

**ROOTS OF CHANGE:
FRONT LINE WORKERS AND FOREST POLICY REFORM
IN WEST BENGAL**

by

Anuradha Joshi

M.C.P. Massachusetts Institute of Technology
S.M.Arch.S. Massachusetts Institute of Technology
B. Arch. School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN PUBLIC POLICY**

at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

February 2000

© 2000 Anuradha Joshi. All rights reserved.

The author hereby grants to MIT permission to reproduce and to distribute publicly paper and electronic copies of this thesis document in whole or in part.

Signature of Author: _____

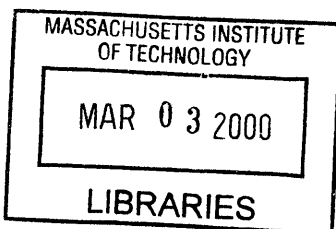
Department of Urban Studies and Planning
January 20, 2000

Certified by: _____

Bishwapriya Sanyal
Department Head
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by: _____

Frank Levy
Daniel Rose Professor of Urban Economics
Chair, Ph.D. Committee



ROTC

ROOTS OF CHANGE: FRONT-LINE WORKERS AND FOREST POLICY REFORM IN WEST BENGAL

by

Anuradha Joshi

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning on February 20, 2000 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Public Policy

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the case of forest policy reform in the Indian state of West Bengal. In 1989, the Government of West Bengal adopted a policy of involving local communities in the protection and management of state owned forest lands, generally called Joint Forest Management (JFM). Through JFM considerable progress has been made in (a) establishing joint management arrangements between communities and the Forest Department at the local level and (b) actual forest regeneration.

The case is interesting from the point of view of policy reform because in contrast to prevailing stereotypes in the literature, JFM was a case of the forest bureaucracy acting in an innovative, non-self interested fashion, at some cost to its own power. Moreover, the initiative for involving people in forest management came from the Forest Department before organized demands for participation from forest communities. What is especially striking about the case is that the cooperation between the Forest Department and villagers that made JFM possible emerged and spread at a time when relations between the two had long been characterized by high levels of distrust and conflict.

In the prevailing literature there are two conventional explanations for the policy change—one focuses on the leadership of a few progressive mid-level forest officers and the other on the formation of autonomous informal protection groups through community initiative. I examine these two explanations closely and find that they only partially explain the trajectory of JFM in West Bengal. The main factual omission in these explanations is the supportive role played by the Association of front-line workers of the Forest Department. I argue that because of the difficult work conditions faced by front-line forestry workers they took up the call for a forest policy that would involve local people in management and protection. These efforts were successful because their Association was closely linked to the political party in power. Support for the policy change from the grassroots, front-line workers, the political party and reformist senior foresters squeezed the opposition from reluctant foresters. This alternative explanation of front-line workers and their union helps fill the gaps in earlier accounts and illustrates how, contrary to received wisdom, public sector unions can play a progressive role in policy reform.

Thesis Supervisor: Bishwapriya Sanyal
Title: Professor of Urban Planning

Acknowledgements

I have accumulated enormous debts to various people in the process of completing this dissertation. It would be impossible to mention every person who has contributed to this work.

I am indebted to my supervisor, Bish Sanyal who has encouraged me at every step of the way during the Master's and the Doctoral programs. His persistent enthusiasm and faith in the project has been a source of inspiration. He challenged me to think creatively and gave me the freedom to explore new ideas. His balanced perspective on academics and life has helped me during the long process of writing this dissertation. I would like to thank Judith Tandler who has been a mentor throughout this process from its tentative inception to its conclusion. She threw an interesting stream of literature my way that proved a fertile ground for ideas. She has devoted extraordinary amounts of time to reading half-baked ideas. I simultaneously dreaded and looked forward to her penetrating questions and demanding comments on every page of the drafts. Most significantly, she taught me the importance of grounding empirical research in the larger literature in the field. Maureen Scully, has been the most supportive and patient reader. She has gently nudged me in the direction of relevant but diverse literature and pushed me to reflect on my case through it.

For their invaluable comments and suggestions, I am grateful to Bina Agarwal, Marty Rein, Mick Moore, Jesse Ribot, Jeremy Gould, S. Sivaramakrishnan, Mark Robinson, Jeff Campbell, Liz Leeds and Debal Deb. I am grateful to Bina Agarwal and Melissa Leach for giving me an opportunity to present some of these findings at seminars at the Institute of Economic Growth, New Delhi and the Institute of Development Studies, U.K.

Several organizations made this dissertation possible by providing support at various stages of the process. The research was funded by a fellowship from the American Institute of Indian Studies and an Energy and Environmental Policy Grant from the Japan Foundation administered by the Center for International Studies at MIT. The American Institute of Indian Studies in India was particularly helpful in logistical support. I would also like to thank the Ford Foundation, the Institute for Bio-social Research and Development, the World Bank, the Center for Science and Environment, The Ministry of Forests and Environment, the School for Fundamental Research, Unnayan, and Voice of People, West Bengal for their openness in sharing materials.

I am particularly grateful to the Department of Forests, West Bengal that provided invaluable help. Several senior foresters who would prefer to remain unnamed, found time from their busy schedules to introduce me to the nitty gritty of forest administration. I am grateful to the WBSFSA for their generosity in sharing their experiences with me. I would like to thank the numerous front-line foresters who patiently answered my numerous questions, provided endless cups of chai, and took me into their homes. My research assistants, Shivaji Mukherji, and Tanmay Chakraborty, made the long train journeys to the field enjoyable and patiently explained finer points of my interviews. I would also like to thank Sharmin Ghani, Sabbir Mahmud, Jill Blockhus, Vikram Dayal, Kinsuk Mitra, Nita Mishra, and Debal Deb who helped with key research material and documents.

Many colleagues in the doctoral program journeyed with me in this process. I am delighted to be able to thank Amy Brown, Lois Stanley, Alex Walters, Ani Dasgupta, Elizabeth Morton, Rosemary Sandford, Paul Shimek, Kathleen Merrigan, Tito Bianchi and Rodrigo Serrano for their support at various stages. I would also like to thank my friends who supported me irrespective of the dissertation and enabled me to finish without losing perspective. Anu Desai, Soni Gupta, David Gipstein, Michael Sheridan, and Manju Mehta are my family in Cambridge. Phred Churchill, Jack Churchill Usha Kaul and Janice Lansita have been supportive throughout. In India, Rohit Jaiswal and Shabnam Akram took me into their home. Adit Pal, Ravi Kaimal, Suneetha and Vineet Kacker, D. Soumya, Malavika Karlekar, Debal Deb, Ashish Sharan Lal and Nilina Deb sustained me in my fieldwork and provided welcome distractions. Last and most important I thank my brother and sisteer-in-law, Amit and Padma, for their unconditional love and patience.

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents, without whose love and support this dissertation would not have been possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	3
List of Figures5
Chapter 1. THE ORIGINS OF FOREST POLICY REFORM	8
I. Introduction.....	8
II. A preview of the arguments.....	15
III. The context.....	21
A. Radical politics.....	21
B. The structure of forest administration.....	27
C. The nature of <i>sal</i> forests.....	33
IV. Methodology.....	39
V. The organization of the dissertation.....	43
Chapter 2: FOREST POLICY AND THE STATE	46
I. Introduction.....	46
II. Subsistence vs. Revenue: The colonial period.....	54
A. EarlyHistory.....	54
B. The Indian Forest Act, 1878.....	57
C. The Indian Forest Act, 1927.....	61
III. From Revenue to Production: Early post independence	63
A. The Indian Forest Policy, 1952.....	64
B. The NCA Report, 1976.....	67
C. The Draft Forest Bill, 1981.....	69
D. The Draft Forest Policy, 1983.....	72
IV. Production vs. conservation.....	75
A. Rise of environmentalism at the Center.....	75
B. Center-State struggles: The Forest Conservation Act, 1980.....	78
V. Conservation vs. subsistence.....	82
A. Social Forestry.....	83
B. Forest dwellers and subsistence.....	86
C. The Forest Policy, 1988.....	88
VI. Conclusions.....	95
Chapter 3 TWO NARRATIVES: OFFICIAL AND SUBALTERN	99
I. Introduction.....	99
II. The enabling context.....	102
III. The official account.....	116
A. Early informal protection groups and the SEP at Arabari.....	116
B. Evaluation of the official account.....	125
C. Remaining questions.....	145
IV. The subaltern account.....	146
A. History of protest and autonomous community management.....	146
B. Evaluation of the subaltern account.....	154
C. Remaining questions.....	169
V. Conclusions.....	171

Chapter 4. A THIRD NARRATIVE: FRONT LINE WORKERS AND THE WBSFSA	177
I. Introduction.....	177
II. Union Activism for policy reform.....	179
A. Taking an independent stand.....	181
B. Petitioning Ministers.....	183
C. Appealing to villagers.....	188
D. Supporting rank and file.....	194
III. Activism and policy influence.....	198
A. 1922-50 Early years.....	199
B. 1950-1977 Political turmoil.....	202
C. Post 1977 The Left Front Government.....	206
IV. Why take a policy position?	210
V. Frontline workers and the work situation.....	217
A. The old work situation.....	221
B. The effects of the crisis.....	228
VI. Recent Trends.....	236
VII. Conclusions.....	239
Chapter 5: POLICY ADOPTION: WEST BENGAL IN CONTEXT	243
I. Introduction.....	243
II. West Bengal in context.....	245
A. Supportive political climate.....	246
B. Lack of opposition from industry.....	249
C. Reluctant bureaucracy.....	250
D. Other Actors.....	256
III. Adoption at the Center.....	261
IV. Post JFM.....	266
A. Issues of principle.....	267
B. Issues of practice.....	270
V. Conclusions.....	273
Chapter 6.	
CONCLUSIONS	275
I. Introduction.....	275
II. The main findings.....	276
A. From one account to three.....	276
B. Of pilots and diffusion.....	278
C. JFM's roots in prior programs.....	279
D. The problem of collective action.....	280
E. The union and front-line workers.....	281
F. State vs. community in forest policy?	281
III. The literature.....	282
A. Diffusion.....	282
B. Collective action.....	286
C. Pathways to reform.....	292
D. The work situation.....	297
E. The missing union.....	303
Bibliography	311
Appendices	321

List of Tables

Table 1.1 Evolution of FPCs in southwest Bengal.....	9
Table 1.2 Functional organization of the Forest Department.....	28
Table 1.3 Organizational hierarchy of territorial forestry in the Wbfd.....	32
Table 2.1 Stages in the development of forest policy.....	53
Table 2.2 Gross Revenue and Surplus of the Indian Forest Department, 1870-1924.....	60
Table 2.3 Gross Revenue and Surplus of the Indian Forest Department, 1939-1944.....	62
Table 2.4 Categories of forests.....	63
Table 2.5 Plan outlays in the forest sector, 1950-97.....	69
Table 2.6 Changes in forest cover in India (million ha.).....	75
Table 2.7 Forest area lost through conversion to other uses between 1951 and 1972.....	79
Table 2.8 Interests in the forestry sector.....	82
Table 2.9 State approaches to curtailing degradation of state forests in India.....	94
Table 2.10 Summary of key documents and events in forest policy	98
Table 3.1 Classification of forest area in West Bengal by legal status.....	107
Table 3.2 Extent of degraded forest lands in three districts of southwest Bengal (1989).....	111
Table 3.3 Percentage of state forests under community management in southwest Bengal...	154
Table 4.1 Strength of the West Bengal Forest Department (1987).....	180
Table 4.2 No. of forest offence cases (illicit felling).....	214
Table 4.3 No. of forest personnel assaulted and murdered between 1981 and 1990.....	215
Table 4.4 Organizational hierarchy of Territorial forestry in the Wbfd.....	220
Table 4.5 Timber and Firewood extraction (FDC and FD).....	227
Table 5.1 Revenue from forests (1994-95) Rs. in Lakhs.....	250
Table 5.2 Modes of forest management.....	268

List of Figures

Map 1.1 West Bengal with district boundaries.....	36
Map 1.2 Detail of Midnapore district.....	37
Map 1.3 Detail of Purulia district.....	38
Figure 3.1 Changes in forest cover and community activism in southwest Bengal.....	149
Photo 4.1 Forest Minister Bhabotosh Soren addresses the WBSFSA delegation, 1969.....	185
Photo 4.2 Demonstration led by SCC and WBSFSA, Calcutta, 1972.....	185

Chapter 1

THE ORIGINS OF FOREST POLICY REFORM

I. Introduction

This dissertation grew out of what appeared to be an anomaly. In 1989, the State Forest Department of West Bengal passed an order formalizing Joint Forest Management (JFM)—a new program that involves forest villagers in the management of the state’s forests by promising them a share of the profits when the trees are felled. A radical departure from the previous focus on policing and protection of state owned forests, the new approach emphasizes the shared responsibility for management and sharing of profits with the local communities through the formation of Forest Protection Committees (FPCs). This policy had its roots in innovative experiments in Joint Management at the local level. Experiences from Midnapore and Purulia districts in West Bengal from the early 1970s showed that when forest staff collaborated with rural communities, they could overcome some of the problems of protection of dispersed forests. From being degraded through overgrazing and cutting, the forests began to regenerate dramatically.

Once started in the early seventies, informal Forest Protection Committees spread rapidly, even before they were formalized through the adoption of JFM as policy by the state government in 1989. By 1988, according to official statistics, there were already 842 FPCs protecting approximately 29519 hectares of land (Roy 1990). Today there are over 3,000 active FPCs in West Bengal, and they have managed to successfully protect and regenerate approximately 45000 hectares of degraded lands (SPWD 1998).

By the late 1980s Forest Protection Committees in West Bengal and some other states (Orissa and Haryana) became so successful in regenerating degraded forests that in 1990 the central government adopted a national Joint Forest Management Resolution (JFM). Subsequently, as of 1998, nineteen states have passed JFM resolutions similar to West Bengal for promoting the formation of FPCs for forest regeneration.¹ Approximately 1.5 million ha. of forest lands are under the protection of 15,000 FPCs. Although this number is small compared to the total forest area in India of 76.52 million ha. (of which 30.98 million ha. is estimated degraded forest area), it represents a significant start towards regeneration.

**Table 1.1 Evolution of FPCs in southwest Bengal
(Burdwan, Birbhum, Bankura, Purulia, Midnapore)**

Years	1984	1985	1986	1987	1989	1989	1990
Number of FPCs	31	59	114	175	286	491	648

Source: Roy (1991). p. 14

Using the example of Joint Forest Management in India, scholars of development are strongly advocating this approach for countries and contexts as far apart as Thailand and Uganda.²

Forestry, in most developing countries has been policing oriented, focussed on keeping villagers out of forested areas in the interests of conservation (Carter, Connelly et al. 1994; Degnbol 1996). Scholars of development are in consensus that forest-based communities have to be centrally involved in the protection and management of forests. Yet, whether JFM-type

¹ These are—Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Nagaland, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, and Uttar Pradesh. For details of the individual orders see SPWD (1998).

² For example, see Sato, (1997) for Thailand, Scott (1998) for Uganda, Nhira for Zimbabwe (1996).

arrangements will succeed in other contexts is an empirical question. Two important issues are—a) to what extent are conditions in other countries significantly different so as to constrain JFM and b) to what extent is JFM successful and sustainable in West Bengal in the first place.

JFM, I argue, has been a success on several counts. First, the fact that JFM was formalized is, in itself, quite an achievement. For more than fifty years since independence, forest policy has been dominated by concerns with revenue and production with little attention to the subsistence issues of forest dwellers. That JFM represents a significant policy shift in Indian forest management is best illustrated by contrasting it with earlier practices. JFM represents a conceptual change: from production for commercial markets and to generate government revenue, to production to fulfill the needs of forest communities; from an exclusive focus on timber to attention to the non-timber forest products (firewood, grasses, leaves etc.) that are important to the livelihoods of forest communities; from monoculture (of commercially valuable species) to mixed forests that include a diversity of tree species; from plantations of a similar age (for ease in harvesting) to plantations of diverse ages (for a sustained supply of timber and other products to meet community needs); and, most significantly from custodial management through policing, to participatory management.

Second, data from West Bengal indicate that these changes have had major impacts. Satellite surveys show that between 1988 and 1991 the forest cover in West Bengal increased by 4.5%. Of this, 67% of the increase in forest cover has occurred in South West Bengal the region that

contains the largest number of FPCs, although it has only 37% of forest land.³ Further, although only a minor portion of the total timber production comes from the south-west region of the state (4%), the total timber extracted has increased from a low of 72,590 cu.m. in 1989-90 to 84,903 cu.m. in 1994-95.⁴

Third, JFM has improved the relationship between foresters and villagers. The number of forest personnel assaulted has decreased from a high of 60 in 1982-83 to 18 in 1994-95.⁵ Similarly the number of forest offenses (cases of illegal extraction) of timber has decreased. In 1988-89 there were 13,053 cases of illicit felling in the state. By 1993-93 these had gone down to 5883. The volume of timber seized in these cases fell even further—from 14,223 cubic meters in 1989-90 to 2878 cubic meters in 1992-93. By 1998, 449,300 hectares of state forest lands (37.82 % of the total) were under the protection of Forest Protection Committees. Villagers have started to benefit from the program—up till 1998, the Forest Department felled demarcated areas in the forests allotted to 164 FPCs generating a total profit of \$1.27 million (Rs. 4.61 crore) of which the FPC share was \$.319 million (Rs. 1.15) (SPWD 1998). But more important, qualitatively, front-line foresters and villagers report a more collaborative relationship a marked difference from the mistrust and fear that was characteristic of the past. Although, as these data show JFM undoubtedly represents a change in the state's approach to forest management, there are several problems conceptual and practical that remain.⁶ As JFM has matured, many of these problems

³The total increase may not have come only from regeneration on Forest Department lands--the satellite images do not differentiate between forest cover on private or state land.

⁴The figures for 1995-96 are not available. The increase is only indicative, since the department had stopped felling in some areas in certain years.

⁵Again, these figures are only indicative.

⁶I elaborate on these problems in Chapter 5. For a good general summary of these issues see Saighal (1996) and Roy (1992).

are posing a challenge to the program's sustainability. In this dissertation my intention is not to extol the virtues of JFM, but to recognize the extent to which change has occurred and to try and identify the conditions that enabled the change.

The case caught my attention for three reasons. First, it is a successful attempt to tackle the serious problem of the degradation of state forests. Earlier attempts at tackling deforestation, such as increased policing and 'social forestry',⁷ have met with limited success despite large investments of personnel and other resources. Second, in contrast to prevailing stereotypes in the literature, JFM appeared to be a case of the forest bureaucracy acting in a progressive, non self-interested fashion, at some cost to its own power. Not only did foresters innovate in implementation, they were able successfully to spread JFM informally and subsequently pressure the state government to adopt JFM as a policy. What is especially striking about the West Bengal case is that the initiative for involving people in forest management came from the state Forest Department, before any demands for participation came from forest villagers. Third, and remarkably, the cooperation between the Forest Department and villagers that made JFM possible emerged and spread at a time when relations between the two main parties were marked by high levels of distrust and conflict.

⁷ "Social forestry" first originated sometime in the late 1970s with the growing international awareness of the fuelwood and fodder crisis. In contrast to JFM, social forestry is implemented on non-Forest Department lands including private farm lands, village common lands and degraded lands under the control of other governmental bodies, e.g. roadside strips. Usually social forestry refers to a broad range of tree and forest related activities that landowners and community groups undertake to provide products for their own use and generate income from NTFPs. Social forestry has also included governments planting trees on public lands to meet local village needs (Gregerson 1989). For a good summary of the Indian responses to the fuelwood crisis see Agarwal (1986).

The case of JFM is particularly important in light of the recent focus on the adoption of community-based approaches to resource management. Scholars from different disciplines and interests are converging on community based forest management systems as a promising approach for problems of deforestation and development.⁸ The experience with community forestry however has been mixed.⁹ Results have been often disappointing because of several factors including inappropriate choice of species, lack of follow up care and lack of participation by the beneficiary communities. Increasingly it is evident that the organizational structure of forest bureaucracies is inadequate to meet the challenges of community forestry. Further, bureaucracies that have not internalized the concept of community based management are unlikely to implement programs in the spirit in which they are intended. Community forestry poses a threat to the power and control of foresters and states especially in peripheral forest areas. The vast literature on community forestry has consistently noted this problem of getting Forest Departments to internalize participatory, collaborative arrangements that are necessary for community forestry to work (Korten and Uphoff 1981; Peluso and Poffenberger 1989; Thompson 1995).

The question that follows is: under what conditions do forest bureaucracies adopt participatory approaches to natural resource management? This dissertation attempts to answer that question

⁸ Deforestation is a serious problem in South Asia. The Food and Agricultural Organization estimates that deforestation rose from 11.1 million hectares a year in 1970 to 15 million hectares a year in the 1980s (FAO 1993). While there is controversy about the causes of deforestation (including population pressures, inappropriate policies and mismanagement) lately there has been a consensus among environmentalists about the need for more effective policies to combat deforestation. I raise this issue because some recent research has convincingly argued that the increased desertification and deforestation scenarios in Africa are not borne out by historical evidence (Fairhead 1996; Leach and Mearns 1996)]. These scholars argue that forests in Western Africa are relatively recent (around hundred years). Prior to that the ecology of the area varied and was largely grasslands. Contrary to popular belief, they argue that the present forests are the result of concerted efforts of villagers.

through the case of Joint Forest Management in West Bengal. The adoption and success of JFM flies in the face of neoliberal perspectives that emphasize the rent seeking motivations of public officials. Such “bureaucracy-skeptical” arguments can be separated into two main types. One type focuses on the issue of corruption—the use by public officials of their power for private benefit. The other type focuses selectively on behavioral motivations that exist within a formally functioning bureaucracy—promotion, budget maximization—and argues that perverse outcomes are the result of such structural incentives (Tullock 1965; Niskanen 1971). The neoliberal approach and the underlying rational choice theory have already been widely criticized for being misleading in understanding the performance of public officials.¹⁰ To develop a better understanding of bureaucratic behavior we need detailed cases of good performance. The case of JFM in West Bengal adds to the small number of such cases. What distinguishes the JFM case from cases of good performance is that in JFM, foresters experimented during implementation and this experimentation led to policy change. While the circumstances surrounding JFM in West Bengal are partly unique, the case points to lessons for understanding policy reform and implementation that are applicable more broadly to cases of policy change and implementation in the management of natural resources.

⁹ See Gregorson (1989) for a good overview. For some of the more recent issues in community forestry see RECOFTC (1997).

¹⁰ For a good review see Dunleavy (1991).

II. A PREVIEW OF THE ARGUMENTS

The primary aim of the research project was to explain the behavior of “progressive” bureaucrats¹¹—the innovative foresters who were responsible for the early experiments that led to policy change—especially when prevalent literature seems to suggest that this is not possible. My research shows that my initial assumptions were not wrong—a few “progressive” bureaucrats play a significant role in the story that I tell. Some senior forest officials, concerned about public interest, promoted the new participatory policy and strategized to get it accepted within the Forest Department. The story however, turned out to be more complex and different from what I had expected. I preview some of the findings from the research in the following paragraphs.

