

GODSEND, SLEIGHT OF HAND, OR JUST MUDDLING THROUGH: JOINT WATER AND FOREST MANAGEMENT IN INDIA¹

Sharachchandra Lele

Policies promoting the 'joint management' (i.e. between the state and resource users) of resources such as forests or water are currently in vogue in India and elsewhere. Many see advantage in the decentralised administration that these arrangements imply. However, they also imply a redistribution of power and so are profoundly political, and their success, if real, cannot be fully explained in terms of a rent-seeking, all-powerful, bureaucratic state. This paper lays out the more complex politics underpinning joint management, assessing interaction between the political and administrative wings of government and the influence of semi-autonomous actors such as donors, NGOs and academics, and identifies the potential for and route towards more, if gradual, decentralisation in the future.

Policy conclusions

- Conventional analyses of joint management are rooted in organisational theory; their apolitical character severely limits their explanatory power.
- Joint management arrangements fall far short of full community involvement in the planning and use of natural resources, so that in effect the state is giving up very little power.
- Even so, joint management is here to stay and its varying performance across regions needs to be understood.
- In practice, the motivation behind the state's acceptance of joint management is usually that it helps to avoid a fiscal crisis by passing costs to resource users. In a few cases, local government has seen fit to support it further because of populism or an ideological commitment to decentralisation
- Other actors – despite their apparent commitment to joint management – have had only limited influence. NGOs (often with the support of academics) put forward innovative ideas, and donors may seemingly respond to criticisms of their earlier lending policies. However, State line departments are aware of the constraints that these actors face – for instance, donors' imperative to meet spending targets – and have little difficulty in circumventing these outside ideas to their own advantage.
- In the long run, NGOs and academics will do well to pressurise the political arm of the state, which needs to be convinced of the electoral gains from decentralisation.

Introduction

The early 1990s witnessed an apparent sea-change in government attitudes towards the management of common-pool resources (CPR) in India and elsewhere. The state, hitherto controlling and managing most CPR such as forests and water bodies in a paternalistic manner, appeared finally to have opened its doors to people's participation. In forestry, within seven years of the historic 1990 directive from the Government of India, 17 States had issued orders enabling 'joint forest management' (JFM). Several States had, with bilateral/multilateral funding, initiated forest sector projects with JFM as the stated cornerstone in all of them. Seminars, workshops, and training programmes on JFM abounded (and continue to do so). A little later,² the irrigation sector saw a similar, albeit less pervasive and publicised, transition not only in the management of tanks and lift irrigation ('minor' irrigation) but even in the management of canal irrigation. Phrases like 'participatory irrigation management' (PIM) or the more explicit 'irrigation management turnover' (IMT), have attained the same status in irrigation management as that of JFM in forestry. They are the new buzz words, the essential components of all sectoral reform programmes or development projects. 'Joint management', 'co-management', or 'shared management' is, it seems, the shape of things to come in public policy on natural resource management in general (Poffenberger and McGean, 1996).

Although acronyms, government orders and

programmes abound, and many non-governmental activist and advocacy groups have shed their initial scepticism and joined in the implementation of these programmes, the picture on the ground is not that rosy. After the initial hyperbole, progress has in many cases been slow, or has resulted in potentially unsustainable outcomes (e.g. Saxena et al., 1997; Tiwari, 1998). This gap between rhetoric and reality is prompting re-examinations of JFM in different ways: typically institutional analyses of the structure of JFM or sociological analyses of 'community' itself. The purpose of this paper is to re-examine assumptions regarding the state itself, focusing on the factors potentially responsible for the recalcitrant implementation of joint management. It is therefore an attempt to explore 'the game behind the rules' rather than the 'rules of the game' of participatory resource management. An analytical framework is first outlined, followed by examples from the forestry and irrigation sectors in different Indian States.

