districts of the state of UP. Since the primary jurisdiction over forests rests with provincial governments, the idea was to exercise more control over resource use in the hills. However, the demand for autonomy from the state was selective, and indeed an altered intervention of the state in the forest economy was implicit in several of the key demands. The movement demanded bans on clearfelling of several forest tracts, which were granted in 1979. Exclusion and autonomy, of course, were also more direct. Women hugging trees literally excluded the contractors from any benefits from the forests. Likewise, even the name of the organizations that together make up the Chipko movement, such as the Dasholi Gram Swaraj Mandal implies 'self-rule'.

^{3 2}See Bina Agarwal, "Neither Sustenance nor Sustainability: Agricultural Strategies, Ecological Degradation and Indian Women in Poverty" in Bina Agarwal ed., Structures of Patriarchy: State, Community and Household in Modernizing Asia, London: Zed Press, 1988; esp. pp 86-91.

^{3 3}See Vishwa Ballabh and Katar Singh, Van (Forest) Panchayats in Uttar Pradesh Hills: A Critical Analysis, Anand: Institute for Rural Management; 1988.

^{3 4}See the descriptions of four such camps in S.S. Kunwar ed. Hugging the Himalayas: The Chipko Experience, Chamoli: DGSM 1988; chs. 6-9. I observed the nursery operating out of the DGSM office in Gopeshwar town, Chamoli District, in June 1992.

The politicization of the question of resource use by the Chipko movement recreates institutional mechanisms resembling - but also crucially differing from - those specified by the institutionalists:

Membership Rules: Chipko encouraged notions of membership to a new community at two levels. At the level of the village community, it encouraged the formation of new forest councils registered with the government under the Van Panchayat (Forest Council) Act. This would lead to clearly specified use rights to those proved to be residents of a village over that village's common forests. At the same time, it would formalize the boundaries of these forests. At the level of the hill regions as a whole, the movement forced thinking on the issue of the creation of another state of Uttarakhand within the Indian union. This would mean that hill residents constituted as a political community would have first rights over the forests. In other words, Chipko created a sense of membership to local and regional commons. Lately, Chipko has become an inspiration to other forest based movements such as the Appiko Movement in south India and is also part of the larger Save the Himalayas Movement. As one of the movements that have articulated ecological critiques of Indian development, Chipko thus is a part of a larger epistemic community as well.

Appropriation and Provision Rules: At the level of the regional commons, Chipko fought for and was granted a ban on clearfelling on certain forest tracts for a specified number of years and of the system of auctioning forest contracts. It also received guarantees from the state to provide local alternative employment well as assistance in forest regeneration. At the local level, new appropriation and provision rules were established. In village Jardhar, for example, young people inspired and trained by the Chipko movement established a forest protection committee in 1980. Each member of the committee was paid in cash or kind by each family in the village. This committee kept a large but degraded forest tract in the slopes above the village free of grazing, fuelwood collection and commercial felling. Funds were externally obtained from the Greening the Himalayas Project, and watchmen were appointed. Today the common forest has regenerated and, indeed, is a repository of remarkable biodiversity.^{3 5} In similar examples, the balance between rights to and responsibilities towards common forests is being re-established.

Effective Monitoring: It may be recalled that the word Chipko means 'to hug'. In the early years of the movement, vigilant women activists would keep an eye out for the crews of commercial contractors, hug the trees to physically stop them from felling the trees and wait for other villagers to arrive at the scene to drive out the axemen. A militant monitoring seems to have been a *modus operandi* of the movement from the very beginning. Activists, however, have been aware of the limits of agitational monitoring. Village forest councils inspired by the movement have asked the government to provide them with resources to guard their forests. In areas where the movement has succeeded in getting the state to ban clear felling, it has demanded that the state provide adequate facilities for the detection of illegal felling.