In exploring the origins of JFM and the behavior of progressive foresters in West Bengal, I found that rather than a single explanation, there were two broad explanations in the prevailing literature on JFM. On the one hand, most official accounts focussed on the efforts of some progressive Divisional Forest Officers in the 1970s to form Forest Protection Committees (FPCs). The pilot Socio-Economic Project (SEP) at Arabari in the Midnapore district of West Bengal and to a lesser extent to similar experiments in Purulia were cited in this account. When these efforts were successful after about five years or so the account goes, other officers embraced the approach and JFM spread rapidly. In 1989, the Government of West Bengal institutionalized JFM through a Government Order. On the other hand, a growing body of academic and NGO-based research has suggested that JFM represents a spontaneous re-

¹¹I am terming the turn to participatory policy “progressive” because it seeks to include previously excluded stakeholders in the management process, it veers away from a single, revenue and timber focussed view of forests to a more holistic multipurpose view and most importantly, it has been successful in stemming the stream of deforestation in the region.

emergence of community forest management and/or is a reassertion of tribal autonomy movements that have a long history in the region. In this interpretation, which I call the subaltern account, the role of the Forest Departments in this account was simply to formalize a process already underway. Such polarized accounts are not uncommon in the literature in development—many stories of success take on this official vs. subaltern, top vs. bottom or mainstream vs. alternative shape. Yet, because they are well entrenched in their respective constituencies, they often miss dynamics at work that cannot be accommodated by such polarization. In order to bring out the contradictions and inconsistencies in these accounts I subjected the official and subaltern accounts to a detail^{e)} scrutiny, comparing their assumptions with evidence from the field.

On a close examination of these accounts, I found them unable to explain certain features of the case. Furthermore, they missed important connections between the accounts that were key to JFMs success. For example, the official account does not explain why it took more than ten years for JFM to be adopted after its early success. Further, it does not explain how growing cooperation was possible in a climate of conflict and mistrust. The subaltern account too has no explanation of bureaucratic behaviour. Why would the Forest Department agree to share twenty-five percent of the profits if communities were already protecting the forests? In addition, it assumes away problems of collective action in communities wanting to engage in informal resource management regimes.

These questions and points of contradiction also throw light on issues of diffusion and collective action in the literature. For example, while the official account of the diffusion of a pilot project

is well entrenched in the Forest Department, it simply does not hold out under close scrutiny. I found that FPCs did not report hearing about the SEP at Arabari when they began their informal protection groups. Rather, I suggest that the role of the pilot project was to enable JFM's adoption as a formal policy. Moreover, the official account partially denies the roots of JFM in the earlier social forestry programs. The subaltern account, in contrast, does not rely on a diffusion mechanism—protection groups it suggests arose where degradation was severe, villages were homogenous and where forest dependence was high. Yet, in its explanation, it overlooks the problem of collective action, particularly when the costs of exclusion are high. While these two accounts were partially true, they did not represent the whole story. My main finding was that there is a third explanation for the emergence and success of JFM that focuses on front-line foresters and their union, the West Bengal Subordinate Forest Service Association (WBSFSA). In contrast to the literature that has portrayed public sector unions as hindering reforms,¹² front-line workers and their union have supported Joint Forest Management and actively promoted it. Since the early 1970s, the union has promoted a participatory approach to forest protection and regeneration. Its efforts have been directed at two channels—motivating villagers and convincing state politicians of the participatory approach. Its active stance was helped by the fact that it has had a close relationship with the CPI (M), the dominant partner in the ruling Left Front coalition. These actions are quite different from the focus on personnel issues that the Association itself has been involved with in the past or what the literature would lead us to expect.

¹² For example see World Bank (1995), Burki (1996) and Lustig (1995).

This then raises a key question—why were the front-line workers and their union so progressive?

There are several possible explanations. One explanation might emphasize the extent to which there was a general perception in the Forest Department that the old arrangements of protection through policing could no longer be sustained. Another might stress the extent of forest degradation leading to a situation where none of the parties had anything to lose by trying out a new arrangement. I argue that the Association's efforts to actively engage with forest policy were stimulated by two factors—its initial left orientation and the threats to the comfort, welfare and lives of Forest Department staff posed by growing conflicts with villagers. Since the early 1950s, the Association has held a Marxist ideology, which both made it more sympathetic to people oriented policies and also gave it access to the ministers in the Left-Front government when it came to power in 1977. Second, in the early and mid seventies, there were many confrontations between villagers and foresters throughout Bengal over the illegal felling of timber and several front line workers were physically assaulted and murdered. Naturally issues of worker safety became a central concern for the association, and it saw cooperation with the people as the only realistic way of ensuring safety.

Thus I suggest that the nature of the work situation of front-line workers as shaped by the interaction between them and villagers in forest areas contributed to the progressive policy stance taken by the union. The political mobilizing of rural West Bengal contributed to changing the attitudes of villagers toward government employees. At the same time, political parties had gained significant support within lower-level government employees. These factors shaped the work situation of front-line foresters as well as their possibilities for contributing to policy change.

Yet this worker dissatisfaction would have remained at the grassroots and not come to fruition without the union—the union, with its close ties to the political party was the channel through which worker demands were transmitted to the policy elite. The JFM case points to the importance of such channels that cut across hierarchical lines in the process of policy reform—to transmit information gained during implementation upwards to the policy process and to disseminate information about the policy process downwards to the rank and file.

Curiously then, my argument leads me to the original assumptions that I questioned earlier—that bureaucrats act in self-interest, and this self-interest can be the key to explaining policy positions. Neo-liberal ideas on bureaucracy turned out to contain elements of the truth for some public officials—the front-line workers—did influence policy in their own interests—but a very different set of interests from those suggested in the literature. These front-line workers in the Forest Department promoted the participatory approach out of a concern for self-preservation and creating tolerable social relations—a position that I argue derived from their conditions of work. They acted through their union—the West Bengal Subordinate Forest Service Association—to influence state policy. Yet the concept of self-interest and the actions of bureaucrats I ended up with is quite different from the one that I started with—of rent-maximizing individuals. Rather, the literature on street level bureaucracy helped provide a basis for understanding the kinds of interest that come into play in shaping bureaucratic behavior on the ground. Structural constraints to action and the concrete conditions of everyday work to a large extent shape these interests (Lipsky 1980). The recent literature on embeddedness has also suggested that interactions with society at the front-line shape the attitudes of some bureaucrats to reforms (Wade 1988; Evans 1995). These interactions are significant because they form the conditions of

work of most public front-line workers. Finally, this analysis offers an explanation of why these positions are not fixed, and how they might change with changing environments both within and outside the state. An adherent of rational choice will find enough elements in this case to validate the paradigm. However, it is a small victory—for it accords to the letter of the paradigm but not its spirit: the policy shift is best explained through ideas and concepts other than rational choice. Overall, my conclusions are more optimistic about the scope for public action and policy reform than the neo-liberal paradigm would suggest.

Thus, the case of the emergence of Joint Forest Management in West Bengal points in several related directions. First, in keeping with some of the recent literature it suggests that disaggregating the state into different levels might offer useful analytical purchase in understanding policy reform (Migdal, Kohli et al. 1994). In the case of JFM that I present, separating out front-line workers from higher levels of administration helped throw new light on the reform. Second, it suggests that examining the role of neglected, but important actors such as public service unions might point to paths through which policy reform might be advanced. Finally, the case illustrates how polarized narratives that are entrenched in particular institutions and constituencies can turn attention away from the complex reality of how reform progresses—in which the interface between foresters and villagers plays a key role. As reform minded scholars, we need to remind ourselves that such narratives might obscure other process that offer a more optimistic view of states and state bureaucrats.

III. THE CONTEXT

To understand the emergence of JFM in West Bengal, it is essential to first understand three contextual factors that create the setting for the story—the history of radical politics in West Bengal, the structure of forestry administration in India and the nature of *sal* (*shorea robusta*) forests. I relate them here because they appear in different ways at various points of the argument in the chapters that follow. Because their presentation then is somewhat fragmented, it is useful to summarize key points of these three elements here prior to diving into the empirical material.

A. Radical politics in West Bengal

The administrative structure emerged out of the history of radical politics in the state. To understand the nature of the ruling Left Front coalition and its development policy it is necessary to understand the history of communist politics in the state. Since the subject has been dealt with extensively by other scholars, I provide a brief thumbnail sketch here of the essential relevant features.¹³ The original Communist Party of India (CPI) founded by M.N. Roy was divided over the issue of whether to support the freedom movement led by the nationalist elite of the Congress Party. Following the lead of M.N. Roy, the faction that did not want to support the Congress, split to form the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI (M)). The CPI had comprised of centrist and leftist factions—the centrists who opposed the split but left the CPI when it became inevitable, and the leftists who themselves comprised of Maoists and radicals.

¹³ For instance see Lieten (1992 and 1996), Nossiter (1988), Mallick (1993), Kohli (1987) among others.

In 1967, when the United Front (a coalition of parties in opposition to the Congress, dominated by the CPI and CPI (M)) came into power for the first time in Bengal, they faced a peculiar problem. The Maoists in the CPI (M) had not joined the winning United Front coalition and had formed their own party and were agitating for a peasant revolution in Naxalbari (North Bengal). They assumed that the CPI (M) would not crack down on a movement led by some of their own previous members. However, the CPI (M) took the decision to repress the Naxalbari movement and used police power to defeat the movement. The Maoists retaliated by killing CPI (M) members. In the violent years of 1967-70 that followed, the Maoists were virtually wiped out and the centrists gained complete control of the CPI (M). After a brief period of Presidential rule following the fall of the United Front government, the Congress came to power in the controversial elections of 1972.¹⁴ The Congress, bent upon establishing its control over the state used its power to repress the Left parties. The Left was driven underground and began mobilizing the rural population as well as gaining control of the unions. By the time the centrally imposed Emergency was lifted in 1977 the CPI (M) was in a position to return to power as a majority partner in the Left Front coalition and had won 177 of the total 224 assembly seats.

The first point of note in this abbreviated history is that the years between 1967 and 1977 were characterized by serious violence.¹⁵ Coalitional instability, political mobilization of the population and socio-economic conflicts led to high levels of civil disorder. Kohli attributes this increase in violence to three factors—the political vacuum left by the decline of the Congress, the

¹⁴ The first United Front government lasted less than a year. It was followed for a couple of months by a Congress led coalition that was dissolved and presidential rule was imposed. In 1971 a Congress coalition again came to power but it too could not last long. Finally after the Bangladesh war in 1971, the Congress did sweep to power but under a cloud of suspicion of ballot rigging.

¹⁵ For a more detailed account of the violence and its consequences see Kohli (1991).

two consecutive droughts in the mid-sixties and the growing presence of leftist parties who used agitation and strikes as a means of mobilizing the population (Kohli 1991). The violence in rural areas centered around agrarian conflicts of two types—the revolutionary class violence driven by the ideological Maoists and the land grab movements encouraged by the United Front, especially the CPM. Often, this resulted in different parties in the coalition taking opposing sides in the conflict on the ground. In many instances, the CPI (M) also failed to check the actions of its enthusiastic cadres leading to some excesses. The political violence was connected to forestry in ways that I elaborate on in Chapter 4.

The second relevant point is that CPI (M), during these years was seeking ways to consolidate and expand its political base. Coalitional instability and the experience with the Maoists made the CPI (M) aware that it needed to be the major party of the Left. It sought to do this through a two-pronged strategy—mobilizing the masses from below and building grassroots political organization, and absorbing the bureaucracy into its fold, thus reducing its tendency to be an “agent of class repression” (Kohli 1991, :277). Faced with the insurgency from the Maoists the CPI (M) had been forced to itself engage in radical mass movements and increase its coalition base in rural areas. Thus, during the two periods of United Front rule, the CPI (M)’s role was largely revolutionary—it saw itself as working to bring together the peasants and working classes. In this period, the CPI (M) along with other political parties, mobilized rural people through slogans of “land to the tiller” and by extension the forests to the people who depended upon them. As we shall see later, such increasing awareness was to play a part in the story of forest policy in the state (see Chapter 3).

Simultaneously, the CPI (M) realized that in order to achieve its aims, it needed the support of the bureaucracy. Consequently, during the first United Front rule, the CPI (M) sought to neutralize the tendency of the state to be repressive by gaining control over the ministries of Home (including the Police Department), land and land revenue and labor. The police was repeatedly told not to interfere in “class struggles” consisting of land grabbing and violence against large landlords.¹⁶ The curbing of police naturally increased the violence in the state and this period was one of a crisis. At the same time as seeking control over key ministries, the CPI (M) sought the support of key public sector unions. The capture of the government employee unions was a smart move, as it effectively brought the implementation machinery under its control. The Forest Department was no exception to this trend and as we shall see later, by 1977, almost 95% of the front-line employees of the Forest Department were members of the CPI (M) connected union (See chapter 4).

The third point of interest is the post 1977 reformist turn of the CPI (M). After coming to power with a solid majority in 1977, the CPI (M) dominated Left Front government has pursued a less radical, more reformist path. Several observers have noted that the land reforms program of the Left Front government that took first priority has achieved impressive results. Although there is some controversy over whether or not the actual achievements have been all that impressive (for critiques see Rudra (1985) and Mallick(1993)), the Left Front did attempt to implement its election promises. These reform attempts have been helped by the strong and disciplined party organization at the grassroots. Since coming to power in 1977, the CPI (M), has revived the

¹⁶ The police department faced high violence akin to that of the Forest Department during this period. In fact, the police workers struck work against the dangerous conditions of work they faced—on the one hand being told to turn a blind eye to the breaking of law and on the other hand needing to retain at least minimum order in the region.

three tier panchayat system in the state and given powers and resources to the panchayats including oversight of local developmental works. The elected members of the panchayats at each level, though officially not affiliated to any party, are often closely connected to the ruling Left Front coalition. This opening of space of representative politics from below has led to a growing confidence among the rural masses, especially in CPI (M) dominated regions, both in the panchayat and the political party in power, a facet that also impacts on the JFM case.

The dominance of the CPI (M) in state politics since 1977 has shaped the terrain of local politics and policymaking in significant ways. The strong (almost undisputed presence) of the CPI (M) in most rural areas has meant in practice that all developmental work occurs through the knowledge and approval of the local party organization. As soon it came to power, the Left Front revived the panchayat system. The panchayat forms an important part of rural administration and has been given powers and responsibilities at three tiers—the Zilla Parishad (at the district level), Panchayat Samiti (at the block level) and the Gram Panchayat (at the level of a group of villages). These elected representatives oversee the work of the local administration including forestry (which was included in West Bengal in 1986). The point is that at the local level these are significant players well connected to different political parties and who have access to higher levels of political representation in the state. This allows them access to politician who head ministries to convey their needs or demands. Thus the local administration (unlike other Indian states till recently) is influenced by the local elected leaders. In part, this is the reason why the presence of NGOs in West Bengal is much smaller than would be expected by the strong and contentious politics in rural areas. NGOs in the forestry sector have been few and far between, as associational developmental work is channeled through the party organization. Some NGOs

suggest that NGO formed groups at the local level, if powerful are also seen as political rivals and discouraged. Within the CPI (M) there is a belief that the party is the appropriate channel for demanding and organizing development work.

Third, the coming of power of the Left Front created a tension between the state and the Center. The CPI (M), aware that the Center would try to curb its power at the state level, made strong demands for greater autonomy to the states. Naturally, the center was not willing to accede to these demands. In practice this became an issue of budget allocations to the state. The Left Front made the center the scapegoat for its problems in the state and has consistently argued that the Center has not been forthcoming in its obligations to the state. The Left Front uses these tensions as an explanation for why on the one hand developmental programs are stalled, and on the other hand government employees are not given the benefits they deserve.

Fourth, there has been a growing awareness of the need to placate the rural poor. The land reforms were successful, but were also a long time ago in public memory. The vested lands have already been redistributed and there is not much land left to distribute. The small loans available under the Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP) have been wrung dry—there are massive defaults among borrowers and no additional source of funds to continue offering subsidized loans to the rural poor. Under the climate of economic reforms and fiscal crisis the CPI (M) has been casting about for rural programs that would help retain the support of the rural masses. As I describe in Chapter 5, JFM appeared fortuitously at this moment.

B. The structure of forest administration

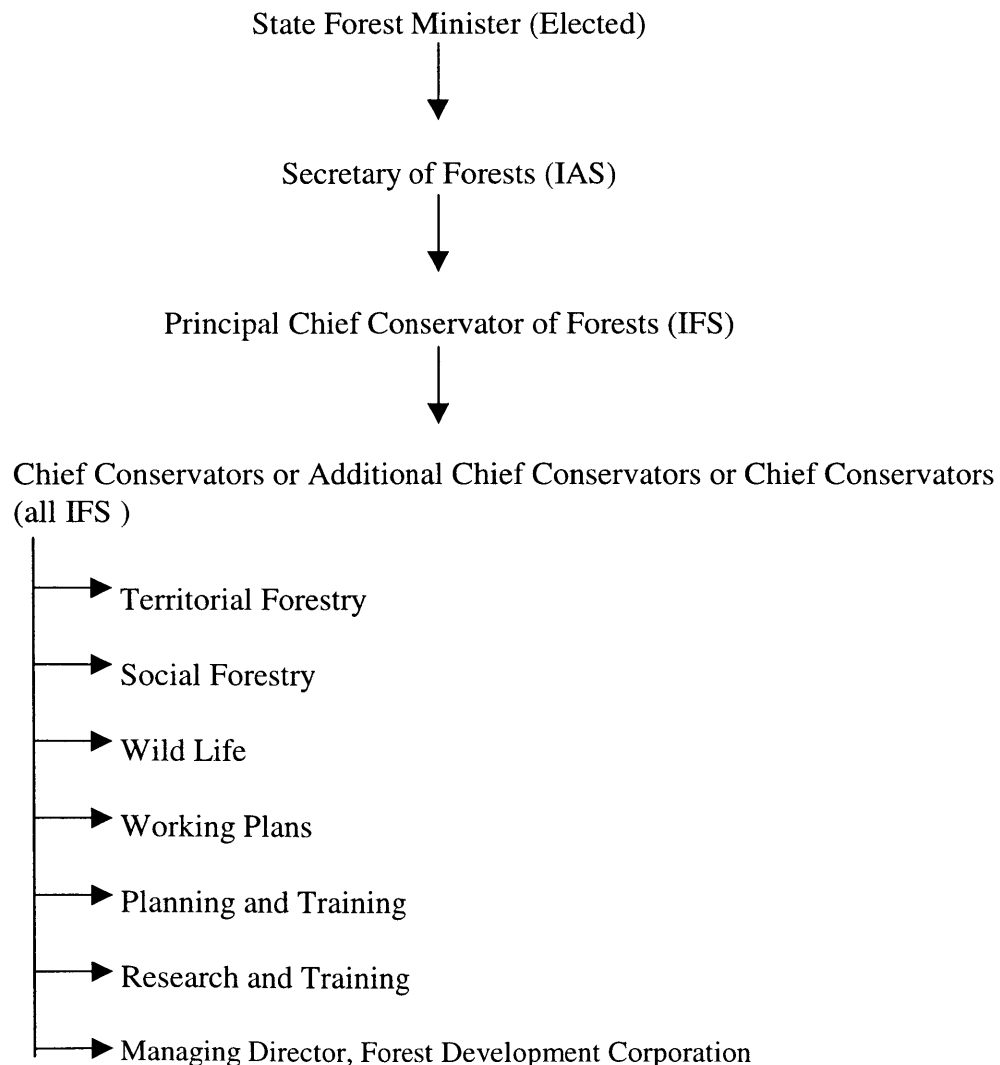
A brief description of the structure of forest administration in India is essential background for the discussion in the following chapters. The Forest Department is organized today, much as it was a hundred years ago. True the number of personnel has increased, the forest area under the control of the Forest Department has increased, additional layers of hierarchy have been added, but the core structure has remained the same till 1994 when there was a reorganization of the West Bengal Forest Department. The number of personnel in the Forest Department in West Bengal have grown from 13 officers in the “superior establishment” and 250 in the “subordinate” staff in 1879 to 396 higher level officers (excluding clerical staff and others) and 4406 subordinate staff (Biswas 1987; WBFD 1995).

To understand how the Forest Department is organized in the states, it is necessary to describe three separate features. First, there is the territorial division of the forest land into smaller administrative units. Second, there are the three different services to which forest officers belong (the three services have separate entrance examinations, forest training schools and career tracks). Finally, one needs to describe how the department is functionally organized—how different services man the various territorial levels of the Forest Department as well as their roles and responsibilities. These three features are described below.

1. Territorial division. The smallest territorial division in the Forest Department is the beat. It consists of forest area anywhere between 3 to 25 sq. kilometers. The rationale behind the formation of a beat is not clear—since they vary in forest area covered, geographic size as well as population. Several beats form a range. Again, the size of ranges varies between 10 to 100 sq.

kilometers comprising of anything from 2 to 5 beats. Ranges are constantly being reorganized to include additional beats and drop others. Between two to five ranges form a division. Several divisions join to form a circle and there are several circles in a state. Apart from the system laid out above, till 1994, other kinds of forest functions such as research or social forestry also enjoyed control over some beats or ranges, although such special ranges were few. In West Bengal, there are 3 main circles. Joint Forest Management mainly emerged in the Western Circle that comprises of seven divisions. Under each division there are numerous ranges and beats.

Table 1.2 Functional Organization of the Forest Department



2. Personnel tracks. There are three main ways to enter the Forest Department at officer level staff. The first is through the Indian Forest Service (IFS), which one of the three All India Services (the other two are the prestigious Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and the Indian Police Service (IPS)). The All India services differ from the other services such as the Central Services or the State Services in that the members receive common training but then are assigned to different state cadres within which they remain for most of their service except for periods of deputation to the Center. The foresters in the Indian Forest Service receive two years training at the Indian Forest Institute in Dehradun. Their pay scales, promotion and performances are controlled by the Center. The second route to the FD, is through the West Bengal Forest Service (WBFS). Qualified applicants are selected through a state level examination and are sent for training to the eastern training school for one year. West Bengal Forest Service officers only serve within the state, in positions subordinate to the IFS officers. One third of the intake of the IFS can be through promotions from the WBFS. The members of the Indian Forest Service and the West Bengal Forest Service are Gazetted Officers (members whose name appears in the official gazette and whose position is akin to that of public notaries in the United States). The third group of foresters are those who have entered through a competitive exam held from time to time. They receive different levels of training depending upon the level they are required to work at and are collectively called foresters or Forest Officers. Usually, if qualified they receive training at the Ranger Training School at Kurseong (North Bengal). These officers receive training for six months and start work directly while on probation.

The above three groups of forest officers are part of the formal officer level rank. However, in addition, there are forest guards, van mazdoors (forest workers) who are hired from time to time and offered permanent posts according to what is sanctioned by the Forest Department. The Forest Officers (Beat and Range Officers) from the above three groups and the forest guards, and all other miscellaneous workers (excluding clerical and office staff) form part of the subordinate service with their union—the West Bengal Subordinate Forest Service Association (WBSFSA) (see Chapter 4).

3. Functional organization. Within these territorial and personnel building blocks, the Forest Department is organized in a typically bureaucratic and hierarchical fashion. At the top of the hierarchy is the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) who belongs to the Indian Forest Service and represents the Department in State level meetings. Above him, the secretary of forests is from the Indian Administrative Service (IAS). He is a generalist who has no special training in forestry. Below the Principal Chief Conservator are between five to seven Chief Conservators of Forests (CCF's), who either look after various Circles or specific functions such as Research and Training or social forestry. The next level of the hierarchy consists of the Conservators of Forests (CF's) who look assist the CCF's in their tasks. Thus far, most of the officials are top level officials in that they are based in the capital of the state and make periodic visits to the field.