Analytical framework

One approach to explaining increasing state interest in joint resource management focuses on *proximate* factors explaining agency behaviour. Thus, Thompson (1995) identifies four reasons:

- i The simple pressure of a fiscal crisis, possibly exacerbated by economic liberalisation.
- ii Pressure from donor agencies for greater accountability

and transparency.

- iii The recognition by government of the failure of past approaches.
- iv The demonstration effect of successful pilot efforts by non government organisations (NGOs), or by government agencies in other sectors.

This is essentially an 'apolitical organisational theory' approach, which does not go into the ideology of the state (or the donors) or the political economy of its links with other actors. The state, essentially reduced to its bureaucratic arm, is seen as a rational learning creature. Joint management programmes are then always windows of opportunity, however poorly they may be conceived and implemented.

Sceptics, however, would legitimately ask 'why states, whose central *raison d'être* is the accumulation of authority, material resources, and legitimacy, should be interested in decentralising and devolving real power?' (Agrawal, 1998). Would the forest department, owning 23% of the country's land, really be willing to hand over forest areas for villagers to manage, and be satisfied with a monitoring and technical advisory role? Will State governments, who themselves complain of insufficient devolution of powers from the central government, be willing to devolve some of their own powers to local governments, i.e. to the Panchayati Raj institutions? This 'sceptical political science' approach postulates that: (a) participatory management involves a substantial devolution of power; (b) but the state is by nature always interested in accumulating power and resources; and (c) the state is the only autonomous actor in the picture. The inevitable conclusion is that either the individual States will refuse to implement joint management, or (as a more sophisticated variant) joint management must be a 'sleight of hand' carried out by the state to satisfy donors and coopt activists while retaining primary control over resources and even expanding it in new ways.

Yet, we find many State governments embracing and adopting these programmes. And there are at least a few States where JFM or PIM programmes appear to be reasonably participatory and successful on several counts. Herein lies the paradox that demands explanation. A framework allowing this paradox to be addressed would:

- clarify the precise nature of decentralisation/devolution involved in joint management;
- allow for some survival-oriented behaviour and disingenuity by the state;
- deconstruct the state into its political arm and the bureaucracy, examining the political economy of each;³
- recognise the influence of other semi-autonomous actors, particularly donors on the one hand and NGOs and academics on the other, in shaping the trajectory of joint management.

Such a framework, although beginning with a healthy scepticism of official rhetoric, donor pronouncements and even NGO applause, would nevertheless allow for, indeed look for, 'unexplained residuals', thus identifying circumstances under which there is likely to be some room for outcomes that might not be fully explained in terms of a rent-seeking all-powerful bureaucratic state. This might enable one to identify the 'room to manoeuvre' that is essential for meaningful social change.

True nature of participation and devolution

The important prior question is whether ongoing programmes and initiatives really represent a significant shift in state attitudes towards people's participation and decentralisation. Even at the rhetorical level, one distinction is immediately visible between the pre-1990 period and now: while academics and activists had clamoured for *community management* of all natural resources, what has actually been adopted now is *joint management* in some sectors. The proponents of community management visualised the role of government as simply that of outlining the broad set up (e.g. the *gram sabha* – the village assembly – to elect a managing committee), drawing initial boundaries, handing over the control of all natural resources within these boundaries to this set up, and subsequently only intervening in inter-village conflicts or in guarding the resource on demand (Agarwal and Narain, 1989). In other words, they envisaged the creation of 'village republics' with very substantial autonomy from the state apparatus.

In reality, the joint management programmes actually adopted by the States have never approached this level of devolution of control and integration across resources. First, decentralisation in resource management is being considered only in forestry and irrigation, with both sectors operating independently and usually in different geographical areas. But the success of forest protection may depend upon proper management of grazing lands, which are out of the purview of all JFM programmes, or upon increasing the productivity of agriculture through existing or new irrigation structures that may sometimes be on forest lands.