Collective Choice and Conflict Resolution Arrangements: Pre-existing arenas were transformed, and new ones created by the movement. The village forest councils had degenerated over the last 150 years since the entry of the British empire in 1822. Lately, they had become ineffective in enforcing rules and were increasingly contracting out common village forests to timber merchants, leading to severe depletion of the commons. Key activists of the Chipko movement encouraged members of the 'mahila mangal dals' to challenge the male control over these councils and to themselves contest for positions within it. In village Papriana, women approached the headman in the early 1970s and asked him to justify his position as the headman of the forest council. They then demanded that since they were the worst affected by

^{3 5} Ashish Kothari, "Eco-Regeneration: Hope for the Future", The Hindu Survey of the Environment, 1994; p 173.

deforestation, they should at least have a say in how the councils operated.^{3 6} From here, these councils expanded to become forums for the discussion of several issues of forest management, and also of gender issues.

The training camps were new arenas for interaction between members of the larger hill community. Here, activists discussed common problems and searched for common solutions. As these camps were also attended by urban and even foreign students, academics and activists, they provided a sense of the political community that had developed worldwide over resource use issues, and of which Chipko was a part.

Conflict resolution mechanisms were regenerated in two ways. As the reconstituted village councils regained their legitimacy and effectiveness, they also became arenas for the settlement of disputes regarding forest use and other issues. At a wider level, with the organization of hill peasants as members of a political movement, Chipko trained cadres and village level activists to deal with confidence with the functionaries of the state, particularly the forest department. Village council members decided to make full use of the forest department, and invited them to their meetings so that they could see the expression of peasant needs and formulate their policies on that basis. Particularly, these meetings provided an arena where peasants could negotiate with the forest department over the tree species that would be planted in the reforestation schemes.

Credible Sanctions: It will be remembered that the new entrants into the forests, timber merchants and industrialists, were blessed by the developmental state to carry out rapid resource use. Since they were seen as the bearers of 'development', their profligate resource use was not the subject of sanctions but of state encouragement. Also, with the growth of parallel and more powerful systems of authority such as the forest bureaucracy, the capacity of village councils to impose sanctions on its own members had declined. Once Chipko's demand of declaring forests and tree species closed for clearfelling for durations ranging from a few seasons to a few decades was accepted, the movement placed the demand that offenders of these restrictions be punished under the law. The movement was also able to recreate systems of sanctions at the level of the village community. Chipko encouraged villagers to register their forest councils with the state, and won the right for these councils to impose fines upto Rs 50 on offenders, up from Rs 5 as mandated by the 1931 administrative provision. While the councils required the backing of the district administration in regulating grazing, grass cutting and the collection of forest produce, it also meant that it had the power of the state to back and guarantee such rules. The state, however, has not always proved an effective guarantor of these sanctions.^{3 7} Strong and credible village leadership is also important for effective sanctions to operate. The holding of summer camps, the spread of women's groups and 'Dalyon ka Dagdaya' (Friends of the Trees) created strong leadership at the local level.

Effective Autonomy from the State: While Chipko created some new areas of effective autonomy from the state, it also sought an increased role of the state in other areas. The demand for the creation of the hill state of Uttarakhand was an attempt at creating regional autonomy. Likewise, the establishment of nurseries by voluntary organizations was aimed at reducing the dependence on the forest department for the regeneration of forests. Most importantly, the movement represented the forest councils as an arena where villagers only should be empowered to make decisions over forests, and where bureaucrats of the forest department would play only the roles of observers, advisers and facilitators. In this regard, it may well be said that Chipko wanted the state's retreat from the community.

^{3 6}Interview, Shanti Devi, May 30, 1992.

^{3 7}K Cherail, R Jain and R Shrivastava, "How Green Were the Forests...", *Down to Earth*, June 30, 1994.

In a transformed political economy, however, cutting off from the state would neither guarantee subsistence, nor empower the community over forests matters. In several aspects of resource use, Chipko sought a renewed alliance between the state and the community. The cooperatives and committees that had come up as an offshoot of the movement wanted to generate local livelihood alternatives to agriculture and intensive forest use: such as weaving, spinning, woodwork and so on. Since these handicrafts were made in the hills away from lucrative urban markets, Chipko demanded state assistance in marketing these items. The state also had a role in the functioning of the forest councils themselves. While affluent forest councils could pay the guards that they appointed, less well off ones required the assistance of the state to pick up the cost of monitoring. In cases where community authority residing in these councils had faced serious erosion, there were difficulties in enforcing sanctions effectively, meaning fines levied on rule breakers were seldom paid. Here, access to state coercion, or more accurately the fear thereof, were felt vital to the success of these reconfigured councils.