The first level of officials who are involved in actual day to day management of the forests under their jurisdiction are the Divisional Forest Officers (DFOs). They live most commonly in the district headquarters and are in charge of all forestry related activities in their districts. In their

work, they are assisted by one or more Assistant Divisional Forest Officers (ADFOs). All officers above and including the rank of a Divisional Forest Officer come from the Indian Forest Service (IFS). The Assistant Divisional Forest Officers and Rangers typically come from the West Bengal Forest Service (WBFS).

Below the Assistant Divisional Forest Officers are the Rangers. The Rangers are in charge of Ranges or attached to Divisional or Central Offices and hold the rank of Forester (see above section on personnel). They look after all aspects of forestry in the Ranges and control the cash in the Divisions and Ranges. Thus they are in charge of the payroll of all the employees in their division, including temporary labor hired from the villages.

Finally there are the Beat Officers who are responsible for the Beats under them. They are the key personnel around which the actual work of forest management revolves. Whether a particular beat is well managed or poorly managed is dependent on them. Below the Beat Officers there are several forest guards and van mazdoors (forest laborers). The forest guards are responsible for daily protection rounds and other management tasks as may be required. The van mazdoors usually do manual labor as required in the forest areas. All permanent staff below and including the Range officers are considered to be part of the Subordinate Forest Service, in that they are not Gazetted Officers.

Table 1.3: Organizational Hierarchy of Territorial Forestry in the West Bengal Forest Department

Functional Organization	Location	Service
Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF)	Forest Directorate (Calcutta)	IFS
Chief Conservator of Forests	(Calcutta)	IFS
Conservator of Forests (CF) (for each circle)	(Calcutta)	IFS
Divisional Forest Officers	District Headquarters	IFS and WBFS
Assistance Divisional Forest Officers	District Headquarters	WBFS
Rangers	Ranges	WBSFS
Beat Officers	Beat Offices	WBSFS
Forest Guards		WBSFS
Van Mazdoors		WBSFS

There are several significant features of the structure of the Forest Administration for the JFM story. First, because the different levels of the forest service come into the department through different routes, horizontal bonds with members of the same service are stronger than vertical bonds in the regions. The system of frequent transfers of personnel (on average within two years) throughout the hierarchy reinforces this horizontal bonding. Second, the system has a strongly hierarchical structure with six levels between the lowest ranking officer (Beat Officer) and the highest one (PCCF). There is a wide gap between the Beat Officer and the officers in the cities that is both sociological and physical. Like other hierarchical administrative systems this means that information between the levels gets transformed in its journey. Moreover, information flows from the field to the office and orders flow from the head office to the field. Third, because the promotions and benefits of the members of the IFS are controlled by the center the IFS officers at the top are less responsive to contextual and political conditions in the

states than to the forestry establishment at the Center. Finally, another feature of importance that is not unique to Forest Administration but is true of most administration in India is that the administrative services predate the formation of the nation state and the institutionalization of democracy. Because of this history, these services are often powerful players in policy-making and not simply carrying out the policies of the elected leaders. Where the administration disagrees with the politicians, they have significant leeway to shift policies or distort implementation in the field.

C. The nature of *sal* forests

Another issue key to understanding JFM is the ecological nature of *sal* (*shorea robusta*) forests and their role in the life of villagers. This point about *sal* forests is key for understanding why it is that the JFM program could emerge informally without high resource investments in the Southwest region of West Bengal. *Sal* is a hardwood that regenerates easily through coppicing if the rootstock is retained. It is a relatively fast growing species that shows regeneration within five years and is ready to be harvested as poles in as little as ten years. There is however, some controversy about the appropriate rotational period for *sal* trees, a controversy that has some bearing on the problems faced in the implementation of JFM (Chaturvedi 1992; Rathore and Campbell 1995). Those opposing short rotation argue that such a system leads to ecological retrogression resulting in drier soils and fewer associated species. They also argue that the quality of timber produced through short rotation is poor and is of low value in the marketplace. Those favoring short rotation point out that the short rotation system is being practiced only after other management systems have been tried and failed. The incentives of getting a share of profits

could not be sustained over a longer rotational period.¹⁷ Despite the ongoing controversy, currently *sal* forests are being managed on short rotation of between ten and fifteen years a factor which has enabled JFM's success.

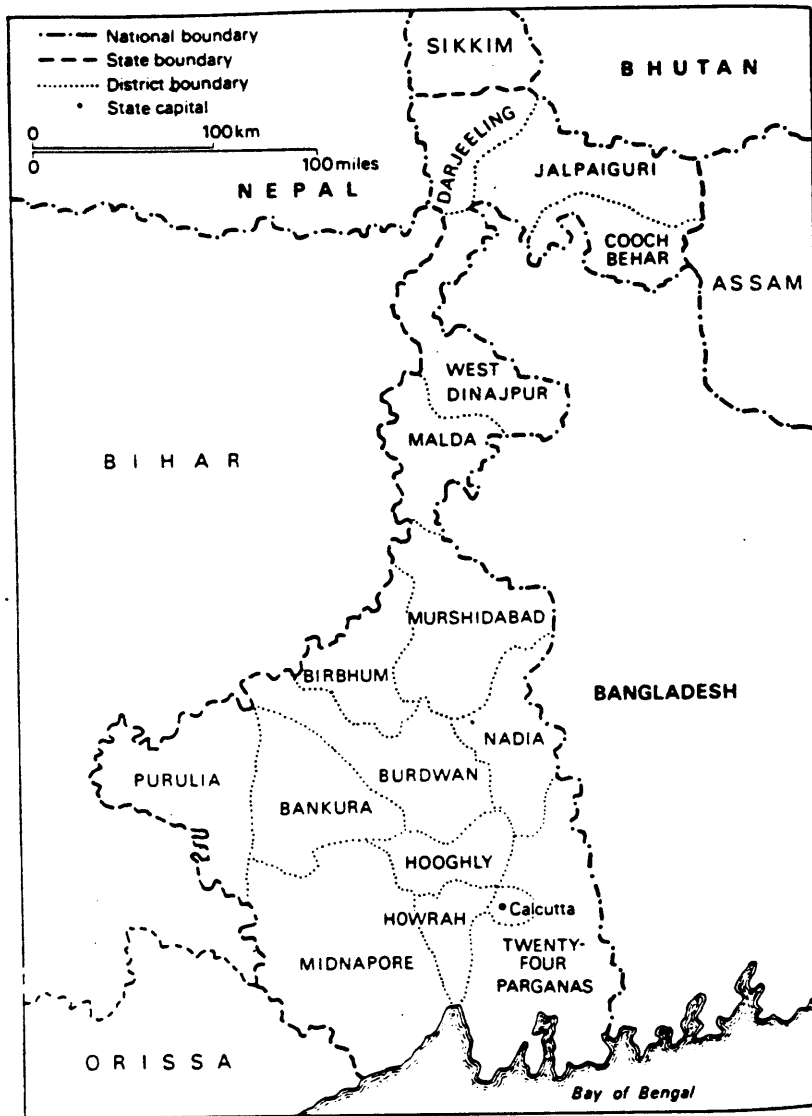
Sal dominated forests are also important for their biodiversity and as a part of the local economy. Dense *sal* forests support a variety of wildlife including the Bengal tiger and wild elephants. *Sal* forests harbor several associated species such as Peasal (*Pterocarpus marsupium*), Mahua (*Madhuca latifolia*), Kendu (*Schleichera oleosa*) among others. These species along with *sal* feature prominently in the local economy. It has been estimated that approximately thirty percent of the diet of tribal groups is derived from forest resources (Agarwal and Saigal 1996). *Sal* poles themselves are a good source of timber for construction, agricultural implements, railway sleepers and cheap furniture. The leaves of the *sal* tree are used for making disposable plates for use in the urban centers. A survey of nine villages in Midnapore, West Bengal showed that seventy-two percent of the households were engaged in *sal*-leaf plate making (Dutta and Adhikari 1991). The study found that a household could earn Rs. 13 per day producing 700-800 plates when the official wage rate was Rs. 28 per day. Further, there is a ready market for *sal* poles, as well as many of the related non-timber products such as *sal* seeds, bamboo mats, mahua

¹⁷ There is another technical controversy underlying these arguments. The *sal* forests of the Southwest have been found to be infected by fungi that cause active decay in the heartwood. Although the trees appear healthy, after twenty five years, there is a danger of heart-rot fungi that affects the heartwood rendering the timber valueless. Thus some would have it that coppicing is a poor practice and *sal* forests need to be regenerated through seedlings. However, seedling regeneration has had uncertain success under natural conditions and might not be able to cross the sapling threshold and sustain wood formation. Given these uncertainties in seedling regeneration supporters of short crop rotation argue that felling within the first fifteen years (before fungal decay sets in) is the best way of managing *sal* forests in the Southwest.

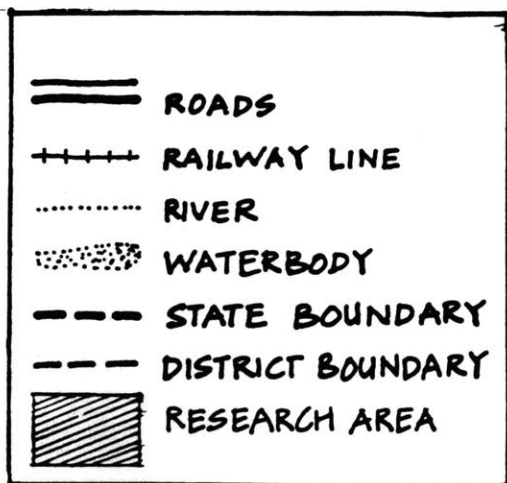
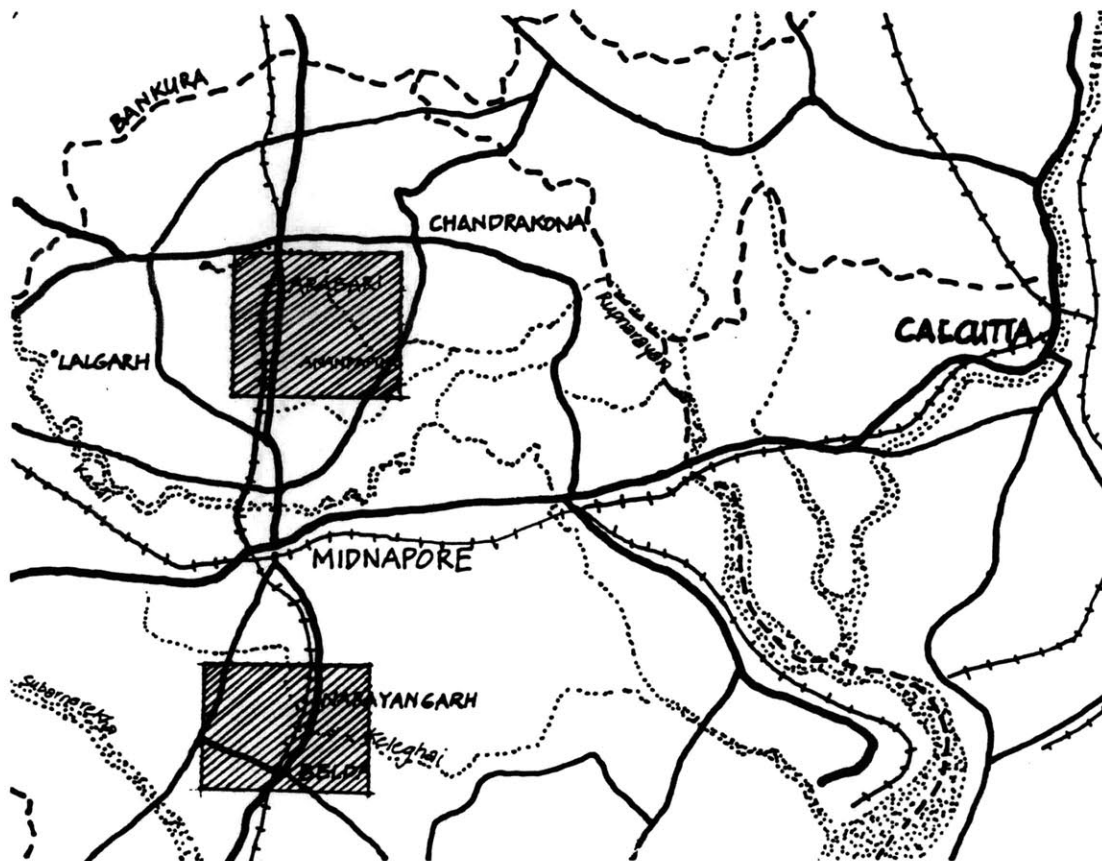
wine, and ayurvedic medicines.¹⁸ One study in Midnapore estimated that approximately twenty two percent of the income of tribal households and sixteen percent of the income of non-tribal households came from NTFPs (Malhotra, Deb et al. 1991). The low cost involved in regeneration, the short regeneration time and the numerous useful non-timber forest products available from the regenerated forests limit the burdens of protection and regeneration for villagers and enable them to engage in Joint Forest Management efforts.¹⁹

¹⁸ Some NTFPs such as kendu leaves and *sal* seeds are controlled by the state. The West Bengal Tribal Development Cooperative Corporation Ltd (WBTDC) has monopoly over their collection and sale and buys the collected products from the LAMPS. The experience with this approach is quite disappointing—LAMPS do not pay for the collected products on time, cannot absorb the total collection and are unable to manage the resources well (Saighal, Agarwal et al. 1996).

¹⁹ Contrast these characteristics with those of eucalyptus or akashmoni, the two trees of choice for the Forest Department's plantation activities. Although these species too provide timber for commercial use, they are not coppicing, do not produce any significant non-timber forest products (in fact, they have been favored precisely because they are non-browsable, low maintenance species) and are suspected of reducing ground-water and soil fertility (although this point is controversial).



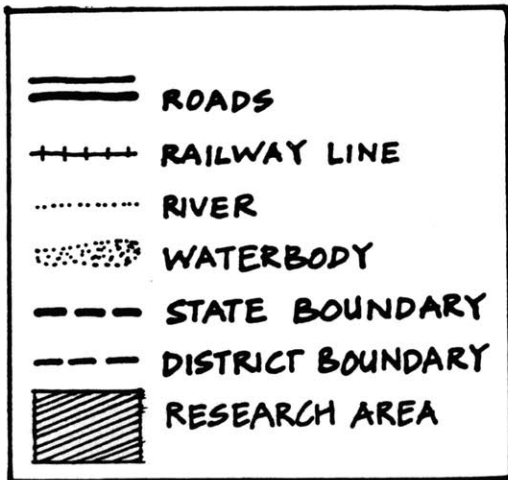
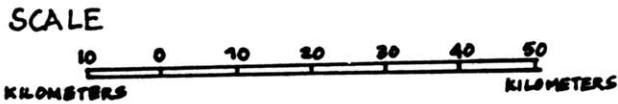
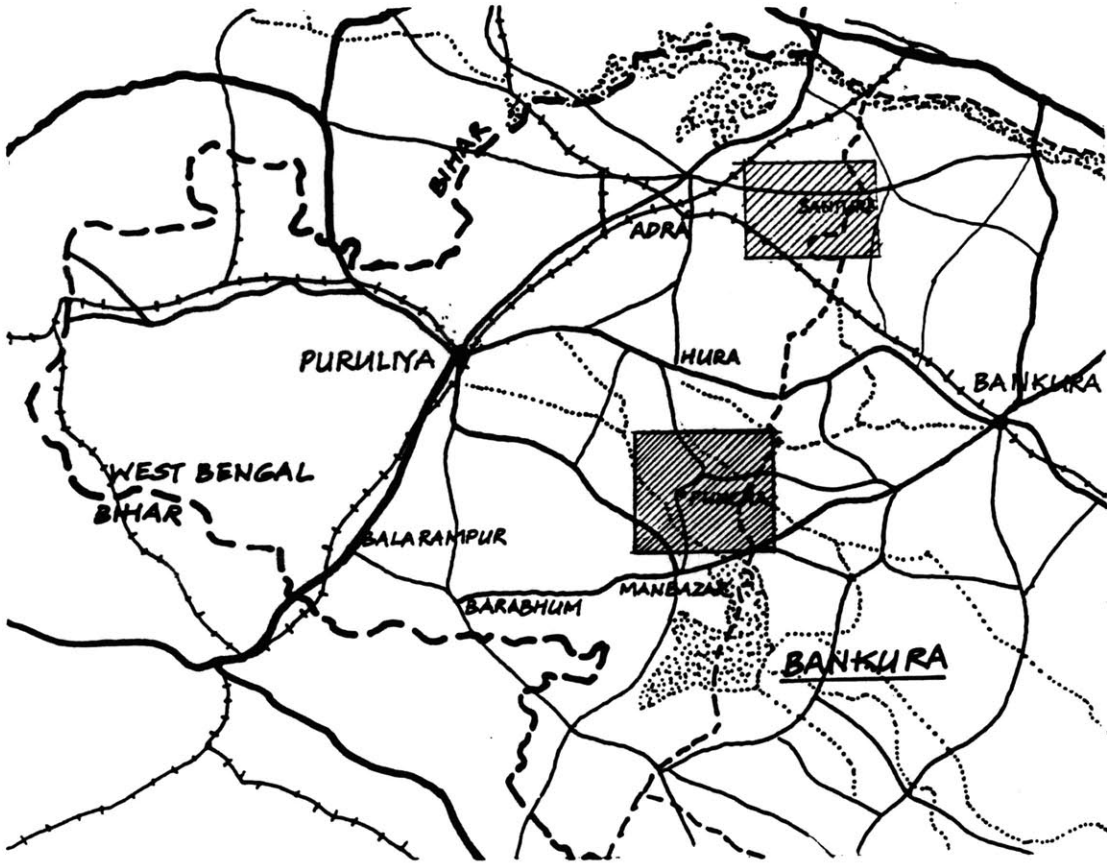
Map 1.1 Map of West Bengal showing district Boundaries



Map 1.2 Detail of Midnapore District

Godapiasal Range
 Bijuria
 Metal Sitarampur
 Teghari
 Dhakkata
 Harinamari
 Multaboni

Belda Range
 Dhanjhuri
 Sagarbhangha
 Harinakuri
 Binai
 Harinamari



Map 1.3 Detail of Purulia District

Hura Range

Raisa
 Karandih
 Dandudih
 Palsol
 Chattalapur
 Kundurka
 Rangameta

Kashipur Range

Jiatole
 Nimtikri
 Chatapathar
 Talberia

V. METHODOLOGY

1. The case

The choice of a single case for analysis invariably poses problems for generalization of the findings. The contribution of single cases to broader understandings depends on several factors including the degree to which theory has already been developed, the choice of case among others (Eckstein 1975; George 1979). In the case of radical policy reform such as the one I am examining, the number of cases available for study is limited, particularly when one wants to examine the origins of the innovative reform. Comparing the late adopting states with the original one in West Bengal might have had advantages—for example, one can answer the question of whether reform initiated by the bureaucracy is likely to be better implemented. Yet at the same time it cannot answer the question of why reform was initiated in the original case in the first place.

In such situations, where the number of cases are few, March's (1991) advice is to increase the richness of the single case through "thick description" or by viewing the case through different perspectives. Another approach to gaining insights from single cases is that of constructing alternative explanations (Allison 1971; Langley 1999). Langley has argued that using alternative explanations—"the alternate templates strategy"—that are not accurate by themselves but taken together provide to overall accuracy enable one to provide insights from a single rich case because the different explanations provide the base for the comparison needed. In this examination of the origins of forest policy reform in West Bengal I have taken this approach. The three narratives that I present cannot stand alone, they explain different parts of the JFM story and emphasize different actors. Taken together they help provide a more whole explanation

of the policy trajectory. In other words, examining the case from different perspectives provides a more accurate description.

In instances where scholars have used a multiple-account strategy in exploring events, the process has generally been deductive—i.e. the accounts draw on theory from outside the data (e.g. Allison 1971). Thus they gauge the extent to which different theories can explain most of the facts of the case at hand and look for a theory or combination of theories that best fits the case. In contrast, my three narratives of the origins and diffusion of JFM are inductive in that they are coherent accounts that participants themselves use to reconstruct events and attribute causality. In terms of theory building then, they avoid the problem of the deductive strategy, of the need to integrate different perspectives into a coherent whole. Rather, the inductive approach to alternative explanations allows one to generalize somewhat differently by casting the different perspectives against the literatures they speak to—an approach I have followed in this case.

2. Field Research

I carried out field work in India for fourteen months between September 1995 and July 1997. The core arguments presented here emerged out of open-ended interviews with foresters and FPC members in West Bengal, and an extensive review of the literature on JFM in India. Initially, I was interested in two aspects of JFM—origins and diffusion. To understand the nature of the origins of JFM, I conducted extensive interviews with seven mid-level reformist foresters who were instrumental in the early experiments or supported JFM from within the state. These interviews were semi-structured, and since almost all of these officers have since retired from the Forest Department, they were able to discuss their experiences freely. To trace the processes

through which diffusion took place and to understand how and why villagers began informal protection groups, I conducted mini-case studies in four regions of south-west Bengal. Of these, two areas were near the two pilot projects of Karandih and Arabari (each covering five FPCs besides the original pilots). The other two areas were in a different part of the district at a distance from the early experiments (See Map 1.2 for the case areas). In Arabari, although I visited Arabari and spoke to some villagers, during the period of my fieldwork, the situation in Arabari was quite tense I therefore did not conduct field interviews in Arabari with the project communities. In my reconstruction of the case, I have relied on my interviews with Dr. Banerjee, two Rangers who were posted at Arabari at the time the project was started, and the present Range and Beat Officers. For the community perspective on Arabari, I relied on Chatterji's detailed account of the Socio-Economic Project (Chatterji 1996). In Karandih, I was able to conduct interviews with the villagers who were involved in the early protection efforts.²⁰ My interviews were open-ended and most were conducted in the absence of Forest Department personnel.

The literature on JFM is dominated by anthropological work deeply rooted in single villages, for example see Chatterji (1996), Sivaramakrishnan (1996) etc. Such studies have enriched our understanding of the historical relationship between forest dwellers and forest policy, and more recently of how JFM operates on the ground. The aim of my work was not to replicate such studies in another village or group of villages. Rather, the aim was to find a way of synthesizing the experience of the region and to gauge the extent to which empirical evidence substantiated

²⁰ Nukul Mahato, a schoolteacher in Karandih and a key figure in the early informal protection efforts was seriously ill during my first visit to the village and died shortly thereafter.

the community oriented account. Thus, my objective was to collect a diversity of experiences about origins of informal groups from field work as well as from the secondary literature to understand the larger picture of community involvement with JFM.

In addition, I was interested in understanding the attitudes of front-line foresters to JFM, and this entailed visiting a wider range of FPCs and Forest Beats. I interviewed several front-line workers in open-ended interviews that usually lasted between half an hour to two hours. In several cases, I shadowed workers in the course of their day patrolling forest areas, supervising work sites and managing paperwork. On occasion I stayed in the Forest Beat or Range offices. Informal conversations in the evenings with front-line forester's families also helped me understand the ways in which front-line workers relate to the villagers.

It was in the course of one such informal conversation early on, that a forester mentioned the role of the front-line worker's union in promoting JFM in the state. Subsequently, when it came up again in another informal conversation in a different part of the state, I decided to investigate the issue further. Unearthing the details of the story of the union proved difficult. When the Association moved its offices into a new building, it destroyed all its old records in the belief that they were no longer of use. Almost all the then officeholders had retired and were difficult to trace. Some of the key players had died. I interviewed as many past functionaries of the Association as I could locate, in addition to interviewing current office-holders. The core arguments emerged from these interviews supplemented by articles from the past issues of the Association's magazine and old documents and newspaper accounts that I was able to retrieve.