Second, the approach is also spatially partial, being limited to the part of the resource which is physically in poorest condition, or socially/logistically the most difficult to manage for the particular department. Thus, JFM programmes are generally restricted to 'degraded' forests. Similarly, PIM programmes only apply to the management of tertiary and feeder canals that have historically been managed by the farmers in many areas in any case; control of the main canal system being retained by the irrigation departments in all States (Brewer et al., 1997). State water management agencies are also more enthusiastic about handing over the management of village tanks and public tube-wells or open wells – resources that represent relatively little state investment and whose management involves heavy transaction costs.

Third, and most important, the participation envisaged is more in execution than in planning, the structures more puppetish than autonomous. In all States except Gujarat, the Village Forest Committees (or equivalent) have a forest department person as ex-officio secretary, and in all States, the committees' decisions are subject to veto by the forest departments. By contrast, departmental plans often cannot be seen, let alone vetoed, by the communities. Each harvest – even if part of an approved management plan – still requires departmental permission; and delays may damage the resource (e.g. through the drying up of bamboo) but there is no penalty for the department. Even in the case of canal irrigation, where the timing and volume of water releases is critical, only two State governments (Maharashtra and Gujarat) have expressed a willingness to enter into contracts with the Water Users' Association to provide a certain amount of water at a certain time. In the cases of

Tamil Nadu and Kerala, joint irrigation management means essentially the setting up of joint management committees for the airing of farmers' views and concerns, without the decisions of these committees being binding on the irrigation department. This is neither decentralisation, or devolution: there is clear insistence on continued state presence, control, ownership and final veto powers in most aspects. In short, at least part of the answer to the question as to why states are devolving power or giving away control is simply that they are not really doing so!⁴

Nevertheless, even the limited amount of decentralisation, opening up and sharing is significant and worth understanding, for three reasons. First, while none of the cases of JFM or PIM in India are anywhere close to 'village republics', there is no doubt that joint management of some sort is here to stay. JFM in West Bengal, even after discounting media hype, is firmly rooted and expanding, and has yielded substantial tangible benefits to local communities; JFM and PIM in Andhra Pradesh, for all their limitations, now appear not only irreversible (Bharati, 1997) but also expanding rapidly.

Second, there is significant variation in the performance of joint management programmes across States and sectors. Five years after passing executive orders enabling JFM, a large bilaterally funded JFM project in Karnataka is only functioning nominally (Saxena et al., 1997), while late starters Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh appear to have made much more progress. While PIM in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh is rapidly catching on, that in Tamil Nadu and Kerala is lagging far behind, even though Tamil Nadu boasts of perhaps the largest number of successful pilot programmes on community-managed irrigation (Brewer et al., 1997). Overall, although the irrigation sector was a relatively late starter in the participatory management game, it appears to have gone further than the forest sector. At least in some places there has been a complete handover of control over certain physical assets, something no forest department has done so far. Irrigation acts have actually been modified in some states (Raju, 1998); the State Forest Act has not been modified in a single case, not even in West Bengal. These differences are worthy of explanation in and of themselves.

Third, the ongoing adoption of JFM can be seen as a foot in the door, a beginning towards greater participation, transparency, and accountability of natural resource management activities, and so understanding its triggers, dynamics and the 'room to manoeuvre' can help to focus the efforts of those who would like to see much greater levels of decentralisation and participation.

Economic survival of the state

'Apolitical organisational theory' assumes a strong state committed to efficient, just, and sustainable social development, and 'rationally' experimenting with different approaches to reach these goals. Under this assumption, we have to believe that 40 years of top-down governance and resource management are now being consciously replaced by more participatory approaches because the state is convinced of the economic, social and environmental benefits of these approaches.