Chipko sought proximity to the state in another sphere, that of the very planning of development. The loss of autonomy had resulted in the passing of effective control over forests from the collective hands of the community. The question of how forests were to be used was resolved decisively in administrative centres far from them, and the views of forest dwellers was seldom solicited. The very early writings of key activists lament the fact that those who ruled were so unaware of local culture and requirements. Indeed, this was seen as a key cause of deforestation and the deteriorating quality of life in the hills. Chipko demanded that those who are the most liable to be adversely affected by state policy should be made party to policy deliberations. NGOs involved in the movement prepared detailed alternative plans for development. The state was expected to protect forests where clearfelling had been banned, to end the auction of forest contracts, and to put boundaries around the market's claim on the forests. The demand for the creation of the state of Uttarakhand itself demonstrates not a revulsion for the state per se, but an attempt to use its instruments for guaranteeing the subsistence of hill dwellers by altering the pattern of natural resource use in the hills. It must be clear from the above that far from the requirement of institutional autonomy from the state, what is felt important in managing contested and reclaimed common forests is a strategic alliance with the state. Such autonomy may well have been crucial in the management of common forests before the forests were subjected to multiples uses; it would be further crippling in the current context.

Conclusion

One of Ostrom's examples of a relatively unsuccessful common property system was a coastal fishery in Sri Lanka. The major reasons for failure, Ostrom concludes, were the specific ways in which the fishery was tied with the larger political scene: disputes between politicians and state incoherence prevented institutions from functioning properly. This is an interesting insight: while the state plays a relatively unimportant role in Ostrom's analysis of successful CPRs, it is central in the failure to generate collective action around common property. Is there 'too much state' in the fisheries, or is it that the specific nature of the state's intervention in resource use that prevented successful common property management? Is a minimal role of the state necessary for managing common property, or should the focus be on political forces that affect the state's role in nature's economy?

In this paper, I hope to have shown the fallacy of identifying features of pre-existing common property regimes and basing on them policy prescriptions and predictions regarding common property management for the future. This fallacy, I have argued, results from institutionalism's failures to account for the state and its interests, to locate local resource use in a wider political economy and to see issues of natural resource use as arenas of state-society conflicts. The Chipko movement is not alone in demanding a new but vigorous intervention of the state on behalf of poor peasants as the best way for sustainable and collective resource use. The Kerala Fishworkers' Movement in south India forced the state to legislate the Marine Fisheries

Regulation Act to demarcate separate fishing zones for traditional, motorized and mechanized fishing vessels, to monitor infringements of these boundaries and to enforce punishments on rule breakers. These and other examples show that when politically more powerful users enter the commons and degrade it, endogenous solutions are not feasible and the commoners seek the coercive capacity of the state to act on their behalf against these new entrants. Not effective autonomy but a specific articulation with the state, then, is necessary for successful common property management.

Social movements as collective actors bring about this articulation more effectively than can individual village communities. Indeed, the same forces that cause the need for creating institutional mechanisms to effectively govern the commons also debilitate the community as constituted from effectively providing them. In the context of developing countries, external actors such as the state and social movements, therefore, are crucial in determining the chances for successful common property management. Local level common property mechanisms may exist when the state is weak, or when a strong state is forced, through collective actors such as social movements, to act on behalf of the commoners. It is this last point, that state interests, capacity and motives are affected by a wider politics, that has remained completely outside the boundaries of the institutionalist literature, which has tended to see 'the state' and 'the community' as necessarily static entities. I have, in contrast, pointed to their contingent and fluid nature. This conclusion not only suggests a need to revise some of institutionalism's postulates on collective action, but also has a bearing on the sustainable development debate: while community control over local resources is important for 'sustainable development', it may well be ineffective without sympathetic linkages with the state, and may be impossible without the prior formation of a political community by social movements around issues of resource use.