I relied on several sources of information to substantiate the various accounts. First, I reviewed the extensive gray and published literature on JFM and forest policy in India. I carried out interviews with local and state level politicians, administrators and NGO personnel who were involved with the adoption and implementation of JFM in West Bengal. A second group of interviews at the national level included bureaucrats and NGO activists who have been active in JFM at throughout India. In addition, I carried out a short survey of 24 senior forest officers throughout India to understand attitudes to JFM.

During the research, I was affiliated with the Institute of Economic Growth in New Delhi, where I had an opportunity to present an early version of these arguments. In Calcutta, I kept close contact with researchers at the Institute for Biosocial Research and Development—the organization that has done the most research on JFM in West Bengal to date. Thus I was able to interact with several researchers working on issues surrounding JFM, not only in West Bengal, but also in other states.

V. THE ORGANIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION

To present the arguments made above, I have organized the material into four chapters that form the body of the work, this introduction and a conclusion. Following this introductory chapter, the next chapter provides the historical context of forest policy in India. The aims of this chapter are threefold--first, to sketch briefly the history of national forest policy in India from 1864 (when the Forest Department was formed) to the passing of the Joint Forest Management order in 1990 to emphasize that Joint Forest Management is indeed a radical change from the previous policies. Second, responding to the recent literature on forest policy history that emphasizes the opposition

of state and society, I will argue that Joint Forest Management follows a history of policy debates within the forestry establishment. Simultaneously I highlight some of the different interests that have impinged on forest policy, often cutting across the state-society divide.

The next three chapters (III, IV and V) present the core empirical material from West Bengal.

After briefly reviewing the terrain of forests and forestry in West Bengal, in Chapter III, I examine the two different explanations of the emergence of Joint Forest Management in West Bengal. The experimental pilot project at Arabari is the centerpiece of the official account of the origins of JFM. I elaborate the official version drawing upon interviews with senior forest officers and some official documents. Following the official account, I lay out what I call the spontaneous community management account of the emergence of JFM. I draw on fieldwork in FPCs to highlight points of contradiction and support for the account. This chapter concludes by highlighting how these accounts are partial and even misleading in their understandings of the origins of JFM. Chapter IV forms the core of the dissertation. In it I offer an additional explanation of the emergence of JFM in West Bengal—the support of the front-line workers and their union. It examines the actions of the union in supporting a people oriented policy prior to JFM, and the reasons for its policy influence. In it I argue that the reason for front-line support of the policy was because of their work situation—it was getting more difficult to work in the conditions of danger that characterized the Southwest in the seventies and eighties. The union served to channel this discontent into the policy making arena. In Chapter V, I finally round out the JFM story by examining the role of other actors—namely NGOs and international organizations—that have played a part in getting JFM adopted. I end this chapter by returning to events at the national level—the debates surrounding JFM since the national JFM Resolution,

that bear on whether JFM is likely to be sustained first in West Bengal and more widely in other states who were later adopters. This will help illuminate the role of social movements and international pressures that have created an environment supportive of participatory initiatives in many sectors and highlight some of the challenges that JFM faces in the years ahead. In the final chapter I conclude by summarizing my arguments and the main theoretical and policy implications of the analysis and point to directions for further research.

Chapter 2

FOREST POLICY AND THE STATE

I. Introduction

That Joint Forest Management is a departure from previous systems of forest management can only be evident through an examination of the history of previous approaches to forest management. My discussion of these past approaches largely focuses on policy changes at the Center because forest policy in the States has largely followed the line set by the Center, despite forestry being a State subject till 1976.¹ After 1976, when the Central government put forestry on the concurrent list (giving both the Center and the States jurisdiction over forestry), Central policy has dominated the forestry sector.²

In this chapter, I attempt to locate Joint Forest Management in the larger history of forest policy and legislation in India with the aim of setting the stage for the chapters that follow. Such a task is both made more formidable, as well as facilitated by the burgeoning literature on forest policy in India since the mid-1970s. While earlier literature mainly presented the official perspective on forests and forest policy, the more recent literature attempts to understand the influence of

¹ In India various sectors are divided into three types—state subjects, central subjects and concurrent subjects. The states largely have jurisdiction over state subjects, the center exclusively over central subjects and both the center and the states have the rights to legislate on concurrent subjects. Forestry was a state subject till 1976 when it was moved to the concurrent list.

² Till 1935, under British rule, forestry was a central subject. Soon thereafter, the British Administration felt that since forests are geographically bounded, forest management would be better handled by the states, with the center setting the broad direction within which individual states could form their own policies. Thus in 1935 the responsibility for forests was given over to the States. After independence in 1947, forestry continued to be a state subject till 1976, when the Central government placed it on the concurrent list (where both the Center and the States had jurisdiction).

forest policies on rural, forest dependent populations.³ Characteristic of this new literature, which attempts to portray the negative effects of environmental change for local people, is a critique of the Indian state (Fernandes 1983; Guha 1989; Shiva 1991; Gadgil and Guha 1992). The argument these scholars make is that post-independence forest policy has continued the exploitative practices of the colonial period resulting in technocratic interventions that ignore the needs of marginalised groups such as tribals, forest dwellers and rural women. Although they differ in various ways, these scholars agree on several common features: that forest policy has been production and revenue oriented rather than bio-diversity and conservation oriented; that it has emphasized timber rather than non-timber forest products (NTFPs); that it has favored industry and urban users over the rural population; that it has been unable to contain the degradation of natural forests; that it has focused on mono-cultural plantations rather than mixed forests; that it has continued the hierarchical and distant forms of administration installed by the British; and finally, that its scientific base is imported and ignores indigenous knowledge for appropriate management techniques. These critiques have focussed on both, the existing laws and policies as well as the ways in which they have been implemented. Simultaneously, these writers draw attention to the role that rural populations have played in resisting these external impositions. They highlight people's struggles attempting to protect the local ecology and provide for their subsistence needs. They locate environmental movements such as Chipko in the larger history of peasant struggles against state control of forests (Guha 1989).

In sum, the paradigm these writers portray is one of an overbearing state interested in forests for their revenue raising potential, pitted against villagers who depend upon the forests for

³ Some of the colonial perspectives on forest policy include Stebbing (1919, 1923) and Brandis (1897). For post independence, official views on forest policy see GOI (1955, 1976, 1985).

subsistence. The view of politics implicit in this paradigm is dichotomous and conflictual.⁴ It is also partial in normative and substantive ways. Normatively, these scholars celebrate civil society and have faith in its ability to manage resources better than the state. Guha, for example has a political agenda as well as a scholarly one—to point to the villains of the story, seek redress for the wrongs committed by the state, and to advocate policy change in favor of villagers (Guha 1989). Substantively, these scholars focus on people's struggles to support their arguments, without paying much attention to the dynamics that occur within the state (Fernandes, Menon et al. 1988; Guha 1989; Poffenberger and McGean 1996).

There are reasons to believe however, that this new literature and the underlying paradigm offers only a partial view. First, while rich in empirical material on ecological struggles, it presents a limited view of reality about the state. The state, especially the colonial state, is viewed as monolithic and omnipresent. There is an assumption that the state has been able to implement its policies uniformly and without opposition—the issue of whether and how policies are put into practice is not problematized. Furthermore, there is no attempt to explain regional differences in outcomes that would help test the hypotheses asserted above. Related, the underlying assumption of the state as autonomous from society (or at least autonomous as far as being able to impose production and revenue interests on forest policy) is not explored. These scholars also ignore the institutional constraints on the state due to global economic and political processes such as the energy crisis, that influence its stance on resource management.

⁴ I use paradigm here in the way suggested by Kuhn, where paradigms mix assumptions about fact with values, assumptions about what is problematic etc. See Kuhn (1970)

Second, the paradigm is of limited use in drawing practical policy prescriptions. The most extreme call of some of these writers is for the state to withdraw from natural resource management and the advocacy of community control as a sustainable alternative to state management (Mies and Shiva 1993). Others are more ambivalent and recognize that the changed context precludes going back to pre-colonial forms of resource management based on subsistence ethics (Gadgil and Guha 1994). They do decry the inefficiencies of central planning and technical solutions to these problems, but suggest that the state promote high-cost energy intensive technology and increase the job opportunities in these forest-dependent regions. That the very state that has been portrayed as a powerful predatory monolith thriving on degrading natural resources is being called on to undertake these reforms seems ironical. Furthermore, given the state's poor record in implementing pro-poor policies, there is little reason to believe that these alternative policies would be implemented successfully.

Finally, this new literature is particularly problematic if one is trying to understand the processes and conditions under which policy change might occur. Policy reform favoring forest dependent populations can only come about in this paradigm through sustained grassroots environmental movements. Yet, such a view obscures other processes that also contribute to policy change. Take the case of Joint Forest Management itself for example. If one accepts the paradigmatic account of interventions in resource management as state vs. people then one sees the emergence of Joint Forest Management in one of two ways. For some, Joint Forest Management is a sea change in the approach to forest management that seems to have come out of the blue (Arora and Khare 1994). For others, it is the successful outcome of years of peasant struggles against the state (Poffenberger 1996). What both these views miss, I believe, is that the origins of the new

JFM resolution also lie in the struggles and debates around forest policy that have occurred within the state. This point is particularly important in understanding policy reform—for differences within the state enable alliances across state-society lines. Progressive groups and actors within the state can create opportunities for change as has been argued in several studies of policy reform (Ascher 1983; Fox 1993).

Some recent writings have begun to challenge this new literature. A few scholars are drawing attention to additional factors to understand the history of state intervention in forestry (Pathak 1994; Vira 1995; Rangan 1997). For example, Rangan (1997) draws attention to the way in which changes in the larger economic and political processes create competing demands on state institutions that shape interventions in resource management. Dividing recent Indian history into broad economic-political phases, she links them with changes in forest policy. She shows that conflicts, negotiations and disputes are characteristic of such processes and impact outcomes. Others are pointing out that the paradigm's assumptions about homogenous, conservation-oriented forest dwelling communities and their capacities forest management are problematic (Nadkarni 1989; Corbridge and Jewitt 1997).

In keeping with and drawing from this literature, in this chapter I attempt to present the history of forest policy in India as a contested one, both between the state and rural populations, as well as

within the state.⁵ These conflicts and contestations occur in different institutional settings, as well as around various interests in forestry. Through such a portrayal I hope to achieve three aims. First, I hope to set the factual stage on the history of forest policy for the chapters that follow by showing how Joint Forest Management is different from previous approaches to forest management. Second, I hope to highlight the various interests that have played a part in supporting the new participatory approach. Finally, I intend to argue that Joint Forest Management follows a history of policy debates within the state about what the form and content of forest policy should be.⁶ Thus I argue that JFM is not a complete departure from previous thinking, neither only an example of success of people's struggles. This point is illustrated again in the chapters that follow on the empirical material from West Bengal.

The evolution of forest policy that is described in this chapter has occurred in the context of changes in two dimensions. The first change is demographic. Population growth has led to a decrease in the forest land-to-people ratio. Simultaneously, forest area has reduced—either through deliberate conversion to agriculture or other non-forest uses, or through gradual degradation, overfelling and lack of regenerative practices (See Table 2.7). As a result the pressure from subsistence use of forests has increased. This pressure has been further affected

⁵ Throughout this dissertation, I use policy to suggest consistent lines of action pursued through states. Thus Policy documents as well as Legislation would constitute policy in the sense I mean it. In India, officially, Forest Policies are suggested guidelines for forest management and do not have legal underpinnings. Legislation in the form of various Forestry Acts in contrast, has legal authority and the government can be held accountable to implement the legislation through the judicial system. To avoid confusion, I will capitalize “Policy” when I refer to the official interpretation, or when speaking of specific Policy documents. Thus, from the point of view of state foresters it might not seem anachronous that for the most part the law that governs forestry today is the Indian Forest Act of 1928 that was passed by the British. From the point of view of forest dwellers however, this is significant because it defines rights and privileges for access to forests. As a strong advocate of revising forest laws states—activists should focus on the revision of forest laws rather than policy, for that is where the potential for real reform lies (Singh in Madsen 1995).

by a parallel increase in the value of timber—because of relative scarcity as well as the increased importance of forestry revenues for States. These changes circumscribe the state’s approach to forest management.

The second change relates to the overall pattern of Indian politics and policy-making. From the exclusionary British colonial state, post-independence politics has been characterized by the gradual incorporation of numerous “weaker” groups. Consequently, policy making has shifted from being mainly intra-state and elite driven to being more “democratic.” Further, with the growing number of activists, organizations and NGOs keeping an eye on governmental activities, policymakers are consulting such organizations prior to policy-making to garner their views. In addition, the power of international environmental concerns, and the ascendance of environmental issues in international donor agendas has brought an international dimension to bear on policymaking.

This leads us to the issue how formal policies relate to implementation on the ground.⁷ Policies are often ambiguous statements that do not recognize the implicit contradictions within their recommendations and rarely do they prioritize the different objectives of policy. Saxena (1995) argues that Forest Policy in general has had limited implementation because (a) Policy is non-statutory, advisory and not backed up by law; (b) the actual implementation is under the control of the states, with different priorities; (c) what gets implemented is what is in the budget and gets

⁶ For scholars of public policy this assertion might seem odd, for policy making centrally involves debates among policymakers with different views (for example, see Allison (1970) view of bureaucratic politics). However, I stress the differences within the state here because the literature on forest policy tends to assume homogenous states and societies with the conflicts occurring between them.

⁷ Saxena (1995) suggests that since the IFS is an All India Service and its service conditions are controlled by the Center, National Policy Proclamations carry much weight.

funded and finally (d) the bureaucracy is powerful and filters what government demands—unless officers are convinced, policies are difficult to implement. However, as will be clear from the following discussion, changes in policies and reactions against draft policies are based on the implementation (or non-implementation) of previous policies. Thus while this chapter does not elaborate on differences in regional implementation of policy it is implicit in the debates around past policies and suggestions for future ones.

Table 2.1 Stages in the development of forest policy.

Debates	Subsistence vs. Revenue 1865-1947	Revenue vs. Production 1948-1980	Production vs. Conservation 1980--1988	Conservation vs. Subsistence 1988—present
Interests				
Revenue interests --British colonial state --States	Indian Forest Act 1965 Indian Forest Act 1878 Indian Forest Act 1927	1952 Forest Policy NCA Report 1976	Draft Forest Bill 1980	
Production Forestry --Department of Forests --State Forest Departments, --forest-based industry)		Forest Development Corporations formed	Draft Forest Policy 1983	
Conservation --Ministry of Environment --environmental NGOs			1980 Ministry of Environment formed 1980 Forest Conservation Act	
Subsistence --Advisory Committees on Tribals --rural development NGOs	Brandis' proposal for community forestry	1973-74 Energy crisis Advisory Committees advocate for tribals	Social Forestry Activism against Draft Forest Bill	JFM Resolution 1991

I divide the chapter into five issue based sections, that are in more or less chronological order. In the second section that follows this introduction, I present a quick sketch of the history of forest policy under colonial rule. In particular I draw attention to the debates that surrounded the Forest Policy of 1868 that revolved around subsistence vs. revenue considerations. I also present

the highlights of the Forest Act of 1927, because it is this act that provides the legal basis for forestry today.

In the remaining sections, I shift to the post-independent period. In the third section, I show how between 1952 and 1980, forest policy continued to draw inspiration from the British and focus on production and industrial development. A discussion of the Forest Policy of 1952 and the subsequent differences between the National Commission on Agriculture (NCA) and the forestry establishment at the Center (national level) illustrate these issues. This period ends with production dominating forest policy. The fourth section covers the period between 1980 and 1988 and deals with the split of interests between production and conservation. These were embodied in the differences of opinion between the environmentalists and the forestry establishment at the Center, and the Center and the States. In the fifth section, I bring out the different interests that have been instrumental in shaping the forest policy of 1988 and the JFM resolution. As it shall be clear, the need for a participatory policy was being debated both within the state and outside for a while previous to its embodiment in the Forest Policy of 1988. I end the chapter with some concluding remarks.

II. SUBSISTENCE VS. REVENUE: THE COLONIAL PERIOD

A. Early History

Prior to the arrival of the British, India's forests were nominally under the control of the regional rulers. The rulers reserved a part of the forests for sports like hunting and fishing. In the remainder, the local population was allowed to use the forests to meet their fuelwood and small timber needs for agriculture and domestic uses. Such practices, most observers agree, were

sustainable due to the limited population base and continued unhindered till the period of British rule. Some scholars have portrayed the pre-British period as one of harmony between man and nature illustrating the environmental awareness of the population and the practice of sustainable extraction (Shiva 1991; Gadgil and Guha 1992). Others question this depiction of traditional practices for not being based on evidence and contradicted by how people view forests through practices and folk-tales (Nadkarni 1989; Freeman 1998). I flag the controversy here, and will return to it later, for it is important in understanding the different perceptions of JFM in later chapters.

Initially, the British saw forests as an obstruction as they were not part of the revenue yielding agricultural tracts (Guha 1983:1883). Consequently, they were keen to convert forest lands into taxable agricultural holdings (Stebbing 1919,:61-62). As a result, the British encouraged indiscriminate cutting in the period between 1770 to 1858.⁸ Only around the mid-nineteenth century did the British attitude towards forestry change.⁹ Two related factors contributed to the change—(a) the need for political control over forested areas, and (b) the increasing importance timber as a source of revenue. The Mutiny of 1857 alerted the British to the importance of quick communication between regions for political control.¹⁰ Consequently, the colonial administration expanded the railways rapidly through forested areas to consolidate control over land (as opposed to the earlier sea-supremacy). The new railways and roads in forested areas

⁸ The East India Company's sole interest was in utilizing the forests to provide adequate teak for ship-building.

⁹ Some scholars have critiqued forest policy histories that treat the British period as uniform (Rangan 1997). Rangan argues that at least two periods can be distinguished—pre 1858 when the East India Company controlled the subcontinent and post 1858, when the rule of the Crown was imposed on India. In the latter period, she suggests separating out the period between 1858 and 1912 as after this period, the Government of India was autonomous from Britain.

made it possible to exploit timber (including the timber needed for railways) more efficiently. The ability to transport logs due to the expanded road and railway network also led to a realization of the market value of timber. Moreover, the financial crisis that followed the Mutiny of 1857 led to pressures to generate revenue (Guha 1990). Revenue from forests, especially hardwoods such as teak, became an important factor in decisions about forest management (Taylor 1978).

At the same time, many individuals connected to the colonial administration expressed concern about the future of the forests and their conservation (Taylor 1978). These conservationists made attempts to assess forest resources, prepare management schemes and promote conservancy. As a result of these efforts, Lord Dalhousie, then Governor General of India, who was interested administrative reforms, established the Forest Department in 1864. Subsequently the colonial administration created the Indian Forest Service (IFS) in 1865 setting up a formalized structure for the selection and training of foresters.

Soon thereafter, in 1865, the colonial administration passed the first Indian Forest Act. For the first time it asserted monopoly rights of the colonial state on the forests. The dual concerns of the Forest Department—of revenue raising and conservation—were reflected in the Act.

Revenue considerations dominated possibly because most of the forested lands were under the control of the Revenue Department (the Revenue Department was responsible for the collection of land revenues under the British). Despite its revenue orientation, the Act of 1865 did

¹⁰ In the Mutiny of 1857, Indian soldiers in a large section of the Bengal Army revolted when asked to use animal grease to smear paper cartridges that had to be bitten by the soldiers. While it began small, the mutiny soon developed into a widespread movement of the agrarian and military revolt. Many considered this the beginning of India's struggle for independence.

recognize traditional community rights over forests—it stated that the Act’s coverage to forest lands “shall not abridge or affect any existing rights of individuals or communities” (Section II Forest Act of 1865).

B. The Indian Forest Act, 1878

In the next decade, the relationship between agriculture, rural people and forestry was the focus of a hotly contested debate within the Forest Department.¹¹ The need for a revision of the 1865 Act grew out of a frustration with its inability to deal adequately with the significant question of what to do about the communities that lived in and around the forests. As far back as 1862, a majority of British foresters had contrasted “scientific” forestry with customary usage by communities. Customary use was viewed as unsustainable—erratic, unsystematic and destructive. In contrast, a few foresters, notably Deitrich Brandis, then Inspector General of Forests (IGF), believed that communities had a role to play in the management of state forest lands. State forestry, for Brandis, operated in an already existing system of local control and use.¹²

In his fascinating account of this debate between 1868 and 1878, Guha traces three main views that emerged around the issue: the annexationists—led by Baden Powell, who advocated total state control; the populists—who supported total community control; and finally the moderates, led by Brandis, who suggested restricted state control combined with some community control (Guha 1996).

¹¹ I draw heavily on Guha (1996) in my discussion of this debate.

At one extreme, the populists argued for recognition of the property rights of communities who used the forests. The populists in particular argued that “all instances of the use of the forest by the people should be taken as presumptive evidence of property therein” (Brandis quoted in Guha 1990). It is important to note that their arguments were made not on moral or legal grounds, but precisely on the managerial grounds that the annexationists forwarded. The populists argued that—(a) communities had as great an incentive as the Forest Department to manage forests well, and besides, would incur the least cost in protection activities and, (b) if such a concession was not made, there would be minor insurgencies all around the country contesting the curtailing of customary rights. They also presented evidence to show that communities had successfully protected forests in some areas through traditional institutions.

At the other extreme, the annexationists called for complete state monopoly and curtailment of the rights of communities if they were inconsistent with overall policy. Led by Baden Powell, they drew upon the purported practices of the pre-British rulers to support their monopolistic claims. Since ancient rulers had been the nominal owners of forest lands—the British claimed to have inherited them upon conquest. At the same time, the British did recognize rights to private property by individuals. However, this right extended only to land that was “really and fairly” in possession, and to the British this meant settled cultivation. Thus they did not consider rights to extraction of forest produce and the practice of shifting cultivation characteristic of forest based communities as true rights.

¹² In a report to the commissioner of Mysore, he advocated that communities should be given the responsibility of managing forests (Guha 1996).

Treading between these two views, Brandis advocated a restricted takeover of the forests. He advocated three different classes of forest property—state forests, village forests, and private forests. State forests he thought would be ‘large and compact areas of valuable forests as can be obtained free of forest rights of persons’ (Brandis quoted in Guha 1996,:94). The forested areas that were interspersed with villages and that had villagers rights to them, were to be given over for community management. This he felt would be both fair and practical given the limited capacity of the Forest Department. Private forests would continue to be managed by their owners. This moderate view was circulated for comments in Mysore (Guha 1996).

Although several district officers in Mysore supported Brandis, others were openly in dissent. They argued that the proposal would result in a loss of state revenues. The villagers, they suggested were ignorant and wasteful, prone to treating the forest lands as open access. This would eventually lead to a tragedy of the commons. Instead, the Government of India suggested that individuals plant trees on their private lands and states open convenient depots for the sale of forest products to villagers. With this mix of legal and pragmatic arguments, the annexationists prevailed. Consequently Sir Baden Powell became the primary author of the Indian Forest Act of 1878.

The Indian Forest Act of 1878 divided the forest lands into four categories—reserved forests, protected forests, private forests and village forests (see Table 2.4). The best forests with the most commercial potential were marked as reserve forests; the rest were either protected, private or village forests depending upon tenure of land. Although the Act of 1878 established the principle of state sovereignty, the colonial state still had to resolve the question of the legal status

of forest-based communities. Towards this end, Baden-Powell made a distinction between *rights* and *privileges*—the forest-based communities were given the *privilege* of using the forest produce, and this *privilege* could be rescinded at the pleasure of the British Crown. In some rare cases, if extinguished these *privileges* might require some compensation. The procedures for ascertaining prior rights of communities were complex and unfriendly to peasants and tribals leading to the loss of rights to forests for many. Reserve forests were closed to villagers, with the exception of the “privilege” of extracting specified non-timber forest produce and watering cattle. In protected forests, they were allowed to extract fuelwood and other products (except for those expressly forbidden) for domestic purposes. Although village forests were demarcated to provide for villagers needs, they were limited area and quality and insufficient to provide for subsistence needs.