The observed differences in the speed and extent of adoption of joint management between the forest and irrigation sectors, however, suggest a more limited rationality, viz. the need to survive in the face of increasing

fiscal pressures. The forest sector has been a net contributor to most State budgets, whereas the irrigation sector is one of the heaviest drains on them. It is hard to assess what returns forest departments ought to generate from the land they control, especially given the range of non-economic objectives (biodiversity conservation, ecosystem regulation, meeting subsistence needs of local populations, etc.). Fiscal pressures on forest departments are therefore generally low, and have not resulted in, for instance, any reduction in staffing complements (Jeffrey et al., 1998). Irrigation departments, on the other hand, deliver a single service with significant operation and maintenance costs and form an easy target for criticism when the returns are not even enough to cover these costs. Joint irrigation management, wherein water users' associations manage tertiary and feeder canals and are responsible for recovering water charges, can be portrayed as a potentially 'win-win' situation for both parties: they reduce the fiscal and administrative burden on the state and provide a better (even if no longer free) service for the farmers. And improved recovery of irrigation charges and reduction in administrative costs is in fact the most commonly cited motivation for PIM by the irrigation department officials across all States (Brewer et al., 1997).

To the extent that some of the forest departments are also adopting joint management, one could argue that they are operating under the same logic. Even if fiscal pressures are not strong, the foresters may prefer to sleep at home and allow villagers to do the arduous and often risky job of patrolling. Yet, while forester response to JFM has been generally lukewarm and occasionally hostile (Jeffery et al., 1998), several States are still pursuing JFM fairly vigorously. Thus fiscal pressures (or their absence) are only part of the story.

Political calculations and ideologies

A fundamental simplification in most analyses of the Indian state in the context of resource management has been the exclusive focus on the bureaucracy, and the further identification of state policy with the policy promoted by a particular department. But a democratically elected arm of government is autonomous from the bureaucracy and capable of holding it to account, at least in theory. And political parties may come to power with specific agendas generated by their particular ideologies, or in response to pressures from their vote-banks and from special interest groups. The concerns and compulsions of the politicians should therefore exert a significant influence on the spread (or lack of spread) of participatory management and decentralisation, especially given that they require changes in the laws of the provinces.

The experience in India appears to bear out these hypotheses to some extent. The political arm of State governments has exerted considerable positive as well as negative influence over the spread of participatory or joint management. As mentioned above, individual experiments in participatory or joint management have sometimes been initiated by bureaucrats. But the scaling up of these experiments and their conversion into legitimate 'programmes' has never taken place without the backing of the political arm of the state. The Arabari experiment would have remained an experiment but for the support it received from the Left Front that came to power in West Bengal in 1977, leading to the spread of JFM in a large part

of West Bengal. Similarly, the JFM concept initiated under a World Bank supported project in 1994 caught the attention of the current Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, and so in 1996 he initiated another programme to bring additional areas under JFM, which has spread much faster than the World Bank programme. On the other hand, although the Agricultural Engineering Department of Tamil Nadu set up 'a very large number of farmer organisations for participatory management in large irrigation systems between 1989 and 1993', the Tamil Nadu Public Works Department did not seriously consider adopting IMT until last year (Brewer et al., 1997), probably due to lack of political support.

The reasons for the generally indifferent and occasionally hostile attitude of most political parties to decentralisation of resource management is understandable, if one adopts the rent-seeking self-serving model of the state. It is, however, interesting to note that two other models also seem to be operating. An ideological commitment to decentralisation of power, reflected in the Left Front government's radical decentralisation through Panchayati Raj, spilled over subsequently into the JFM programme. In the case of Andhra Pradesh, the strongly populist style and history of the ruling Telugu Desam party explains their jumping onto the JFM bandwagon, just as they are leading the PIM bandwagon, vigorously implementing power sector reforms, and being credited with being the first State to free cooperative societies from excessive state control. Thus, in a functioning democracy, the presumed distance and antagonism between the state and the community is incorrect in theory and at least an exaggeration in practice.⁵

