

Schedule
International Workshop (August 18th & 19th 2006)

“Nature in the Raj: Colonial Environments and Indigenous Knowledge”

[Organised by the Centre for studies in Science Policy (CSSP, Jawaharlal Nehru University), Centre for World Environmental History (CWEH, Sussex University) and Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML, New Delhi)]

ABSTRACTS

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Forest settlements in the Raj:
Persistent diversity in forest property regimes in Himachal Pradesh

The forest territorial landscape of India is shaped by colossal settlement efforts that were undertaken by the colonial forest department in later half of the nineteenth century. In principle this was a systematic, comprehensive and rational process designed to make legible the complex pattern of property relations that existed over forests. However, in practice, forest settlements in colonial India were often a process of struggle and interaction between diverse economic, political and ideological forces that resulted in heterogeneous outcomes, only sometimes intended. Forest settlements in a small region of the present state of Himachal Pradesh reflect this struggle between the ideology of homogeneity and legibility on one hand and the persistent and thriving diversity of property regimes on the other. Actual settlement records reflect the perspectives and differences of individual settlement officers, influence of local power centers, different political incentives, and particular local political-economic concerns at specific points of time when the settlements were undertaken. This paper discusses the patchwork of diverse property regimes that were created in Himachal Pradesh's forests by divergent interests that defied any attempts at homogeneity.

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COLONIALISM AND ENVIRONMENT: COMMERCIALISATION OF FORESTS
AND DECLINE OF TRIBALS IN MADRAS PRESIDENCY, 1882-1947

This paper attempts to analyse colonial forest policy and its impacts on the environment and tribals in the Madras Presidency, during the post- Forest Act period (1882-1947). It argues that the post-Forest Act colonial regime actively encouraged the commercialisation of forest resources while simultaneously imposing several restrictions on tribal populations and other forest users. Further, it argues that the conservation initiatives made by the government was essentially intended to curtail the access of the tribals and other forest users so that the colonial regime could extract these resources for commercial purposes. In short, post-Forest Act colonial forest policies that were allegedly intended to conserve the forests ended up enabling the colonial government to systematically extract forest resources; resulting in the emaciation of the tribal populace and the transformation of the forest environment in the Madras Presidency.

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Mapping The Use And Abuse Of Nature In The Territory Of The Princely States Of
South Gujarat: A Study In Their Flora –Fauna Potentialities And The Process Of
Deforestation And Conservation
c. 1750- c. 1960

Princely States have attracted considerable scholarly attention on issues related to sovereignty and integration. However, even a cursory survey of literature on the princely states will suggest that environmental history is less explored. The post colonial state of Gujarat, in fact, was carved out of a number of princely states. Large

today has a National Park, a Botanical Garden in its surroundings at Waghai and Shulpaneshwar and a Sanctuary at Dedia Pada. The region has been witness to several processes of deforestation on one hand while on the other a strong reaction for conservation had also set in. Our explorations will be based on archival material and supplemented with interviews from senior informants in the Bansda, Rajpipla and Dang territory.

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NATURAL HAZARD AND THE BRAHMAPUTRA RIVER BASIN: STATE
DESIGN, FLOODS AND PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS IN MAJULI ISLAND.

This paper tries to analyse policy discourses on 'flood management' in Majuli. One of the largest river islands that is prone to flood and bank erosion. The public policy on flood mitigation in the country in general and in the Brahmaputra Basin in particular has been overwhelmingly motivated by technocratic interventions such as embankments and large dams. In recent years, this structural model has been criticized for causing adverse impacts on river regimes and the flood plains.

While the proponents of the techno-centric approach see the populations occupying the flood plain as being subject to natural hazards they tend to ignore the technological risks and hazards that have been brought on by the embankments. Thus, these floods are perceived as being inherent natural hazards that can only be controlled by regulating the flow regime of the river through engineering measures. A strong emerging counter argument that is echoed today by neo-indigenists is the claim for the relevance of traditional ecological knowledge or Indigenous Knowledge (IK) of the local

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COLONIAL NATURALISTS, INDEPENDENT INDIANS AND THE EXOTIC
WILDLIFE – A PHOTOGRAPHER'S VIEW

This visual presentation will largely argue that Colonial Naturalist writings on Indian wildlife had a strong element of exoticism. This trend, I will hope to show, continues to resonant and is driven in contemporary times by the western media (National Geographic and the Discovery Channel etc). In part, such visual exoticism, I will hope to show is also driven by the emergence of several "pro environment" groups in young urban India. In effect, this urban grouping in their quest for the 'exotic' in wildlife, chooses to remain oblivious to various types of social, political and environmental complexities on the ground. Within wildlife photography, photographs that have an "exotic" element are appreciated more than photographs that reveal the less romantic aspects element of 'wild India'.

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Photography and Environmental History: Documenting the Memory of Tehri.

This visual presentation is based on a series of photographs taken between 1988 and 2006 on the submergence of Tehri town and its surrounding environs (Uttarakhand, India) by the Tehri dam. My attempt will be to explore the idea of using contemporary photography as a format for environmental documentation and the shaping of memory for environmental activism. In other words, the meticulous and careful compilation of environmental change through photography offers not only a credible means of recording landscapes for posterity but critically as well for shaping 'memory' as a volatile element to environmental politics.

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Water, State and Society in pre-colonial Rajasthan

Despite the fact that water is central to making agriculture possible, the political and social relations of water use and abuse in Indian society have only recently been scrutinised by historians. The pre-colonial state in India is widely viewed as being passive in this regard; exercising only a limited set of interventions for the manipulation or control of water in rural society. The belief is that the actual practices of water management was largely run by communities and their conventions and norms. In

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THE SUNDARBANS, BADAMIYAN, HISTORY, NATURE AND LANDSCAPE

...INTERPOSED BETWEEN THE SEA AND THE PLAINS OF BENGAL LIES AN IMMENSE ARCHIPELAGO