Table 2.2 Gross Revenue and Surplus of the Indian Forest Department, 1870-1924.*

Period	Gross Revenue (Rs. Million)	Surplus (Rs. million)
1870-74	5.6	30
1874-79	6.7	31
1879-84	8.8	36
1884-89	11.7	36
1889-94	15.9	46
1894-99	17.7	45
1899-04	19.7	43
1904-09	25.7	45
1909-14	29.6	45
1914-19	37.1	43
1919-24	55.2	34

*Source: (Ghate 1992, : 68).

The Act of 1878 governed Indian forests for the next five decades. Unsurprisingly, revenue concerns dominated forestry (see Table 2.2). Till the early twentieth century, because of the limited market for forest products, the forests were a limited source of revenue. As a result of

the small potential contribution of forest produce to revenue, agriculture was given priority over forestry in the Act of 1878. Thus, the Forest Policy of 1894 stated “wherever an effective demand for cultivable land exists and can only be supplied from forest areas, the land should ordinarily be relinquished without hesitation...even though that land may have been declared reserved forest under the (Forest) Act” (NCHSE 1987,:3). The reasoning was that cultivated areas were sources of revenue through taxation, unlike unexploited forest lands whose value was yet to be realized. .¹³ In fact, in 1886 the Forest Department was shifted to the Department of Revenue and Agriculture in most states, reinforcing its role in revenue generation.

C. The Indian Forest Act, 1927

After a period of fifty years, the Act of 1878 was replaced by the Indian Forest Act of 1927. The 1927Act, closely patterned after the Act of 1878, was aimed at streamlining the governance and management of the forested areas. The Act gave priority to production and revenue over the rights of forest dwellers and laid out procedures for dealing with the claims of forest dwellers. The original Act anticipated three kinds of claims from forest dwellers—claims of ownership (which meant settled cultivation); claims to forest produce (such as grass for cattle grazing) and claims of shifting cultivation. The Forest Department would investigate each of these claims and reject or admit them as prescribed by law. If no claims were made within the stipulated time period, then the claims were considered extinguished and the villagers had no rights to land or forest produce. In theory, the law set down what appeared to be fair procedure. In application however, many have pointed out that this system of classification and the complex rules introduced to control local access disenfranchised many tribal communities and led to the

¹³ Before World War II the market for timber was limited and the Forest Department could not fully exploit the resources under its control. Although the inter-war period had increased the demand for timber, it was not till the

degradation of the forested areas (Guha 1989; Shiva 1991). Villagers who might have otherwise been active in conservation lost interest as they were afraid that their protected areas would then be declared reserved forests under the new Act (Guha 1983).

What is peculiar about the Indian Forest Act of 1927, and in all the related acts or policy documents that follow is that no attempt is made to define “forest” or “forest land.” For the purposes of the Act and subsequent policies, all land that is under the jurisdiction of the Forest Department, whether or not it has forest cover, is deemed to be forest area. By itself this might not have been problematic, but for the fact that the Act also gives powers to the Forest Department to notify areas as reserve forest, protected forest and village forests, whether or not such areas have forest cover. These far reaching powers enabled the Forest Department to increase the effective area under its control and again reflected the important contribution of forests to revenue (See Table 2.3).

Table 2.3 Gross Revenue and Surplus of the Indian Forest Department, 1939-1944*

Period	Gross Revenue (Million Rs.)	Surplus (Million Rs.)
1939-40	32.0	7.5
1940-41	37.1	13.3
1941-42	46.2	19.4
1942-43	65.0	26.7
1943-44	101.5	44.4
1944-45	124.4	48.9

*Source: Guha, 1989:

Further, the distinctions between reserve forests, protected forests, village forests and private forests were continued in this Act.¹⁴ *Reserve* forests were forests reserved for environmental

growth of the paper and plywood industries that the demand required heavy exploitation of forests.

¹⁴ During the 1880s and 90s there was a concerted effort to demarcate and reserve forest lands with the greatest commercial potential.

reasons. Within reserve forests, timber was not felled for revenue purposes. Villagers were not allowed to take anything unless a concession for a particular product was explicitly granted to them. In *protected* forests the land was protected from being used for purposes other than forests. The timber in these was felled for revenue on a rotational basis—and the forested land was to be maintained as forested land in the long run. Villagers were allowed to extract forest produce from protected forests upon payment of a fee—they were allowed to take all products except those that were expressly forbidden (see Table 2.4).

Table 2.4 Categories of forests

Classification	Type of forest	Privileges of villagers
<i>Reserved Forests</i>	Dense forests reserved for conservation and production	No extraction apart from concessions granted for specific products
<i>Protected Forests</i>	Protected from conversion to other uses	Extraction of all products allowed except those explicitly prohibited
<i>Village Forests</i>	Village common lands	All products could be extracted by villagers
<i>Private Forests</i>	Privately owned forests	The rights and privileges of local communities depended up on the owners.

As is evident from these successive Acts, throughout the colonial period, revenue considerations dominated forest policy. In the process, the traditional rights of forest dwellers were slowly eroded.

III. FROM REVENUE TO PRODUCTION: EARLY POST INDEPENDENCE

India attained independence in 1947. Post-independence, all forest lands that were under British control came into the hands of the Government of India. Later, in the early fifties, most private forest lands were nationalized bringing the land area under the Forest Department’s control to

approximately twenty three percent of the total land mass of India (the total cultivated area is approximately forty six percent). Meanwhile, by 1950 the population of India had also increased by almost 40 percent of what it was in 1878. This brought increased pressures on all lands, including pressures to convert forest lands for agriculture and other developmental projects. Consequently, post-independence forest policy had to first establish the independent right of forests to land area, and then juggle the pressures on forests from various quarters.

A. The Indian Forest Policy, 1952

A remarkable feature of Post-independence Forest Policy and Law is its continuity with the British period.¹⁵ Thus forest policy upheld the fundamental notion that revenue generation and the satisfaction of the timber needs of industry was the first charge on forest produce. This emphasis on industry was fully in keeping with the development strategy of the political leaders, especially Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who envisioned Indian development being led by industrial growth.¹⁶ All national resources were directed towards this development strategy. The thrust towards rapid industrial development was reflected in the organizational structure at the time. Forest policy in practice continued to be subservient to the needs of industry and agriculture; till 1980 it was located within the Ministry of Agriculture.¹⁷ Naturally forest management was oriented towards revenue generation for development and colonial forest policies were well suited to this task.

¹⁵ The Indian Forest Act of 1927 that I discussed in the previous section, continues to form the legal basis for forest policy to date. A draft Forest Bill amending the 1927 Act was circulated in 1994. For a discussion on the new Act, see Vira (1995).

¹⁶ Environmentalists have argued that an alternative Gandhian approach to development would have been more sensitive to the needs of people as well as forests (Gadgil and Guha 1992). Yet many observers note that given the economic stagnation and high levels of poverty few politicians would have adopted the low levels of consumption and production implicit in Gandhian thought.

After Independence, policy-makers in government thought it prudent to first revise Forest Policy, and then the Forest Act—in order to first set the larger direction from which the revised Act would emerge.¹⁸ The discussions resulted in the Forest Policy of 1952, which was the first attempt to shape the post-independence approach to forests. The Policy sought to change the notion that agricultural uses must always be given preference over the preservation of forests. It emphasized that the “notion that forestry as such has no intrinsic right to land, but may be permitted on sufferance on residual land not required for any other purpose has to be combated” (GOI 1952). It stressed the various ways in which forests contributed to the national interest and aimed at putting thirty percent of the total geographic area of India under forests.

The National forest policy of 1952 sought to further limit the rights of communities to forest produce. Traditional rights and usufructs from earlier periods were converted to “concessions and privileges” that were reluctantly accepted, despite being, as the public officials thought, against the “national interest”. As an often quoted section of the Policy states,

“The accident of a village being situated close to a forest does not prejudice the right of the country as a whole to receive the benefits of a national asset... While, therefore, the needs of the local population must be met to a reasonable extent, national interests should not be sacrificed because they are not directly discernible, nor should the rights and interests of future generations be subordinated to the improvidence of the present generation” (GOI 1952).

Thus as Lindsay notes, rather than accepting that limiting access to forests had contributed to degradation, the state believed that the very privileges that had been granted to villagers were the cause of degradation (Lindsay 1994).

¹⁷ This situation is similar to the British period in which forests were indiscriminately exploited and agriculture promoted partly because forestry fell under the Revenue Department whose concern was primarily the increase of revenue.

During the late forties and fifties, deforestation had increased. Besides population pressures and poverty, there were several reasons for this increase. Forests earlier under the control of *zamindars* (Indian intermediaries for the British who were granted control over lands in exchange for collecting revenue) were nationalized in the 1950s. Many *zamindars* seeking to minimize their losses under nationalization, or to prevent nationalization undertook large scale felling of mature forests. At the same time during this period, state governments leased out millions of hectares of forests to industries for the supply of raw material at subsidized rates well below the market value on the pretext of encouraging industrialization. Not surprisingly these concessions resulted in heavy exploitation of forest lands, far in excess of their allotted quotas. Finally, the increased illegal exploitation of forest lands by contractors in collusion with Forest Department employees led to a loss of interest and alienation of people from forest lands as well. Some scholars argue that these feelings of detachment made people reluctant to re-establish traditional forms of management as they felt that the fruits of their effort would be reaped by others (Guha 1989).

The increased deforestation led policy-makers to rethink forest policy. From the late sixties to the mid-eighties three sets of ideological actors based in different institutions at the Center and the States fought for control over forest policy. The powerful National Commission on Agriculture (NCA) set up in 1970 held the view that forests should be managed chiefly for

¹⁸ Some have argued that the Forest Policy of 1952 was based heavily on Sir Herbert Howard's post war forest policy of 1944 that was never implemented (Taylor 1982).

production purposes and to support industry.¹⁹ The forestry establishment both at the Center and in the States felt that forests should be managed for production, but with some view of ecological considerations. The newly created Ministry of Environment held a strong conservationist view and advocated preserving the forests for environmental reasons. These ideological differences found expression in different institutional battles around forest policy within the state. Groups outside the state attempted to influence the course of these battles through activism and formation of alliances with sympathetic groups inside the state. The advocates of these differing conceptions of the role of forests in the development project within the state however agreed on one issue—that people were the main cause of continuing deforestation and stricter laws should be passed limiting access for people to state forests. These conflicts are discussed in the following sections.

B. The National Commission on Agriculture's Report, 1976

In 1970, the central government set up the National Commission on Agriculture to broadly examine the agricultural sector and make recommendations for modernization. The NCA turned out to be one of the strongest proponents of production forestry. In its fifteen part final report (Part IX dealt with issues related to forests) of 1976 it highlighted the importance of forests in economic development. While, agreeing that no felling should be permitted on reserve forests it suggested that the remaining forests should be managed for production purposes to “realize maximum productivity in the shortest possible time” (NCA 1976,: Vol. IX para 41.5.3). The

¹⁹ Commissions (and Committees) are governmental agencies created to perform particular functions either advising government on policy matters or investigating particular issues. Senior officers from within and outside the government are appointed to Commissions in order to provide a broad and thorough review of the issue at hand. Commissions have broader powers and generally deal with financial questions. Committees have narrower mandates (Rao 1985).

foremost charge on forest produce was to be revenue generation and the fulfillment of needs of forest-based industry.²⁰

The NCA report argued that people were responsible for the degradation of the forests because of the generous “rights and privileges” that had been granted to them earlier. For example, the report states:

“Free supply of forest produce to rural population (sic) and their rights and privileges have brought about destruction to the forests, so it is necessary to reverse the process. The rural people have not contributed much towards the maintenance and regeneration of the forests. Having overexploited the resources they cannot in all fairness expect somebody else will take the trouble of providing them with produce free of charge” (NCA 1976).

The NCA report set the tone of several policy documents that followed. The fifth Five Year Plan covering the years 1974-79 reflected the NCAs emphasis on production forestry. In order to make exploitation of forest resources more efficient, during the seventies, many states set up State Forest Corporations. By the late seventies, the balance within the state was clearly established in favor of production forestry over people’s needs. Following from the diagnosis of the problem as the thoughtless exploitation of forests by local people, the state sought to increase controls over forest land and protect the remaining forests through increased policing. The management implications of the view that people degraded forests was to increase forest land under non-browsable and non minor forest product yielding species. Even where the population was sparse, the prevailing policy was to plant such commercial species as teak, eucalyptus and bamboo in the hope of converting low value mixed forests into high value plantations (Saxena

²⁰ The emphasis on meeting industrial and developmental needs was quite strong. As one commentator writing in the Indian Forester noted:

and Gulati n.d.). The view that forests were a source of production and revenue was reflected in the fact that till the 1980s there were few resources reinvested in forestry (see Table 2.5). Not even one percent of the plan budget was devoted forestry (compared to twenty three percent to agriculture) even through twenty three percent of the land area was under the direct control of the Forest Department.

Table 2.5 Plan outlays in the forest sector 1951-97

Plan Period	Total Outlay	Forests	%
I (1951-56)	1960	7.64	0.39
II (1956-61)	4600	21.21	0.46
III (1961-66)	8576	45.85	0.53
AP (1966-69)	6625	41.93	0.63
IV (1969-74)	15778	84.42	0.54
V (1974-79)	40650	208.84	0.51
(1979-80)	12550	68.33	0.54
VI (1980-85)	97500	692.64	0.71
VII (1985-90)	180000	1859.10	1.03
VIII (1992-97)	434100	4081.87	0.94
TOTAL	802339	7111.83	0.89

Source: MEF, and Various Five year plans, Planning Commission

C. The Draft Forest Bill, 1981

The support of the NCA for production forestry was also evident in the Draft Forest Bill of 1981 that was circulated by the Ministry of Agriculture. The Draft Forest Bill of 1981 represented the first attempt since independence to amend the Act of 1927. The need for a uniform forest code for the country was urgent. Although some states had passed their own forest related Acts, these differed from state to state. Timber smugglers took advantage of these differences by operating at the borders of states. Another reason was that several national level issues (e.g., interstate-trade and commerce, standards for quality of goods, forest based industries, reclamation and

“There has been some thinking in the recent years that forests in India can be used as a vehicle for economic development... More importantly although the awareness regarding the importance of a shift from “conservation” to “production” oriented forestry or from a single objective to multiple objectives in forest management started in

redevelopment of interstate river valleys) had implications for forest management. Furthermore, policy-makers felt that it was time to change the 1927 Act to suit the changed context.

In this matter, the Central Board of Forestry had sought suggestions for improvements and changes in the Indian Forest Act 1927 from the state governments in the early sixties (Pathak 1994). After examining them in 1963, the Board suggested the curtailment of the customary access of local people, expanding the powers of the Forest Department to deal with the local people and increasing punitive measures for the “proper preservation of the forests.” In 1976, after forestry was put on the concurrent list enabling central government to pass laws on forestry, the NCA elaborated substantive parts of the earlier draft bill and the Central Forestry Commission reproduced the NCAs recommendations.²¹ The proposed bill was ready in 1978 but was kept pending during the unstable years of the Janata government. The draft bill was finally circulated when the Congress returned to power in 1981 (CSE 1982).

The draft Bill sparked discussion among activists, scientists and academics. The consensus among the NGO and activist community was that the Bill was against the interests of forest dependent populations.²² Critics pointed out that the Bill used ambiguous terms such as carrying capacity that were open to interpretation by foresters (see Kulkarni 1983). Moreover, the Bill gave Forest Officers wide-ranging powers to arrest and seize property in the case of forest related offences that critics argued would be used to harass villagers. The NGO community organized mass demonstrations to protest against the Bill. What was unique about this activism

the late fifties, the concept has been better appreciated following the recommendations of the National Commission on Agriculture” (Gupta 1978).

²¹ The Ministry of Law pointed out the Parliament could not make amendments because ‘forests’ were a “state” subject.

is that critics were demanding not just modifications of the Bill, but a reconsideration of forest policy as a whole (Fernandes 1983).

The adverse publicity that critics of the Bill generated was politically problematic. The Congress government at the Center led by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, had proclaimed *garibi hatao* (poverty eradication) as an urgent priority under its twenty-point program. It was important to retain the credibility of this program because since Mrs. Gandhi came to power, she had increasingly jettisoned old party bosses and only kept counsel of those loyal to her. In doing so, she undermined the party organization at the grassroots. The *garibi hatao* program was an attempt of gaining support of the masses directly through populist programs instead of going through the old party organization.

Within this political context, the central government was sensitive to the portrayal of their activities in the media. Further, the Chipko movement against the commercial exploitation of natural forests had gained international recognition, including the support of the Central Government (Guha 1989). As Pathak puts it:

“Chipko was internationally and nationally known as a struggle of the forest dwellers against the state to stop it from destroying the forests. How could the same forest dwellers be condemned as destroyers of forests and their customary use of forests confiscated; or worse made offenders in their own homes for destroying forests!” (Pathak 1994, :52).

The protests against the draft Bill alerted the government to potential political problems if the Bill was tabled in parliament.

²² For some of the detailed critiques of the Bill see Kulkarni (1983).

As a result, the CBF in a meeting of Ministers of States for Forests, decided to withdraw the bill for redrafting. Environmental groups viewed this as a victory for the environmental and human rights movement (Fernandes 1983; Hiremath, Kanwalli et al. 1994). The activism against the Bill also brought together a variety of tribal, environmental and developmental NGOs on a united platform. More significantly, as an outcome of this effort, the activities of the Forest Department came under close and critical scrutiny throughout the country.

D. The Draft Forest Policy, 1983

Meanwhile, the forestry establishment at the Center disagreed with the NCA vision for forestry as embodied in the Draft Forest Bill (recall that the Department of Forests was still under the Ministry of Agriculture). Within the Forest Service, one of the bones of contention was dissatisfaction with the ways in which forests had been made a handmaiden to agriculture and industrial development through the conversion of forest land. For example the NCA recommendations had made it clear that forests were to first provide raw material to industry. If this required the clear felling of forests and the creation of plantations of commercial species that was to be given priority. The forestry establishment felt that natural forests should be managed through selective felling for maximum production. Moreover, the NCA suggested that forest lands required for development projects should be converted without question, a suggestion that the forestry establishment was against. For Forest Departments, such recommendations of the NCA report meant reduction in their control over forest lands. Foresters also felt that inadequate attention had been paid to issues of conservation. As early as 1971, some foresters pointed out that the lack of attention to forest conservation in the large dam projects would result in large-scale siltation and a consequent reduction of the dams lifespans (Singh 1971).

Consequently, the Department of Forests formulated its own Draft Forest Policy and circulated it for approval to the cabinet in 1983. The Policy emphasized environmental objectives—to check the denudation of mountainous regions and along rivers, preserve the national heritage, promote tribal economy, provide small timber, increase productivity, provide employment and urban recreation amenities (Fernandes, Menon et al. 1988). While, these objectives sounded reasonable and desirable, the document however made no attempt to recognize or reconcile potential contradictions that the different objectives might generate. Moreover, this draft Policy document was similar to the 1952 Policy in putting blame on local people for the degradation of forests.²³.

The more moderate position taken by the forestry establishment in the draft Policy was supported by several advisory Committees that were looking into different issues related to forests. The Planning Commission had constituted a National Committee on the Development of Backward Areas in 1981 that supported the forestry establishment and recommended the curtailment of rights of the local people and the creation of a framework for the protection of forests. Another, the Committee for the Review of Rights and Concessions in Forest Areas was constituted by the Ministry of Agriculture in 1981, and submitted its report in 1984. The report asserted that the preservation of forests was crucial for sustaining the economy. The unconditional surrender of these bodies to conservation over people's rights was strategic Pathak argues, as it circumscribed what people could not do in forest areas rather than tell the Forest Department what it could do (Pathak 1994).

The draft Policy of 1983 too was ill-fated. An important development in the Forest Policy debate had taken place when the Central Board of Forestry was reconstituted in 1980 with a broad based membership including representation from the states and union territories. Consequently, the revision of forest policy provoked considerable public interest and widespread demands for debate and discussion (Anon. 1988). The attack on production forestry that the draft policy advocated came from two separate fronts—ecological/environmental considerations and rural people. Environmentalists demonized monoculture plantations promoted in the draft for their inability to support wide-ranging bio-diversity. Meanwhile, local groups had been criticizing monoculture plantations because of their limited production of non-timber forest products for subsistence uses. Population biologist Madhav Gadgil was at the time a member of the National Committee on Environmental Planning and Coordination that in 1983 suggested revisions to the draft that attempted to include the widespread objections to the previous draft. These recommendations were published with some revision by the Government of India (Madsen 1995).

Meanwhile, deforestation continued. While twenty three percent of the land area was nominally under forests, remote sensing data showed that the percentage of area under forest cover had gone down from 16.89 percent to 14.10 percent (see Table 2.6). The report of the National Committee on Environmental Planning estimated that no more than about twelve percent of the total area was under forests.

²³ Fernandes points out that the 1984 draft was the second draft, the first had been the one prepared by the Department of Environment which was generally more progressive in banning all commercial felling and suggesting the allocation of wastelands to village communities (Fernandes, Menon et al. 1988,:291-92).

Table 2.6 Changes in Forest Cover in India (million hectares)

Years	Closed Forests	Open Forests	Mangrove Forests	Area under control of FD*	Total	Forest Area as a percentage of land area
1972-75	46.42	8.77	0.33	74.74	55.52	16.89
1980-82	36.02	10.06	0.26	74.74	46.34	14.10
1997**	36.73	26.13	0.48	74.74	66.35	20.18

Source: CSE, 1985. National Remote Sensing Agency.
255.46 million ha total area of India.

*from CSE 1983

** From State of Forest Report, 1997 (MOE) reported in Hindu Survey of the Environment 1999: 191

By the mid 1980s it became clear to the central government that any new forest policy would have to deal with several concerns. First, there was the threat of adverse ecological consequences of forest degradation. Second, was the ongoing looming energy crisis that had emerged in the early seventies. Third, there was the issue of tribal populations and their dependence on forests. Finally there was the need to recognize the needs of forest based industries for timber as a part of economic development (Anon. 1988). Although previous policies had covered these concerns, over the years the relative importance of these factors had altered. The rising importance of environmental concerns at the center along with the growing activism of environmental NGOs on behalf of forest-dependent people were reflected in new Forest Policy of 1988 written by the Ministry of Environment and Forests.

IV. PRODUCTION VS. CONSERVATION

A. Rise of environmentalism at the Center

By the mid-seventies several domestic and international pressures had created a growing awareness and concern at the Center for the environmental role of forests. Environmental concerns from the Stockholm conference in 1972; fuelwood crisis of 1973-74; and increased deforestation led to an awareness at the Center of the importance of forest conservation.

After coming to power, in 1980, the Congress government constituted a special committee to recommend legislative measures and machinery for environmental protection. Till then, the National Committee on Environmental Planning and Coordination (NCEPC) set up in anticipation of the UN conference on the Human Environment in 1972, had been the only body responsible for dealing with environmental issues and had recommended the formation of a Department of Environment at the Center. Consequently the Ministry of Environment was formed in 1980 under the auspices of Mrs. Indira Gandhi and given charge of environmental protection, eco-development and the environmental appraisal of development projects. It was also entrusted with policy formation on natural resources including forests, land, oceans and air.