The role of donor agencies, NGOs and academics

Purely state-focused interpretation of policy formulation, whether rent-seeking ones or committed-state ones, ignore both the looming presence and power of international donor agencies at the 'top' and the small but sometimes significant leverage exerted by actors at the 'bottom', viz. NGOs and academics. The latter groups have been pushing vociferously for decentralised, participatory resource management for at least two decades. Bilateral and multilateral donors such as the World Bank, British Overseas Development Administration (now the Department for International Development (DFID)), Canadian CIDA, Swedish Sida and Japanese OECF, who earlier were quite lukewarm to such ideas, have adopted a much more people-friendly posture since the early 1990s. Although it was the private Ford Foundation that provided the initial publicity for JFM, the large donors quickly jumped onto the joint management bandwagon and made it an essential requirement of projects they fund. While, on the face of it, the agendas of the 'top' and 'bottom' players appear to be aligned, in fact they do not pull in quite the same direction. Thus, assessing their relative contribution vis-à-vis each other and the state, and predicting the likely trajectory of joint management, requires a careful understanding of the particularities of the situation, as the following example from Karnataka State in southern India illustrates.

During 1985–90, a Social Forestry Project of the Karnataka Forest Department (KFD) had received a large loan from the World Bank and a grant from the British bilateral funding agency, then called the Overseas Development Administration (ODA). Severe criticisms of

that project from various sides indicated the need for a serious rethink when the loan/grant came up for renewal. The World Bank had already indicated that it would not consider a new loan. However, the ODA, ostensibly to redress the failures of the SF project, but quite likely driven by the British Government's commitment to spend £100 million on international forest conservation, agreed to consider a new grant.

The first draft proposal submitted by KFD reflected little new thinking on people's participation and was prepared without public consultation. It became public only because it was leaked to some NGOs in the UK, who in turn passed it on to NGOs in Karnataka, who were organised as the Federation of Voluntary Organisations for Rural Development-Karnataka (FEVORD-K). Facing criticism from FEVORD-K and perhaps more importantly from NGOs within the UK, the ODA was forced to ask KFD to rewrite the proposal and, in 1990, the ODA itself sent a consultant team to redraft it, 'on behalf of' the KFD. This draft project proposal, called the Western Ghats Forestry and Environment Project (WGFEPE) was touted as a radical departure, in that it incorporated JFM as its cornerstone. FEVORD-K, with the help of scientists from the Centre for Ecological Sciences, produced a critique of this proposal, and shared this with its NGO contacts in the UK. In January 1991, an ODA team visited Bangalore to take the final decision on the project, and in a meeting with NGOs and academics, was unable to give satisfactory answers to these criticisms (Box 1). Simultaneously, in consultations held by the Karnataka Government in December 1990, FEVORD-K and the academics opposed the draft structure for JFM proposed by KFD, and after heated debate a number of points proposed by FEVORD-K (Box 1) were incorporated into a revised draft structure at the behest of the non-forest bureaucrat (Development Commissioner) who

Box 1 Criticisms by FEVORD-K of the WGFEPE and JFM structure

General criticisms of the project proposal:

- Although JFM, which essentially requires legal, institutional and attitudinal change, was claimed to be the cornerstone of the project, 70% of the project budget was allocated for plantation activities.
- The plantations were mostly of fast-growing exotics, which pre-empted villagers from making their own choices and revealed the KFD's silvicultural bias.
- Significant funds were being set aside for sending forest officials to the UK for training in socially-oriented and ecologically sound tropical forest management, when there were facilities and scientists to provide this kind of training in India itself.
- Funds were being earmarked for setting up a new Forest Research Institute under KFD control, which was unlikely to serve any useful purpose. FEVORD-K also felt that the project should begin in a forested district such as Mysore that has a significant forest-dependent tribal population and rural NGO presence rather than Uttara Kannada, which has neither.

Specific demands were made relating to JFM structure:

- all forest and revenue department lands must be open for JFM, not just 'degraded' forest lands; that,
- no forest official should have more than observer status in the Village Forest Committee; and,
- it should be impossible to dissolve Village Forest Committees by the orders of forest officials alone.

presided over these consultations.