However, the Ministry of Environment was constrained in implementing its environmental agenda by the well entrenched forestry establishment at the Center located in the Ministry for Agriculture, and the Forest Departments of the states who were responsible for implementing forest policy. Frustrated with the forestry establishment for not embracing the conservationist agenda, Indira Gandhi, addressing the Conference of the Forest Ministers of the States in 1982 said:

“If we find that they are not changing their ways, then we will have to review the whole situation and, if necessary, change the whole concept of the service and the way it is functioning. But it simply cannot continue as it is going now. That is one thing we are all quite definite” (Mrs Gandhi quoted in Pathak 1994,: 56).

Consequently, the Department of Forests was ultimately brought under the Ministry of Environment in 1985 along with its renaming as the Ministry of Forests and Environment. After merger, the struggles between the different ideologies were confined to one umbrella the

Ministry of Environment and Forests, and in the years that followed, production forestry lost the battle against conservation.

The environmentalists at the Center located in the Ministry of Forests and Environment had to tread carefully between the production oriented State Forest Departments and the pro-forest dweller activists. Pathak (1994) has argued that the Center was sympathetic to the idea of reducing the encroachments on forest lands and limiting access of people. It did not however, want to focus on that issue since it would alienate the activists. It also did not want to play into the hands of the forestry establishment. Moreover, it was aware that the State Forest Departments would take care of that issue. Instead, by emphasizing the environmental protection and conservation concerns of the Center, it could retain the support of both sides while subtly attempting to evict traditional forestry's hold on policy.

In explaining the strong conservationist stand of the Center, Khator (1989) argues that unlike the rise of environmental concerns in the North, environmental issues emerged on the national agenda in India through international pressures rather than through people's movements. Consequently, the environmental concerns as reflected in policy took on a protectionist tone that viewed people as culprits and did not take their issues into account (Khator 1989). Others have also argued that environmentalism in India has been driven by conservation interests in the North (Gadgil and Guha 1992). By the end of the eighties, it became clear that conservationist concerns predominated.

B. Center State Struggles: The Forest Conservation Act, 1980

As discussed in the previous sub-section, environmental issues had started taking on importance at the Center since the early 1970s (Pathak 1994). In trying to deal with issues of wildlife protection the Center had drafted the Wildlife Protection Act and asked the states to adopt it.²⁴ States however were slow in adopting the Act. The Center's experience with the Act and pollution issues made it aware that it had limited powers—all the legislative and executive powers were with the state. Consequently, in 1976, Parliament transferred forests into Concurrent List from the State List, so that both the state and the center had jurisdiction over forests.

By 1976, there was a growing concern at the Center about the high rate of deforestation in the country. One cause of this deforestation was the conversion of forest land for agriculture or the location of industries, dams or other large scale state favored projects (see Table 2.7). Between 1950 and 1976, 4.135 million hectares of forest land were converted for other purposes (Vira 1996,:22). The basic issue was this—bureaucrats at the center were concerned that states were quick to give in to regional and local pressures to convert forest land into industrial or agricultural purposes.²⁵ Allocation of forest land to industry, starting of new “public interest” projects such as hydroelectric dams etc. and most significantly the legalization of encroachments on forest land were popular means for states to gain and retain political support. This, central bureaucrats argued, was one of the causes of the massive deforestation that has occurred in the

²⁴ The Wildlife Protection Act was an early directive from the center for protection of wildlife from local populations.

²⁵ There were glimpses of such struggles between the states and the center in the earlier debates. In 1875, when Mysore wanted to implement a plan for community forests, the Forest Department refused to allow it (Guha 1996). What is interesting is that the push for monopoly over forests came from the Center and the push for participation came from the States; a reverse of the situation today where the Center is encouraging participatory forestry and the States are often dragging their feet in implementation.

thirty years since independence. In response, the states argued that a general central policy was not sensitive to different contexts and the needs of different states. At heart of the issue lay the question of power—by and large states were still wedded to production forestry, partly because forests contribute a significant revenue to the state treasury. The center was promoting a mandate of conservation that implied reduced revenues and restrictions on conversion of forest lands for other productive purposes.

Table 2.7 Forest area lost through conversion to other uses between 1951 and 1972.

Purpose	Area in Thousand Ha.
River valley projects	401
Agriculture	2433
Road and communications	55
Industries	125
Miscellaneous	388
TOTAL	3402

Source: CSE, 1983.

The central government came to the conclusion that if left to the states, then forests would fall prey to the political games in the state. Consequently, one of the first laws to be passed by the central government after forests were put on the concurrent list was the Forest Conservation Act of 1980. The Act limited the ability of states to de-reserve forests or divert forest lands to other purposes without permission from the Center. The Act was applicable to all forest lands, not just restricted to *reserved* and *protected* forests. The Center set up an advisory committee to look into all proposals that came to the Center and ascertain whether the proposed projects could be implemented using non-forest land instead. If clearing forest lands was unavoidable, the Act required states to carry out compensatory afforestation elsewhere in the state. The Act has been

relatively successful in its objectives—the diversion of land has fallen from 150,000 ha. per annum in 1980 to 16,000 ha. per annum after the Act was passed (Matthai 1990; Saxena 1997).

States however, attempted to circumvent the Act by taking advantage of the ambiguities in its language. For example, the Act does not state clearly what non-forest uses are. Taking advantage of this ambiguity states have raised plantation crops like tea, coffee and rubber on forest lands arguing that these are forest uses. In 1988, the central government amended the Act to close these loopholes and explicitly prevent such uses. Further, states protested that the Act did not take into account their various needs. Many important small development projects, they argued, were unnecessarily held up because of procedural delays in obtaining clearances. In many cases, enough land was not available for compensatory afforestation. The Center responded to these criticisms by allowing the clearance of projects involving the diversion or dereservation of forest lands of up to twenty hectares without permission from the center.

Some have argued that rather the Act simply shifted the pressures for the conversion of forest lands to the Center where interests that are nationally well-represented have greater power (Vira 1995). Local groups and NGOs have criticized the Act on precisely these grounds—they argue that the clearance procedure is biased against the interests of poor communities with inadequate political representation at the Center. There are also cases in which the Act has been invoked against afforestation schemes started by NGOs (Chambers 1989). Protesting against the Act, ironically, in Uttarkhand the site of the Chipko movement, some groups led a *Ped Katao Andolan*, (tree-cutting movement) as the Act was stalling development projects (anon., n.d. #151,:11).

The now famous Chipko movement in Uttar Pradesh is another example of the tensions between the States and the Center around the issue of conservation.²⁶ The Uttar Pradesh Forest Department viewed Chipko as a threat to scientific forestry, and was keen to not give in to the movement's demands to stop commercial felling. The Center on the other hand saw in Chipko an environmental movement that affirmed the importance of forest conservation.²⁷ After several months, in the end, the Center was able to pressure the State government to stop commercial felling of forests in the hill regions.

Many observers have argued that Chipko itself in its aims was not essentially conservationist, especially if conservation came at the cost of development. The movements demands have not been against the existing exploitation of the forests but for a more just distribution of the benefits of exploitation. Thus Gayatri Devi, a prominent leader of one of the major confrontations explains:

“We acted to save our trees. We never clung to any tree but when I went to Delhi I was told that ours was a big andolan. Maybe it was, but we never got anything out of it. The road to our village is yet to be constructed and water is still a problem. Our children cannot study beyond high school unless they can afford to go and stay in town. The girls simply cannot do that. Now they tell me that because of Chipko the road cannot be built because everything has become parayvaran (environment) oriented nowadays. Chipko has given us nothing.” (Down to Earth 1992).

Thus, in the matter of the Forest Conservation Act, NGOs and activists found themselves siding with state-governments against the Center, even though the Center had supported them against the State Forest Department in their struggle against commercial fellings.

²⁶ The Chipko movement (hugging the trees) began in the hill regions of Uttar Pradesh in response to the state's refusal to recognize the claims of local people on forest resources. To prevent the forests being felled by a commercial company from the plains, the women of village Reni hugged the trees, thus giving the movement its name. For a detailed history of Chipko see Guha (1989), Weber (1987).

²⁷ The National Commission on Agriculture held a somewhat different view of Chipko. It saw Chipko as an affirmation of the people's trust in "scientific forestry" and a way of taking away control over half of U.P.'s forests from the revenue department (Pathak 1994,: 45).

V.: CONSERVATION VS. SUBSISTENCE:

The turn to participatory forestry since the mid-eighties in policy has emerged out of pressures from several quarters (see Table 2.8). On the one hand, the growing fuelwood crisis placed the issue of forestry high on the policy agenda (Agarwal 1986). On the other hand, there have been growing calls for meeting the needs of tribals in a limited fashion from within the state and more stridently from the various separatist movements outside the state including the Jharkhand and Uttarkhand movements. Such separatist state movements have emerged precisely in those areas that have benefited the least from development. Part of the mobilization of such movements has been through the demands of the right to natural resources including forests. Finally, the losing battle against degradation and the resultant loss of revenue made policy makers realize that state forests could not be protected without some involvement of the local people. These different strands pressurized policymakers to rethink management policy in more inclusive ways. I trace some of these strands below.

Table 2.8 Interests in the Forestry Sector

Interests	Institutional Base	Main Activities
Forest Dweller's Subsistence	NGO's, environmental activists, Various advisory committees	Opposition of Draft Forest Bill 1980 Critique of Forest Departments
Forest-Based Industry	Individual industries in states	Behind the scenes lobbying of state governments
Energy Crisis	Center	Social forestry
Conservation	Ministry of Environment	Absorption of central forestry establishment Passing of Forest Conservation Act 1980
Production forestry	Central forestry establishment State Forest Departments	
Revenue	NCA State governments	NCA Report
Political survival	State governments	Conversion of forest land to other uses

A. Social forestry

As early as 1952, policymakers realized the need for ensuring adequate supplies of firewood and small timber for rural as well as urban households (GOI 1952). The early concern was to increase the availability of firewood so that cowdung that was used as fuel, could be released for manure to improve fertility of land. Accordingly, the Forest Policy of 1952 envisaged that village forests would be managed for providing firewood, small timber for agricultural implements, grazing lands for cattle, and other forest produce as per local requirements (GOI 1952).²⁸ Following suit, the Central Board of Forestry recommended that the needs of rural people be met through village forests. The state was to help these efforts by providing seedlings at nominal prices and establishing a Forest Extension Service. The National Commission on Agriculture in its Draft Report in 1973 agreed with the basic proposition that people's needs be met through what it called "social forests." These recommendations were repeated in the Five Year Plans from 1951-83.

The fuelwood crisis came to a head in the mid-seventies with the reduced availability of firewood and the sharp increase in oil prices in 1974. This was an especially serious problem for people dependent on forests for firewood as well as livelihoods through selling fuel in local markets (Agarwal 1986). The central government set up a task force on Taking Forestry to the People in 1979 in order to find effective strategies for increasing the supply of firewood, involving people in tree farming and using the available financing from international organizations to support forestry programs. The task force realized that the Forest Department due to limitations of finances and organizational capacity could not create plantations to meet

²⁸ The Policy however, did suggest that appropriate safeguards be in place before handing over village forests to *Panchayats* in order to prevent degradation.

fuelwood supplies. It therefore reiterated the need for people to participate in social forestry. One means of encouraging people, it recommended, was to share the benefits of social forestry with the people. Consequently, from the late seventies, the Indian government has promoted social forestry vigorously as a means of increasing the area under forest cover as well as catering to the need for firewood.

Social forestry had clear aims. The social forestry plantations were to increase the supply of firewood in rural areas and ease the pressure on state forests. A secondary objective was to provide small timber, fodder, bamboo and other minor forest products for use by local people. Plantations, were also expected to contribute to the ecological objectives of forestry by increasing the area under forest cover, helping in soil conservation and water retention. Four types of social forestry were implemented—plantations on village common lands (community forestry), on private lands (farm forestry), on roadsides, embankments, along railway lines and canal banks (strip plantation) and on degraded government owned lands, in some cases including lands under the control of the Forest Department.

The increased emphasis on social forestry is evident from the resources devoted to it. The allocation of social forestry during the Fifth Plan (1974-79) was Rs. 525.326 million (CSE 1982). It increased in the Sixth Plan to Rs. 3590 million. By 1993, the annual investment by central and state governments had reached Rs. 7 billion. This was supplemented by international support. Donor contributions from the World Bank, SIDA, USAID, CIDA among others between 1979 and 1984 totaled approximately US \$ 214 million. These massive investments resulted in 8.8 million hectares of plantations from 1985 to 1990.

After three decades of investment in social forestry, most observers agree that the program failed in its objectives (Shiva, Sharatchandra et al. 1983; Someshwar 1993; Saxena 1994). The plantations raised under farm forestry have not contributed significantly to firewood needs; on the contrary, the situation grew worse. Partly, this was because Forest Departments encouraged plantations of commercial species such as *eucalyptus* and *akashmoni* that provided little in the way of fuelwood and were controversial for their impacts on groundwater. Of the two main components of social forestry—village woodlots and farm forestry—farm forestry was by far the most successful (Shah 1989; Saxena 1994). Farmers, particularly large and medium farmers, have taken up farm forestry for various reasons. High profits could be reaped from the eucalyptus and akashmoni plantations in a fairly short period of five years. Moreover, in many regions traditional agriculture faced a shortage of labor. Under such conditions farm forestry offered an attractive alternative—farmers could devote a part of their landholdings to tree farming that required little labor. In fact, many observers critiqued social forestry precisely on these grounds—because it led to the conversion of fertile agricultural land to farm forestry resulting in declining food production (Shiva, Sharatchandra et al. 1983). Village woodlots were less successful partly because of the problems of protecting plantations at some distance from villages, and partly because the benefits in terms of firewood were nominal. Besides failing in the objective of increasing the fuelwood supply, social forestry also came under fire for not targeting poorer groups. A study of a SIDA supported social forestry scheme in Tamil Nadu concluded that the project had little impact on the poor apart from some employment (Arnold and Bergman 1988). In sum, social forestry was unable to meet the fuelwood needs of the rural population or ease the pressure on state forest lands. Because of the failure of social forestry to

meet fuelwood needs and the resultant increase in dependence upon state forest lands, the state was forced to reconsider its approach to the need for firewood.

B. Forest Dwellers and subsistence

Meanwhile, various committees formed to look into the interests of tribals had repeatedly suggested linking forest and tribal development programs. As early as 1961, the Report of the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission recommended that there should be a basic change in forest policy to enable tribal communities to have control over forest resources.

Village *panchayats*, Development Corporations for Minor Forest Products, and Forest Laborer Cooperative Societies, the Report suggested, could facilitate such control and ensure access to forest produce. The Hari Singh Committee in 1967 reiterated these suggestions, especially the need to eliminate intermediaries in the forestry sector. Advocates for tribal interests even pointed to some excerpts from the National Commission of Agriculture's Report where the NCA acknowledged the needs of tribal populations and suggested their inclusion in forestry activities. The Estimates Committee of the Fourth Lok Sabha called for steps to provide tribals with alternative means of livelihood (GOI 1974). However, most of these recommendations had a limited impact on forest policy—a few cooperatives for tribals were started; tribals were offered work in departmental operations and some of their rights to usufructs were acknowledged.

By 1980, advocates for tribal interests within the state had shifted their position. They no longer separated tribal subsistence issues from the conservation interests of the Forest Departments. So for example, the Working Group on Tribal Development during the Sixth Plan urged that increasing forest cover to one third of the country's area was an enormous undertaking and could

not be achieved by the State Forest Departments alone. To address the issue they suggested that people's participation should be mobilized by involving a "tree army" of Forest Development Corporations, educational institutions, voluntary organizations, communities, *Panchayats* and private individuals. Similarly, the Committee on Forests and Tribals in India commissioned by the Ministry of Home Affairs submitted its report in 1982 arguing that the forests had been for a long time made subservient to the revenue needs of the government at the cost of tribal subsistence. Blaming the Forest Department for alienating tribals from their traditional rights and means of livelihood, the Committee recommended harmonizing national, regional and local interests in forests and recognizing the symbiosis of the local people with forests in forestry work. They highlighted several examples of successful integration of tribal welfare and forest conservation in their report. Although these committees were not politically powerful enough to alter the course of forest policy, they contributed to the growing dissatisfaction with existing policies.²⁹

The plight of tribals and other forest dependent populations were highlighted in numerous studies by scholars and activists alike. The movement against the Draft Forest Bill had been led by a coalition of organizations that had been working with forest dwelling populations (Fernandes 1983; Fernandes, Menon et al. 1988; Hiremath, Kanwalli et al. 1994; Fernandes 1996). The CSE's (1982) report on the state of India's environment highlighted poor policies that had led to the situation rapid of environmental degradation and the threatened livelihoods of the poor.³⁰ Simultaneously, a number of independent political movements demanding autonomy

²⁹ In general, special Committees constituted to advise on various policy issues have had limited impact on policy making. For one of the few studies on this question see Rao, (1985).

³⁰ For a good review of strategies employed by environmental movements in India see Gadgil (1994), also Krishna (1996).

had begun to emerge in tribal and forest areas. The Jharkhand movement for tribal autonomy in the states of Orissa, Bihar and West Bengal, the Uttarkhand movement in Uttar Pradesh among others threw into high profile the plight of forest dependent populations in these states.³¹ It was no coincidence that these movements have emerged precisely in those areas that have been bypassed by development. The political problem that these movements posed made the issue of the relationship between forest resources and forest dwellers difficult for the government to ignore.

C. The Forest Policy, 1988

While almost all previous policies, committees and reports had paid lip service to the need for involving people in the management of forests the real pressure to make it a central feature of forest policy did not come till the mid-eighties. At their best, earlier reports raised the possibility of including people in management of state owned forests; at their least they recognized the need to find alternative sources of fuelwood, employment and subsistence needs of local people.³² After the hue and cry surrounding the draft forest bill in 1981, it was clear to the central government that any new forest policy would have to somehow accommodate the subsistence needs of forest dwellers. Such a task was difficult precisely because almost all in government believed that villagers were mainly responsible for forest degradation.

³¹ It is beyond the scope of this paper to review these movements. However, one might note that not only did these originate in areas with populations highly dependent on forests, but they have also used forests and forest related rituals for gathering momentum. For example see Duyker, (1989), Corbridge, (1997) and Das (1992).

³² Ironically, even the much criticized report of 1976 mentioned this possibility. It stated "There are substantial parts of the country, where protection of forests from human interference is a critical factor. Involvement of the local people in forest development may be useful to contain such forces of destruction" (NCA 1976,: 41.5.13).

Moreover, the forestry establishment had been under growing criticism since the mid seventies for its inability to protect the forests lands under its care. With the publication of the first Citizen's Report on the State of the Environment, the extent of deforestation in the country became widely known (CSE 1982). As mentioned earlier, between 1951 and 1972 an estimated 3,402 thousand ha. of forest area was officially lost (see Table 2.7). While the Forest Department had repeatedly claimed that 23 percent of the nations area were forest lands—this was misleading as it only meant that 23 percent of the land was under the control of the Forest Department. Some observers note that the forest cover loss is well over a million ha. per year. A report prepared by the IUCN stated that India lost over 2.5 million hectares of mangrove forests over the past eighty years. As a result the Forest Department felt under growing pressure do improve its image.

In an attempt to curtail increasing deforestation, Mrs. Gandhi in 1985 created the high-profile National Wastelands Development Board placing it in the Ministry of Environment and Forests.³³ One of its main mandates was to increase afforestation activities in the country on non-forest wastelands, mainly *panchayat* and revenue wastelands.³⁴ Over a period of five years it was expected to bring five million hectares annually under fuel and fodder plantations by making degraded lands available to individuals communities and organizations for afforestation. While the Board was successful in raising awareness of the issue of deforestation and wastelands afforestation, it was largely unsuccessful in meeting its afforestation targets—its annual

³³ Later, in 1992 the NWDB was moved to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development creating interdepartmental tensions and limiting its ability to carry out its mandate.

³⁴ The parallel National Afforestation and Ecodevelopment Board in the Ministry of Environment and Forests was to promote afforestation on degraded forest-lands.

afforestation has been well below two million hectares.³⁵ More importantly, people's participation (which was a central plank of its strategy) in afforestation programs has been limited (Gadgil and Guha 1989). The inability of the NWDB to successfully approach its mandate some have argued lay in its limited control over state forests (Anon. 1988). The high extent of encroachment on areas under the FD left approximately half the real wasteland under FD control which the NWDB had little say over (Roychowdhury and Narain 1992).

As late as 1986, the Central Board of Forestry had tried to give a conservative orientation to the draft policy stressing departmental control over all forests, including private forests (Madsen 1995). After some debate, the Ministry of Environment and Forests drafted a new forest policy that was approved by Parliament in 1988. The statement of basic objectives of the 1988 Forest Policy are similar to previous policies in listing all the competing demands on forest resources as objectives of good forest policy. These include maintenance of environmental stability, conservation of natural heritage, meeting basic needs of people such as fuelwood, fodder and small timber, checking soil erosion and denudation, increasing the forest cover, increasing productivity of forests to meet essential needs and creating a people's movement to achieve these objectives. The policy was thus a compromise between the preservation ideals and the commercial exploitation of forests.

Not surprisingly, the policy views the protection and conservation of forest areas as the first important objective of forest policy.³⁶ Of importance is that the second objective of the Policy is

³⁵ Even this achievement has been critiqued for focussing on farm forestry rather than trying to meet the fuel and fodder needs of the people.

³⁶ This marks the ascendance of the conservationist lobby over the production lobby at the Center. At the same time, it marks the opening of the new phase in conflict—between conservation and subsistence uses.

meeting the subsistence needs of forest dwellers. Even while conceding the importance of subsistence needs, the Policy clearly states that “the rights and concessions, including grazing should always remain related to the carrying capacity of the forests” (GOI 1988). Under the new Policy, clear felling is banned—“no such program (production forestry) however, should entail clear felling of adequately stocked forests. Nor should exotic species be introduced through public or private sources unless long term scientific trials under taken by specialists in ecology, forestry and agriculture have established that they are suitable”(GOI 1988).

The most radical aspect of the policy deals with the supply of raw materials to industry. The policy advocates that people’s needs are to be met from the state forests, and industry can no longer depend on state forests for the supply of raw materials—they should look at private sources of supply. “As far as possible , a forest based industry should raise the raw material needed for meeting its own requirements, preferably by establishment of a direct relationship between the factory and the individual who can grow the raw material” (GOI 1988,: 4.9).

Moreover, the policy goes on to state that “the practice of supply of forest produce to industry at concessional prices should cease” (GOI 1988,:4.9).

By and large activists and social scientists hailed the 1988 policy as an improvement on the earlier Forest Bill of 1983 (Fernandes 1996). It acknowledges rural people’s first right to forest products. It seeks to create a people’s movement for the achievement of its objectives. By clearly stating that state forests could no longer be the suppliers of subsidized raw material to industry, the policy has reversed a decades old injustice against forest dwellers. Observers have also welcomed the Policy’s strong ecological thrust (Gadgil and Guha 1988). For example the

policy emphasizes the “conservation of total biological diversity” rather than a few spectacular species like the tiger. The Policy lays stress on protection of mountain systems and rainforests and is against the introduction of exotic species (Gadgil and Guha 1988).

At the same time, many have critiqued the Policy for not going far enough (Bahuguna 1988). The policy recognizes limited rights of forest-dwellers to forest resources. The Policy speaks about the fuel and fodder needs of people, implicitly recognizing only subsistence and not economic needs (Bahuguna 1988). Critics argue that although the Policy pays lip service to tribal needs, it continues the system of total state control. Others have criticized the ban on regularizing encroachments on forest lands, as this will largely affect the rural poor. Yet others have pointed out that the Policy elevates ecology to absolutes by relying on controversial concepts such as “carrying capacity” (Gadgil and Guha 1988).

Another line of critique comes from those who point out the many contradictions and curiosities within the policy, as well as with the policy and the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 (Saxena 1995). For example, the Policy advocates that non-timber forest production should be enhanced whereas the Forest Conservation Act prohibits the plantation of horticultural plants including medicinal plants without the prior approval of the Government of India. Another issue pertains to the possible contradictions between this principle and encouraging social forestry. While social forestry has aimed to meet the fuel and fodder needs of people, in practice it has been most successful in its private farm forestry component where farmers have converted fertile agricultural lands to tree growing. It seems hard to imagine that a successful component of farm forestry will be actively discouraged. Especially in light of the fact that later, the policy goes on

to say that forest based industries can no longer expect to rely on state forest lands for the supply of raw materials. They are encouraged to contract with individuals and groups to grow raw material for them, this is again likely to be on agricultural lands as the easiest means of tree growing, thus undermining one of the essential elements of forest management.³⁷ More seriously, the Policy suggests that degraded lands should be made available on lease or on the basis of tree patta (tenure) schemes to individuals and institutions for afforestation whereas the Forest Conservation Act bans the assignment of forest lands to people or institutions not owned by government.³⁸ As Acts take precedence over Policy, it is likely that the intentions of the 1988 Policy will be undermined by the Forest Conservation Act.

Such contradictions within policy objectives and means is not unusual or limited to forestry. Because of the very nature of policy making and its non-binding nature, policies attempt to satisfy many constituencies and therefore remain somewhat ambiguous and abstract leaving implementation to the discretion of bureaucrats (Lowi 1979). The 1988 Forest Policy with its accommodative language has not explicitly rejected the claims of any social group, except perhaps forest-based industry.³⁹ The real test of the Policy is in how it is interpreted in its implementation, which is why the JFM order is important. The 1990 circular on JFM was the

³⁷ Similarly, the policy states as one of the essentials of forest management: "Diversion of good and productive agricultural lands to forestry should be discouraged in view of the need for increased food production" (Forest Policy 1988:3.2). Although, sound in theory, it seems surprisingly removed from the historical experience as well as experience with social forestry programs leading to internal tensions in the policy. In the colonial period, because of revenue considerations, we saw that conversion of forest land to agriculture was explicitly encouraged. Later post-independence, much forest land was diverted to other non-forest uses such as agriculture because of political and economic needs of the states. For example, tea and rubber plantations were encouraged and encroachments regularized. Indeed, the Forest Conservation Act of 1980, was passed to prevent such conversion. Now, it appears that reconversion of such lands to forests is discouraged.

³⁸ For a detailed examination of such contradictions see Saxena (1995: 21).

³⁹ Forest-based industries have not spoken out against the Policy. Observers say that industry is not worried however, as no matter what the policy is the backdoor has never been closed. This claim is somewhat substantiated by the recent development when the Government considered a proposal to lease degraded forest lands to industry for raising captive plantations (see Chapter 5).

first to give real teeth to the 1988 Policy documents. I will pick up the story of how that circular was adopted and its impacts in changing forest policy on the ground in Chapter Five. The 1988 Policy began the next phase of forest management in India.

Table 2.9 State approaches to curtailing degradation of state forests in India.

Policing	Social Forestry	Joint Forest Management
<u>Officially started</u> 1947	1979-80	1989
<u>Objective</u> Protection of forests from villagers and illegal poachers	Satisfy local needs through fuelwood plantations to divert pressure from natural forests	Protect forests in collaboration with villagers, meet local needs through forest products
<u>Who?</u> Forest Department staff with help from the police force	Private farmers especially larger farmers by giving them access to credit	Clearly defined and organized community groups. Focus on forest dependent communities—tribals, landless, women.
<u>Where?</u> State forest lands	Private farmland Village commons Revenue lands, wastelands	State forest lands Protect forests and reserve forests
<u>How?</u> Allocating protection personnel	Making budgets, setting targets. Establishing nurseries and plantations Providing employment	Microplanning processes Identifying needs Defining rights and responsibilities of FPC and FD
<u>When?</u> Based on departmental budget Budget increased with increased deforestation	Based on donor aid and departmental budget Renewal based on achieving targets	Departmental budget supported by donor aid Low budgetary needs in subsequent years
<u>Average Cost*</u>	Rs. 5000-10,000 per hectare	Rs. 250 per hectare
<u>Coverage</u> All states	All states	16 States

Source: Adapted from

*From Singh, 1994.

VI. Conclusions

In this chapter I tried to show that the evolution of forest policy in India has been characterized by contestation by various groups and interests, within and outside the state. One can discern four broad periods of conflicts between different objectives of policy. In the first period under the British, forest policy was largely shaped by revenue considerations. In the second period following independence, forest policy established the hold of production forestry as being important for economic development as embodied in the NCA Report on Agriculture in 1976. The third period began in the mid seventies and in this phase production forestry was replaced by conservation interests that crystallized in the Forest Conservation Act of 1980. In the fourth and most recent period, the conservation ethos has been challenged by those supporting the subsistence rights of forest dwelling populations.

Parallel to these four periods of debate, various interests attempted to shape post-independence forest policy. The first (and early) set of interests relate to agriculture. The thinking was that forest lands were expendable, agriculture was essential for the growth of the country. The second set of interests lay in traditional production forestry embodied in the State Forest Departments, the Department of Forests at the Center and forest-based industries. The third set are environmental and conservation concerns as embodied in the Ministry of Environment and also supported by the political leaders. Finally, there are the interests relating to the subsistence of forest dwellers, mostly given voice through the ministry of tribal affairs etc, that have largely been supported by activists and movements outside the state. These various institutional sponsors of different positions have debated policies within the state and outside it. At various times however we saw how non-state groups have supported production over conservation as

was the case of the Forest Conservation Act of 1980; or have supported forest conservation over commercial production as happened in the case of the Chipko movement. Alliances between state and societal actors seem fluid and shifting depending on the issue as well as its institutional sponsor.

Given this history, it seems clear that the Indian state is not as monolithic as is suggested by some environmentalist' accounts. Rather, there has been much debate and discussion within the state about the objectives of forest policy. On some issues, the tension is between environmental concerns of the center and revenue concerns in the states. Sometimes the tension has been between different groups within the Center—the conservation-oriented group located in the Ministry of Environment and the production-oriented group in the Department of Forests. On some of these issues, the center marshaled the moral weight of groups outside of society to bolster its conservationist position. On other issues, the powerful NCA used its institutional strength to promote production forestry. As we have seen while these strategies and sponsorships have not always led to success, they have been important in opening up the possibility of alternative views to be assimilated by some progressive actors within the state.

An examination of policy outcomes alone, suggests that the 1988 Policy and the subsequent JFM order are departures from the traditional anti-people stance of the state. In this chapter, I tried to show that the hegemony of a particular interest in a period was debated internally and contested externally. A closer examination of these debates and contestation revealed that the issue of including people in the management of forests had been discussed much earlier, and was included at least in the rhetoric of several government reports and documents. The emergence of

the 1988 Policy and the JFM order seems to be the result of a delicate balance between competing charges on forest policy—forest conservation and fulfilling the subsistence needs of people. Resource constraints and rapid deforestation have led those who believe in production forestry to accept the reality of people’s participation in forest management. For advocates of participation within and outside the state, the 1988 Policy represents one step in gaining acceptance for total community management of state forests.

Moreover, the success of both the 1988 Policy and the JFM Resolution is somewhat paradoxically in the hands of those who have been historically identified as the exploiters—state governments. The implementation of Joint Forest Management and the shape it takes will depend upon the attitude of the State Forest Departments to the new arrangements. If JFM implies a significant reduction in the operational freedom of the State Forest Departments, they might resist. Given that issues of regional identity and autonomy are salient in many states where JFM would be most applicable, its implementation is likely to become a major political issue. Within this context, it seems important to understand the process of policy change in those states that have been at the forefront of JFM’s innovation and especially the role of foresters in enabling the change. The next three chapters attempt to examine this question in the context of West Bengal.

Table 2.10 Summary of key documents and events in forest policy

Laws	Policy Documents	Important Developments	Implications
<i>Pre Independence</i>			
Indian Forest Act 1865		Forest Department formed	Importance of forests for revenue increases
Indian Forest Act 1878			Traditional rights reduced and relegated to privileges
Indian Forest Act 1927			Revenue considerations and limited rights crystallized
<i>Post Independence</i>			
	Forest Policy 1952		Continuation of British policy of forest management for revenue
	NCA Report 1976	Forestry put on Concurrent List	Energy Crisis, social forestry advocated as solution
Draft Forest Bill circulated 1980		Ministry of Environment Formed	Rise of conservation interests
Forest Conservation Act 1980			Environmental activists, NGOs unite against draft Act. A pro-participatory position is crystallized
	Draft Forest Policy 1983		First State of India's Environment report. Strong critiques of Forest Departments
		Department of Forests moved from Ministry of Agriculture to Ministry of Environment 1985	
	Forest Policy of 1988		Policy emphasis on first conservation, and second subsistence. Raw material for industry relegated to private lands
	JFM Directive, 1991		Concrete program to involve people in forest management

Chapter 3

TWO NARRATIVES:

OFFICIAL AND SUBALTERN

I. Introduction

In the previous chapter we saw that at the Center forest policy was a locus of controversy and conflict. In most states there was less debate. Although forestry was a state subject till 1976, most states accepted the Forest Policy of 1952 made by the Center.¹ In West Bengal, forest policy was not significantly different from that of other states till the passing of the JFM order in 1989.² Given such general conformity, what explains the adoption of the JFM order in West Bengal—an order that went against established precedents in many respects? How were foresters able to innovate in implementation and translate their experiments into policy, especially in a context characterized by high conflict? What explained the adoption of a policy that not only reduced the power of foresters in relation to villagers, but also required the sharing of revenues

¹ Individual states formulated some laws and amendments to fit their particular circumstances, for example the Bihar Kendu Patti (Regulation of Trade Act of 1973, that regulated the extraction of sale of kendu leaves used for making *bidis* (crude cigarettes). The policy intentions in the states were not written out as such. They were embodied in the state level programs and projects and in the Working Plans of each Circle. For example see Ghate (1992) for Maharashtra, Lele (1993) for Karnataka, and Guha (1989) for Uttar Pradesh.

² One of the first pieces of forest legislation in the post independence period was the West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act of 1953 allowing for the takeover of all privately owned forests by the State Forest Department. By 1955 96% of the estimated total of 81,844 ha. private forest (most of which was of poor quality) had come under Forest Department. This increased the forest area under the Forest Department from 1109329 ha. to 1187900 ha. Simultaneously, the strength of the Forest Department was increased from 461 in 1944, to 2908 in 1970 to cope with the increased area under its control (Biswas 1987). The other important piece of legislation in the state was the West Bengal Forest Produce Transit Rules passed in 1955 (later amended in 1959). These controlled the transport of forest products, especially timber, within the state and checking the illicit logging of timber. Later, to protect endangered species and conserve biodiversity the Bengal Wild Life Preservation Act was passed in 1959. Besides these acts however, for the most part, the National Forest Policy of 1952 and the Indian Forest Act of 1927 were the main guidelines for forest management and protection. These policies were translated into state and centrally funded programs such as the tiger conservation project and the early social forestry projects.

with villagers—an action unprecedented in the history of state revenue collection? In this chapter I attempt to explore these questions.

The literature on JFM has often pointed to the “exceptional” conditions present in West Bengal in an implicit response to these questions (Saxena 1992; Arora 1994; Chhatre 1996). Among the various factors scholars point to are: the extent of poverty of the region; the high dependence on forests; the ethnic homogeneity of the population; the geographic dispersion of the forests; the high level of degradation of forests; the special characteristics of *sal* dominated forests and the favorable political climate in the state. These conditions, scholars argue, provided a fertile ground for JFM to flourish and be acceptable to various stakeholders. Yet (apart from differences in political parties) similar conditions exist in several other states such as Orissa, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, yet they were later arrivals in the JFM movement. So, it appears that these factors can only partially explain the origins of JFM in West Bengal.

When I started researching these questions in the field, it became clear that there were two quite separate accounts of the origins of JFM in West Bengal. In both accounts scholars drew upon the general structural factors mentioned above—yet they interpret them in somewhat different ways in formulating their explanations. More significantly, they attribute agency for the innovation in very different ways. On the one hand, in the official account foresters located the genesis of JFM in the efforts of some progressive Divisional Forest Officers to form Forest Protection Committees (FPCs). The Socio-Economic Project at Arabari initiated by Dr. Banerjee is the most widely cited (Roy 1990; Campbell 1992). When the experiments were successful, other forest officials adopted the approach leading to the rapid spread of JFM in West Bengal. On the

other hand, a growing body of research presents a subaltern account and argues that JFM represents a spontaneous re-emergence of community forest management, or is a reassertion of tribal autonomy movements that have a long history in the region (Deb 1993; Poffenberger 1995). The role of the Forest Department in this case was simply to formalize the process.

In this chapter, I present these two accounts respectively and examine them for their ability to explain the trajectory of JFM in the southwest. Drawing from my field research, personal interviews and the secondary literature, I delineate the areas of agreement and contradiction in these accounts. The core argument is that the prevailing accounts are only partial explanations for the origins, diffusion and adoption of JFM in West Bengal. Those proposing the official account of progressive, innovative, mid-level officials, fail to explain why it took more than ten years for JFM to spread after initial its success. Moreover, they do not explain how growing cooperation was possible in a climate of conflict and mistrust between the people and the foresters. This account also does not provide a satisfactory explanation of bureaucratic behavior. Why would foresters support an approach that reduced their power and agree to give the communities a share of the forest produce? Furthermore, the story of the diffusion of a pilot project in the official account is somewhat at odds with evidence from the field. The subaltern narrative at the other end, does not provide a satisfactory explanation of bureaucratic behavior either. If communities were already protecting forests, why did bureaucrats agree to share profits without being under pressure to do so? Further, the question of how communities overcame collective action problems remains unaddressed.

The above argument is organized in the following manner. In the first section I examine the contextual features of West Bengal that contributed to the emergence of JFM as a means of setting the contextual stage for the sections that follow. The next two sections focus on the two narratives about the emergence and spread of JFM in southwest Bengal. I examine them in detail here because they are well entrenched in their respective constituencies. Taken seriously, they raise questions about some aspects of the progress of JFM in West Bengal. I divide my discussion of each narrative into three parts—in the first part I lay out the core elements of the narrative, in the second part drawing on fieldwork, I examine the narrative for internal consistency and contradiction, and in the third part I raise questions about the trajectory of JFM that are not satisfactorily explained by them. In the final section of this chapter, I conclude with some reasons why these narratives are so entrenched and the issues at stake. The aim of this elaborate analysis of the prevailing narratives is to lay the groundwork for the third supplementary explanation for the emergence of JFM that I present in the next chapter.

II. THE ENABLING CONTEXT

Observers of JFM have offered a variety of reasons for its emergence in West Bengal. I elaborate on these “exceptional conditions” below by way of introducing important aspects of the social, material and environmental context of the region. To gauge the extent to which these various specific factors are valid, whenever possible, I will attempt to compare the prevalence of these factors in other parts of West Bengal as well as in other states.

A. Poverty and high forest dependence

West Bengal is one of the poorest states of the country. The fourth most populous state in the nation (after Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Maharashtra) it stands seventeenth in terms of recorded forest area (Wbfd 1995). Its population of 68.078 million has a per capita income of Rs. 1882 (\$ 47.5 @ Rs. 40= \$ 1) in 1991. Seventy three percent of its population is rural with almost 95 percent of the rural population engaged in agriculture. The pressure on land is high with a land man ratio of .15 as against the national average of .32. The population density is also high—566 persons per square kilometer. The per capita forests is consequently low compared to other regions of India—0.02 ha. for West Bengal vs. 0.11 ha. for the rest of India.³ Only Haryana and Punjab (both having higher per capita income and stellar performers in the green revolution have lower per capita forest areas). In many villages in the dry regions of Bankura and Purulia, seasonal migration—*namal*—is a regular feature with working adults migrating as far as Burdwan and Calcutta to seek work. In other words, high poverty combined with a low forest area per capita leads to high pressures on existing forests for subsistence.

The land in the southwest comprising the districts of Bankura, Burdhan, Birbhum, Midnapore and Purulia is not particularly fertile and in most areas cultivation is restricted to one crop in the year. Agriculture, consisting largely of paddy cultivation, can support villagers for only between six to eight months of the year (Basu 1987). For the remaining period, villagers largely subsist on consuming forest products such as mushrooms, fruits and medicinal plants and berries and

³ These per capita forest figures are based on the area of forest land under the control of the Forest Department. Actual per capita forest cover is often lower as some of the land is degraded. The per-capita forest land based on actual forest cover (LANDSAT imagery) is .09 ha [Wbfd, 1991].

unauthorised cutting and selling of wood. A survey by Malhotra (1991) in 12 FPCs in the Jamboni range of Midnapore found that 75 forest product species were used regularly by villagers in subsistence. Many Non-Timber Forest Products are also sold in local markets including *sal* leaves and seeds, *kendu* (*diospyros melanoxylon*) leaves, fuelwood, mahua (*bassia latifolia*) flowers and mushrooms. On average, one study found that NTPP collection generated 430 man days of employment (per family per year) (Pal and al n.d.). Many scholars argue that this high dependence on forests for survival has led to a population that is particularly aware of the need for preventing deforestation (Saxena 1992; Chhatre 1996).⁴ At a minimum, scholars argue, this dependence made the people more receptive of innovative ideas for forest regeneration and protection such as JFM. They suggest that in many regions such awareness led villagers to form protection regimes on their own initiative (see section IV).

B. Ethnic homogeneity and culture

Some have argued that the concentration of tribal populations in the southwestern districts and the ethnic homogeneity of most villages creates favorable conditions for collective action (Saxena 1992).⁵ Of the total population of the five districts—Midnapore, Bankura, Purulia, Birbhum and Burdwan—23.29 percent belong to scheduled caste and 8.93 percent belong to scheduled tribes: the highest concentrations in the state.⁶ The main tribes in the region are *the Santhal, Oraon, Munda, Bhumij, Maheli, Ho Kora, Mru, Chakma* and *Lodha*. One can classify

⁴ Some argue that the predominance of paddy in the region (rather than jowar) frees the forests from being viewed as potential land for agriculture (Chhatre 1996). However, in many regions, villagers have been cultivating crops on what was previously forest land, although not on a large scale.

⁵ There are however other states in central India where a significant proportion of the population that is tribal, e.g. Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar, Andra Pradesh and Maharashtra (9.19 % of total population in 1981 with most concentrated in three divisions in Western Maharashtra).

⁶ Compared to the percentage of the total population of India that belongs to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes (24.56%) the figures for West Bengal are higher (29.22 %).

the rural population in the Midnapore region for example, into three main groups—*mahatos*, *santhals* and *lodhas* (Sivaramakrishnan 1996). The *mahatos* are mainly engaged in wet paddy cultivation on irrigated, fertile lowlands (*aman*). The *santhals* are the dominant tribal group in the region fall next in the hierarchy. They have less access to *aman* lands, and are mostly confined to dry upland cultivation (*boro*). Finally, the *lodhas* who have been reviled as a thieving caste (*chaur*) are mostly dependent on the forests. These distinctions are broad—and the categories overlap, with each group using the forests to different degrees and for different products. The tribal groups are the most dependent on forests for subsistence. The importance of forests in the tribal oral tradition, hunting festivals, sacred groves and tree worship all attest to a culture that is united in its veneration for the forests and all that they provide.

Moreover, researchers suggest that the ethnically homogenous nature of villages makes collective action easier than in villages with a mixed population (Saxena 1992). Even where villages are mixed, the settlement clusters (*paras*) that make up the village are usually homogenous.

Protection activities in such cases can be equally shared as villagers will have similar interests in the forest resource. Enforcement of rules is easier because the group can use social sanctions against offenders. The predominance of tribals and the homogeneity of villages or village clusters, then, was a key factor in JFM's emergence in the southwest.

C. Interspersed Forests

Another factor that is sometimes mentioned regarding the emergence and success of JFM in the southwest is that forests of the southwest are geographically interspersed with villages (Saxena 1992). Almost all villages have access to some forests, and no forested area is far from human

settlement. In addition, one can often identify a single village clearly with a particular forest *coupe* (a measure of forest area)—making the allocation of forests to groups for protection administratively easier. This pattern means that villagers already have a sense of ownership of particular forest patches (Saxena 1992, :33). Such a distribution, scholars argue contributes in two ways. First, it enables villagers to protect their forest patch easily, since it is close to the village. Second, the proximity of the allotted forest enables the maximum use of the forest lands by villagers in support of subsistence.⁷

Contrast this geographic distribution with that of forests in North Bengal. North Bengal has large contiguous areas of forest land and few villages nearby. Scholars suggest that this is the reason why forests in North Bengal are better preserved than those in the South—as timber extraction is difficult for both villagers as well as outsiders since the forested areas are not easily accessible. Parts of other states are similar to southwest Bengal in forests being interspersed with settlements, however, they are probably not as densely settled.

D. Protected vs. Reserve Forests

Another factor that researchers point to is the high proportion of *protected* forests in West Bengal, especially in the southwestern region that enabled JFM. Recall that under the Indian Forest Act of 1927, forests under the Forest Department is usually classified into three types—*reserved*, *protected* and *unclassed* forests. *Reserved* forests are those where extraction of all forest products is prohibited with the exception of certain specified NTFPs. These are forests

⁷ It is important to note that it is this very proximity to settlement that has led to the heavy degradation of the forest lands in the first place. Further, proximity can cause conflicts between villagers when they claim to be protecting the same patch of forest land.

that have been earmarked with such restrictions in order to preserve them for promoting biodiversity and maintaining the ecological balance. *Protected* forests are forests in which villagers can extract any NTFPs with the exception of some, for example cashew, that are explicitly prohibited. These forests are the production forests where timber is felled on a regular rotation as per the Working Plans. Thus, restrictions in *reserved* forests are stricter than restrictions in *protected* forests. Because of the relative laxity of rules in *protected* forests, researchers argue that it was easier to conceive of and implement JFM. Allowing people to extract NTFPs from reserved forests would not have been as easy, neither would promising a share of the proceeds from felling have been necessarily possible.

Table 3.1: Classification of Forest Area in West Bengal by legal status.

	Reserve Forests (ha.)	Protected forests (ha.)	Unclassed state forests & others (ha.)	Total (ha.)
Northern Circle & Forest Corporation	259800	25900	19400	305100
Western Circle	20600	339900	74200	434700
Central Circle & Sundarbans Tiger Reserve	425000	11400	11700	448100
Total (ha.)	705400	377200	105300	1187900
(%)	(59.38)	(31.75)	(8.86)	

Source: WBFD. 1991. Forests for all by 2000 AD.

West Bengal has one of the highest proportion of *protected* forests in the country—59.38 percent are *reserved* forests and 31.75 percent are *protected* forests. Other states with significant forested

areas have them mostly as *reserved* forests. For example, Maharashtra has 68.85 percent of the forests under the Forest Department as *reserved* forests, 27 percent as *protected* and 4 percent as *unclassified* forests (figures for 1988-89 Khator 1989). In Karnataka 74 percent of the forests are *reserved*, 10 percent are *protected* and 15 percent are *unclassified* (figures for 1985-86 Nadkarni 1989). Moreover, in West Bengal most of these *protected* forests are located in the southwestern districts where JFM emerged (see Table 3.1).