Yet, in April 1991, ODA granted £24 million for the project with minimal changes to the project proposal. And the government order on JFM that came out in 1993 reflected none of the changes ratified in the December 1990 consultations with the NGOs. The order's weaknesses (Lele, 1995) combined with the KFD's and the government's limited interest in JFM have resulted in tardy initiation of JFM and a number of lacunae even where it has occurred (Saxena et al., 1997).

How could KFD and ODA succeed in resisting these pressures? On the one hand, the ODA's political compulsions to make a grant (its *raison d'être*) ultimately outweighed its interest (such as it was) in pushing the KFD to design and seriously implement a people-oriented and cost-effective project (Box 2). On the other hand, the NGOs suffered from a combination of attrition, internal conflicts over strategy, and an inability to mobilise support from the political arm of the state (Box 3). Certain factors peculiar to the social context of forestry in Karnataka also played a role (Box 3).

Apart from the compulsion to meet targets of amounts given/lent, the donors' politically correct rhetoric also masks their own agendas. ODA's primary domestic selling point for the WGFEF was the climate benefits of afforestation/forest conservation. The World Bank's privatisation agenda peeps out repeatedly from the Andhra Pradesh forestry project documents. And while activists and academics enter into debates on the principles, the game of bargaining between donors and bureaucrats goes on, even if it is not clear why large sums of money are required to achieve policy and attitudinal changes. Hefty allocations for infrastructure, consultancies to retired bureaucrats, and foreign trips help to silence bureaucratic opposition, whether on principles or more venal matters.⁶

Clearly, the process of structural adjustment and the hardening of budget constraints that comes along with it have made States more pliable to donor pressures. Donors

Box 2 Donor efforts and FD tactics

KFD-ODA negotiations on the final draft dragged on from late 1990 to late 1992. By this time, ODA probably concluded that it was better to have some project with some sort of JFM than nothing at all. ODA efforts before and after the sanctioning of the project indicate some concern with quality of implementation of JFM, such as their insistence on the setting up of a Steering Committee with NGO and academic representation, their willingness to fund NGOs for JFM work, their agreeing to sponsor an independent external review in 1997 by recognised experts acceptable to the NGOs, and their attempts to involve NGOs in project design for the second phase of the project.

In the event, these were often easily thwarted by KFD. KFD bypassed the Steering Committee by setting up a separate 'Empowered' Committee; it insisted on controlling the funds set aside for NGOs and for research and then hardly spent them; it produced a sanitised executive summary of the independent review for public consumption; and it eventually rejected the draft second phase proposal prepared by the joint KFD-NGO-ODA team. Clearly, at no stage was ODA prepared to use its ultimate weapon – suspension of funds – to obtain any major concessions; and the obvious and persistent footdragging by KFD did not stem the continuous flow of mostly British consultants that ODA sent for various 'support' and 'input' activities.

in turn appear to lend some legitimacy to inputs and interventions from non-governmental actors, but they are ultimately constrained by their internal agendas, primary among them being the need to make disbursements. The bureaucratic arm of the state typically adopts the rhetoric of 'participatory management' and walks the tightrope between wanting to retain its traditional top-down control and wanting to capture fiscally beneficial and personally lucrative projects. The political arm appears to be sitting on the fence; in the absence of a strong ideological commitment, it will only jump onto the community participation bandwagon when it sees some scope for making electoral capital out of it. Independent NGOs and academics, operating in what is still a very open society by most standards, wield some limited influence on the policies of the state either by establishing strong personal relationships with bureaucrats or (more rarely) by building bridges with progressive politicians.

Conclusions

The main attempt in this paper has been to chalk out a middle path between one extreme of taking state pronouncements of radical ideological shifts too literally and the other of characterising the state, the only actor presumed to have some agency, as a monolithic rent-seeking turf-maximising entity. Evidence from two sectors across several States in India suggests a richer model that differentiates between participation and devolution, between joint management and decentralisation, and then

Box 3 NGO exigencies and socio-political realities in Karnataka

After the 'successes' of the December 1990–January 1991 period, FEVORD-K (most of whose constituent NGOs have more than just forest sector issues on their minds) lost the momentum of its early protests, especially since the project was definitely going to be implemented in Uttara Kannada district, where hardly any of FEVORD-K's members worked. Moreover, after KFD and ODA made it look like they had accepted the NGOs' criticisms and dangled the carrot of working together (with ODA funding for the NGOs), FEVORD-K's 'radical' consensus broke down and internal conflict surfaced. While some NGOs felt it was time to seize the opportunity presented by the acceptance of JFM and work with local communities to extract maximum benefits from it, others felt that the proposed structure of JFM was fundamentally flawed, that the larger problems with the project remained un-addressed, and that taking financial support from KFD/ODA would seriously compromise the NGOs. Further, the lack of broader political support meant the activists could not get the politicians to rectify the JFM structure proposed by KFD.

It should also be noted that Karnataka is a State where:

- the very substantial and lucrative forest estate has made the forest department powerful and relatively insulated from fiscal pressures;
- the forest bureaucracy, brought up in a strong technocratic tradition, has been generally hostile to JFM; and,
- unlike other well-forested States/regions such as Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and eastern Gujarat, there is no significant vote bank of *forest-dependent tribal poor* to pressurise the political arm. On the contrary, there is a powerful vote-bank of 'forest-exploiting' rich landlords – arecanut farmers and coffee planters – who have historically enjoyed very substantial *private* control over forest use and are afraid of any 'communitarian' takeover.

explains the range of state responses to the concept of joint management as being the outcome of the compulsions and motivations of several different actors inside and outside the 'state'. I would argue that in a country like India with a well-entrenched democratic setup and an active civil society, the rent-seeking model of the state has a limited life span. The processes of liberalisation and structural adjustment have temporarily shifted the balance of power towards donor agencies and also given greater legitimacy to the non-governmental sector. But the political arm of the democratic state and its constituencies will not (and should not) remain bypassed for long. Whether it asserts itself through a West Bengal-type internalisation of the decentralisation agenda or takes the populist – and necessarily haphazard – route as in Andhra Pradesh remains to be seen.

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Endnotes

1 Revised version of a paper presented at the Conference on 'Crossing boundaries: The seventh common property conference' University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, June 10–14th, 1998.

2 One landmark was the 1992 report at the Planning Commission's Committee on Pricing of Irrigation Water, advocating a participatory approach to irrigation management.

3 In what follows, the term 'state' is used initially without disaggregation while discussing points one and two above, or when I do not see a divergence between its constituents in a particular case.

4 This is notwithstanding the fact that the trigger for JFM in West Bengal undoubtedly came from the bureaucracy in the form of the now-famous Arabari Socioeconomic Project of the mid-1970s (Tiwari, 1998). Note that although Arabari is the 'original' experiment in *joint* forest management, it is by no means the first or only site where *decentralised* forest management as such was attempted. Hundreds of villages in Orissa and tens of others in Gujarat and elsewhere were protecting and managing forests entirely on their own in the 1970s or even before.

5 This is not to say that the Left Front's decentralisation initiatives or the Telugu Desam's liberalisation drive are complete successes or that they are purely altruistic moves. The point simply is that these initiatives have yielded significant, though not evenly distributed, social gains and opprobrium, which indicates the room for achieving political gains through socially meaningful policies.

6 A recent review of World Bank lending to the forest sector in India concluded that the lending was not cost-effective at all; yet it argued continued funding. The Ministry of Environment and Forests' response included a blatant demand for greater say in deciding on consultancies, foreign trips, etc.

Sharachchandra Lele can be contacted at the Ecological Economics Unit, Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore, P. O. Nagarabhavi, Bangalore 560 072, India.
Fax: +91 (80) 321 70008. Email: slele@isec.kar.nic.in

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