E. Degradation

Some scholars argue that it is the high degradation itself that is key to the emergence of cooperative arrangements like JFM. Part of this degradation has been brought about by the pressure on forests by the increased population dependent upon a finite land base. Officials have always stressed this factor blaming the loss of forests on illegal and indiscriminate felling by villagers. Simultaneously, contractors have contributed to the increased degradation through over-extraction and illegal extraction of timber from state forests, often in collaboration with the forest officials. Till 1976, standing forests were auctioned off to contractors for rotational felling. Contractors often took more than their assigned acreage of trees, cut older *sal* trees that were prohibited from felling, felled fruit trees indiscriminately, and practiced clear felling (rather than selective felling) in order to make their task easier. Villagers view the process of degradation as being mainly caused by such stochastic and large scale extraction by outsiders in collusion with government officials. These factors are similar to those that have caused degradation of forests in many parts of India and other countries in the region.⁸

There are other causes that are peculiar to West Bengal. Since independence in 1947, there has been a steady influx of refugees from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) into West Bengal. In 1971 after the war of independence for Bangladesh the trickle was transformed into a surge. This wave of migration of refugees with their needs of fodder, fuel and food increased the pressure on the forests. The late seventies saw successive droughts in the region that exacerbated the situation. During periods of drought, villagers supplemented their diet with wild berries, tubers and mushrooms from the forest. Given the severity of the droughts, in order to survive, villagers also began to fell poles illegally from the forest and sell them to nearby timber merchants for ready cash at below market values. The demand for firewood in the nearby towns has created a ready market for such activity.⁹ Within heterogeneous villages, higher caste households paid poor villagers to gather fuelwood for them. With the depletion of large timber and the accompanying non-timber forest products, the sale of firewood became the only source of income for poorer villagers. They stripped the remaining forests to the extent that in some regions, even the root stock of *sal* was excavated for sale or use as firewood.

Another contributing factor to degradation was the acquisition of private forests on the zamindari estates following the passage of the Zamindari Abolition Act of 1951. The West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act of 1953 vested in Government all private lands that were not under cultivation. Under this Act, private forest lands fell under the purview of the State Forest Department. Earlier, the *zamindari* forests had been protected against encroachment because of the powers of eviction and punishment that *zamindars* could use against encroachers. When it became clear

⁸ For example see Peluso (1992) and Gilmour (1997).

⁹ Several of my interviewees admitted to having cut trees and sold them at the market during the drought years of 1980-81.

that the state was to take over the forest lands, *zamindars* hastily felled the most valuable forests in an attempt to cash in their assets before the Forest Department took over. Moreover, when the state finally did take over, the effective threat of punitive measures by *zamindars* was removed and the forests became open-access common property exploited by villagers and outsiders alike.

The contribution of the above regional factors to degradation is well known. Less highlighted has been the ways in which the political turbulence has led to degradation in the region. As this factor has received relatively little attention in the literature, I examine it in greater detail in the next chapter and discuss it only briefly here. In the late sixties and early seventies, political stability in the state was under threat and West Bengal witnessed several changes in the governing political party, including a brief period of President's rule. At the time left-oriented parties were keen to mobilize the rural poor in their support. Political organizers visited rural areas convincing them that the forests were community property. As there were no management systems in existence, villagers began indiscriminately cutting and selling trees contributing to the increased degradation of the forest lands. Together these factors contributed to the degradation of the *sal* forests in South West Bengal from the early seventies to the mid eighties.

By 1987, estimates of the degraded forest lands in West Bengal suggest that 359 thousand ha (of a total of 1188 thousand ha. of total recorded forest area) were degraded, not including those that were barren areas notified as forests (Khan 1987). In the Southwest, more than half the forest area in the three districts of Bankura, Midnapore and Purulia was degraded, in Purulia it was as high as 94.48 percent (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2. Extent of degraded forest lands (ha.) in three districts of Southwest Bengal (1989)

District	Area of forest	Rooted waste	Scrub forest	Total degraded forest	Percentage of forest area degraded
Bankura	139,370	39,678	47,567	87,245	62.59
Midnapore	170,189	91,915	9,581	101,497	59.64
Purulia	92,250	26,131	61,026	87,158	94.48

Source: Deb and Malhotra 1993: 330.

As we have seen then, by the early 1980s, in Southwest Bengal the *sal* forests were so degraded that there was nothing left to be extracted from them. Some scholars suggest that such degradation reduced the potential opposition to and generated support for Joint Forest Management from all parties concerned (Saxena 1992). What this implies is that areas where forests were severely degraded are more likely to have successful JFM emerge, and conversely when the forests regenerate and become valuable, there is the likelihood of old patterns of opposition, illegal logging and corruption emerging.

F. Dispersed, small-scale forest-based industry

One of the main potential sources of opposition to JFM could have come from those who gained from the illegal felling—small saw mills and timber traders and local firewood markets. This opposition, observers have suggested, did not materialize because of the high levels of degradation in the southwest. Small saw-mill owners and illegal loggers were not getting much out of the forests through their illegal operations and so were not about to oppose JFM a program that would, at best increase the supply of timber. Unlike North Bengal where most of the forest-based industry consists of large firms, in the south the firms are small and dispersed—small

because of the relatively low produce and value of the timber there, and dispersed because of the dispersed nature of the forests. Thus, it was not in the interest of these firms to protest the introduction of JFM, even if they were kept out of the new arrangements. In sum, with key potential opposition neutralized because of the severe degradation, JFM could emerge and become successful (see Chapter 5).

G. Coppicing *Sal*

One of the most important factors in the emergence of JFM that all observers agree upon is the coppicing ability of deciduous *sal* forests. As I discussed in Chapter 1, *sal* forests are easily regenerated through coppicing—the process of leaving the root-stock to sprout shoots by itself. Initially, all coppicing needs is healthy root-stock and protection from grazing, trampling and extraction in the first few years. For villagers, although regeneration involved the opportunity cost of labor used in protection and the loss of income (or fuelwood) from illegal extraction, these costs were low compared to the alternatives. Not protecting meant that the existing situation would deteriorate further. For the Forest Department, the average per hectare costs of such regeneration were low—between Rs. 250-500 per ha. as compared to Rs. 2800 for plantations and Rs. 750 for social forestry (Singh 1986). The relative recentness of the degradation mentioned earlier has also been a boon for JFM. The root-stock of *sal* trees was healthy and intact in most places—which enabled successful regeneration through protection rather than plantation.

Of the seven major types of forests in Bengal, only southwest Bengal has dry deciduous forests of coppicing *sal*. In the northern regions one finds alpine and wet temperate forests in the

Himalayan mountainous region, subtropical and wet evergreen forests in the hills of the north and mangrove forests in the Gangetic delta. The species endemic to these forests are non-coppicing and plantations are the most viable option for regeneration. In some cases as in mangrove forests, the trees cannot be regenerated even through plantation. Thus, the conditions in these other regions were not favorable for the emergence of JFM.¹⁰ The neighboring states of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa also have *sal* forests similar to those of the south-west, however, as we have seen some of the other factors that facilitated JFM were absent in those states leading one to conclude that coppicing *sal* forests alone cannot spur JFM.

H. Radical politics

Finally, all observers agree that the supportive political climate in the state has been a major factor in the emergence of JFM. As detailed in Chapter 1, West Bengal has been governed by a coalition of left oriented parties the Left Front since 1977. The coalition came to power promising to work towards improving the condition of the rural masses and has held power continuously for the past twenty-two years providing political stability to the state.

Evidence of the sympathy of the Left Front towards the rural poor can be found in the effectiveness of implementation of several anti-poverty programs in the state.¹¹ West Bengal has

¹⁰ Since the 1989 order however, JFM has been extended to other parts of West Bengal. In 1994, there were 39 FPCs in the Darjeeling Hills, 121 in the Terai and 6 in the Sundarbans (WBFD 1995).

¹¹ The actual achievements of the Left Front government are a subject of some dispute. Some scholars have questioned the claims of the Left Front arguing that the achievements are not only less than claimed, but also that the targets themselves have been quite modest. For example, Mallick argues that the much lauded land reform achievements were simply those started by the Congress government in an earlier period (Mallick 1993). Or as Lieten (1996) suggests, although *panchayats* have some powers and are elected regularly, they are dominated by the rural elite. Consequently the rural poor have little influence over policy implementation at the grassroots. These criticisms notwithstanding, most observers agree that West Bengal has gone further in empowering the grassroots than most other states in the country.

been one of the few states in India that has been able to implement land reforms. Through Operation Barga, the Left Front has managed to get 1.2 million sharecroppers registered and formalized the sharing of harvest in a seventyfive-twentyfive percent division that favored the tenant-farmer (Kohli 1987). West Bengal has vested (expropriated and held) around 1.2 million acres (around $\frac{1}{4}$ of the total vested land in India) under land reforms and distributed around 0.8 million acres to the landless.¹² Unlike most other states, it has a vibrant, functioning three-tier *panchayat* system whose first elections were held in 1978 after the Left Front government came to power and have been held continuously since then. Not only are elections regularly held, the Left Front has, through a series of orders, increased the power of the *panchayats* over development at the district level and below.¹³

Researchers argue that the favorable political climate enabled JFM in several ways (Saxena 1992). Advocates of the subaltern account suggest that mobilization of the rural poor by the Left Front created a grassroots leadership that could initiate and motivate the informal protection groups (see Section III). Others argue that a supportive political party in power enabled the easy passage of the participatory policy at the state level. The Left Front's success with its land reforms programs also suggests that problems of implementation are less intractable in West Bengal than in other states. With the exception of Kerala, other states do not have a Communist coalition in power, and have done much less to advance the interests of the rural poor.

¹² Other states have appropriated greater acreage but have been less successful in distributing it to the landless (Mallick 1993).

These contextual factors discussed offer structural explanations of the conditions under which JFM emerged in West Bengal. From the point of view of the transfer of JFM to other states, (or explaining why JFM did not emerge elsewhere in the first place) many of these factors are similar to those present in a number of other states. There is more to a complete explanation however, than to simply state that all the factors mentioned above were absent in other states. Such structural features present what seem to be necessary but not sufficient conditions for reform. Such structural explanations of organizational change and diffusion are prevalent in the current literature on organizations, especially in institutional theory (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; DiMaggio and Powell 1991). Complementing such structural factors, we need accounts of agency—of how actors within institutions translated a favorable context into policy reform (Scully and Creed 1999). The two accounts of the emergence of JFM in West Bengal work towards constructing such a complementary explanation.

The two accounts of origins that I present in the next two sections incorporate the seven factors that prevail in the literature on JFM. These are also key factors that arose in my fieldwork and provide a structural background to the discussion of the two accounts that follows. I elaborate on these accounts in some detail because they are well entrenched yet offer only partial explanations of the trajectory of JFM in West Bengal. I draw on my own interviews with foresters and villagers to throw into relief areas of contradiction and ambiguity in these accounts. In the next chapter, I present an additional account that works together with these two to form a more complete picture of JFM.

¹³ The *panchayats* have some control over development funds at the local level. The Bhumi Sanskar Sthae Samiti, a statutory body of the Zila Parishad and Panchayat Samiti, is responsible for all development matters relating to

II. THE OFFICIAL ACCOUNT

A. Early informal protection groups and the SEP at Arabari

Official accounts locate the origins of JFM at Arabari in the early 1970s. The story of the Socio-Economic Project (SEP) at Arabari is now commonly known and an established part of Forest Department lore. I reconstruct the official account here drawing from personal interviews, official documents and descriptions of other researchers in order to examine it in greater detail.

In the late seventies, Arabari was a small, sleepy, silvicultural, research station around 60 kilometers from the district headquarters of Midnapore. Located amidst a number of surrounding villages, the research station was surrounded by degraded forests. An old forester recounted how one could see the neighboring beat's office compound that was about 14 kilometers away from the Arabari research station. In 1970, Dr. Banerjee, a young Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) who had just returned from completing his doctorate on soil conservation in Canada was posted to the research station at the Range office at Arabari. He started conducting a number of experiments on the growth patterns of *sal* (*shorea robusta*) trees. Everytime the *sal* trees in his experimental plots reached a certain height however, the neighboring villagers felled them for fuelwood. Dr. Banerjee was getting increasingly frustrated with his inability to continue his experiments and decided to find out why it was that villagers were sabotaging his experimental *sal* trees. He, with his Ranger and Beat Officers, went out to the villages and sat down with the people and asked them about why they were cutting down the trees from the government forests. After an initial period of doubting his motivations, the villagers informed him of their desperate

land reforms and development programs and liaisons with the district administration. The implementation of

need for fuelwood and income that had led them to such illegal extraction. If they had alternative forms of employment they argued, they would not cut down the trees.

After eight months of discussions with the surrounding villages, Dr. Banerjee offered them a deal. The villagers would get forest products, firewood and non-timber forest products for their own needs at a nominal cost once the forests began to regenerate. They would also be offered full employment to replace what they earned from selling the illegal timber. In exchange, the villagers would have to refrain from illegal extraction, give up grazing animals on forest land, and work towards protecting the forests.

Initially, although he had promised the villagers employment, Dr. Banerjee did not have any resources to offer full employment to villagers in Departmental activities. He asked the Chief Conservator at the time for a small grant of Rs. 100,000 to start an experimental project. As the Chief Conservator of Forests (CCF) had good personal rapport with Dr. Banerjee, he agreed to sanction the money for the project. Thus in 1971 the Socio-Economic Project (SEP) at Arabari began formally under the jurisdiction of the Arabari Silvicultural Division. Eleven villages comprising of 601 households agreed to be a part of the project and Dr. Banerjee demarcated 1256 ha. of forest land around the Arabari research station and entrusted it to their protection.¹⁴ Of the total area, approximately 400 ha consisted of primary *sal* forest, 400 ha. of degraded *sal* forest, and 400 ha. was barren land.

development projects as well as budget management remains in the hands of the District Administration.

¹⁴ The mauzas were New Chandmura, Guchisole, Gutiamara, Jorakeudi, Majhigarh, Mohisdubi, Sahisole, Sankrui, Sapadiha, Satsole, and Urami. The village of Chandmura did not agree to be part of the project because they owned many cattle that they grazed in the forest. Alternative sources of fodder were not available, so they could not agree to refrain from grazing. As a result Chandmura was not included in the project (Chatterji 1996).

To overcome the initial problems generated by sacrificing the income from selling firewood, Dr. Banerjee offered to employ anyone who needed work in forestry operations. There were few non-timber forest products to be had from the Arabari forests, which were in poor condition. Neither was there much work in the form of silvicultural operations, certainly not enough to support the population of the eleven villages. To compensate, Dr. Banerjee, encouraged villagers to grow paddy and *mesta* between the regenerating trees to supplement their income and offered to buy the paddy at production cost (including the cost of labor). People also started planting *binata-sabai* grass, fruit trees and bamboos that would provide valuable non-timber forest products (NTFPs). In order to aid in protection activities, especially in the beginning when it was relatively new, eleven guards, one from each of the eleven villages, were hired and paid from project funds. Although the area that the eleven guards could patrol was limited, they helped in reporting unusual activities and deterring illegal extraction. With the villagers also contributing in guarding forest areas, incidents of theft reduced significantly.

After the first year, it was clear that due to financial limitations, the Socio-Economic Project could not provide employment for everybody who needed it. There were also potential legal complications arising from cultivation on state forest lands. Consequently, after the second year, consequently, interplantation was stopped. To sustain enthusiasm for forest protection, Dr. Banerjee instead promised that the villagers would get twenty five percent of the profits from the sale of timber when the trees matured approximately ten to fifteen years later. At the time, the promise was informal, although a proposal submitted to the government at the time was disregarded (Chatterji 1996).

Such initial interactions between the Arabari foresters and the villagers were formative ones. Villagers were doubtful and wary about the intentions of the Forest Department and needed to build trust in the project. In the first few years a number of problems arose that threatened to sabotage the experiment. Dr. Banerjee's response to these issues helped in the creation of trust. For example, Dr. Banerjee had promised to employ anyone who turned up for work on a specified day. On the appointed day only five villagers showed up, because they did not believe the promises of the FD. Once they realized that it was true, within five days more than a hundred and fifty villagers were turning up for work.¹⁵ Furthermore, allowing agriculture on forest lands, was a significant departure from departmental norms. Cultivation on forest lands was strictly prohibited by the Forest Department as such encroachments could later be the basis of villagers' claims to Forest Department lands. Allowing cultivation then, probably created a common bond of collusion between foresters and villagers against the government. There were also a number of conflicts and cases of assault between villagers and foresters as villagers tried to adapt to the Socio-Economic Project pact and give up their old ways. Foresters who were assaulted were bent on reporting the incidents to the local police as not doing so undermined their authority. But reporting would have reinforced the mistrust and dislike between the foresters and villagers. Dr. Banerjee convinced his staff not to report the assaults, rather to accept public apologies from the miscreants.¹⁶ Another issue was that as the Arabari forests were now protected, villagers started

¹⁵ Interview, SB., Burdwan, 11 April, 1996.

¹⁶ One Ranger recalled an incident where he tried to stop a milkman ploughing on forest land. Instead of stopping, the milkman assaulted the Ranger and started beating him. Unfortunately there were no guards around and nothing could be done at the time, so he got himself treated and lodged an FIR at the police station. The D.F.O. however convinced him not to pursue the case and forgive the milkman, whom he promised would publicly ask for forgiveness. The Ranger was persuaded and the situation was assuaged/smoothed/handled and work at Arabari went on.

raiding the adjacent forests for firewood. Although Dr. Banerjee was aware of this, he decided to turn a blind eye, because he was aware that if he cracked down on illegal fellings outside the project area, the SEP experiment would be in jeopardy. While cutting of trees and branches in the forests was prohibited, people were allowed to harvest fallen twigs and branches. To meet their firewood needs then some villagers started to “gird” the trees—making a deep incision at the base of a branch—so that the branch would die and they could take it. Again, Dr. Banerjee was tolerant of such activities as long as they did not reach high proportions. He also imported timber for agricultural implements from the north, in order to meet the villager’s needs of large logs. Tolerance of some illegality along with innovative solutions to the villagers problems convinced villagers that they could trust the Forest Department.

A scant two years after the initiation of the Socio-economic Project Dr. Banerjee was transferred. His successor supported the SEP and protection work continued. Two years later however, communications between the Forest Department and the communities became shaky, partly because of poor direct communication. Six years after the formation of SEP, an executive committee for the SEP was formed as the mediating body between the FD and members of the SEP. Thereafter, FD restricted its interactions to the community elite that formed the SEP and consequently lost the popular grassroots support it had enjoyed (Chatterji 1996).

At around the same time as Arabari in the early seventies, in Purulia another Divisional Forest Officer, Mr. S. Palit, was initiating similar co-management arrangements with villagers in an effort to prevent further degradation. Palit had tried to stop deforestation through increased policing and come to the conclusion that, given the limited number of Forest Department

Personnel, the policing approach was unlikely to work, especially when the larger illegal timber loggers often had the protection of politicians. As he recounts:

“As a young DFO, I too organized such raids with great zeal to recover stolen forest produce from all over the district. During one such raid in June 1973, we encountered stiff resistance from the people bringing in the produce, which led to the police opening fire. Two people were killed and three injured. A number of forest and police personnel were also injured by missiles hurled by the miscreants. This incident resulted in my telegraphic transfer from the district, a judicial inquiry into the firing incident and a government order discontinuing hat raids. The staff were totally demoralized and the illegal trade continued to flourish. This was in fact a turning point in my career as I became convinced that there was no alternative to Joint Forest Management if the forests were to survive” (Palit 1993,: 4).

Palit encouraged some villages in Purulia to form informal protection groups. He convinced them that it was in their long-term interests to see the forests survive. In his efforts he neither offered the villagers full employment, nor did he promise them any share of the profits from the final harvesting because he did not have the ability to deliver on those promises. Fortunately, his efforts coincided with the villagers own realization that indiscriminate felling was destroying the very forests they needed to survive. Reassured by the DFO, the villagers began protecting the forests in order to benefit from the increased production of NTFPs. Highlighting these experiments in an article on protection of forests in Purulia he wrote, “if such committees could be developed all over the district, the protection of forests would not pose such a problem.” At the same time, he expressed caution at this approach as he feared that “some unscrupulous people might try and assume more and more authority and with that some proprietary rights” (Palit 1973, :11).

In the story of informal protection group formation in Purulia, the issue of how villagers met their immediate needs during the initial protection period is unclear. In my interviews, villagers

said that they used dried leaves as fuel rather than cut the young saplings from the regenerating forest. It is quite likely that they also took some fuelwood from the neighboring forest areas that were not protected. In this case, the Forest Department did not offer any additional employment to supplement their income needs. The forests were probably degraded to the extent that there was nothing more to be had from the forest areas (i.e. even if villagers had not protected, they were not getting any income from the forest lands anyway).

Of the twenty-five forest informal protection groups formed at the time which covered 2371.2 ha. of forest land, Karandih was the most organized. The village school teacher Mr. Mahato, the lead figure behind the Karandih group, was innovative and resourceful.¹⁷ He was politically well connected and, along with other village leaders persuaded the then West Bengal Forest Minister Mr. Kamala Kanta Hembram (1970) and later Shri Sita Ram Mahato (1972) to visit the village and offer the villagers encouragement in their protection efforts.¹⁸ This visit gave a high profile to the informal protection groups formed by the villagers and the Forest Department began informally supporting their efforts. Unfortunately, a couple of years after formation, the group faltered due to political infighting. Also, since Mr. Palit had left, and the political powers had also changed, official attitude towards such groups became ambivalent.

Supporters of the official account are silent about the events that followed the initiation of the SEP at Arabari and the informal protection groups in Purulia. In fact, the story suddenly picks up

¹⁷ Unfortunately, Mr. Mahato was very ill during my first visit to the village and passed away soon after.

¹⁸ These visits along with visits by other important personnel were recorded in a notebook where other important matters relating to the group's activities were also noted. The notebook comprises rare documentary evidence of the existence of informal protection groups in the early 1970s with the knowledge and support of the Forest Department.

again after the first felling of timber in 1987 at Arabari when revenue sharing first took place.¹⁹ In 1986, the Forest Department evaluated the performance of the SEP. The project area was found to contain an excellent stand of tall coppice forest of *sal* over 699.40 ha. and fully stocked plantation are of over 486.45 ha.. A total of Rs. 1,210,000 was spent between 1971-72 to 1986-87 in the regeneration efforts working out to Rs. 68 per ha. per year (Roy 1989). In recognition of the success of the project and the efforts of the local people in contribution to its success, the Government of West Bengal issued an order granting 25 percent of the yield of the annual harvest from *sal* forests to individual beneficiary households in equal shares (see Appendix 1 for details of the order). As a result of the felling that followed in 1987-88, each family received a cash amount of Rs. 428 and an average income of Rs. 600 per household through employment in the harvesting operations.

Meanwhile, the Forest Department was aware of the several informal protection groups in other regions particularly in the three southwestern districts of Bankura, Purulia and Midnapore that were already protecting the forests (WBFD 1985). In order to provide encouragement to their efforts, the Forest Department undertook several employment generating projects in the forest areas including fresh plantation efforts. Simultaneously supporters of this approach within the Forest Department sent a proposal to the Government of West Bengal for formal recognition of the protection groups entrusting them with specific duties and responsibilities that would entitle them to a share of the usufructs from the regenerated forests. In July 1989, the Government formally approved the proposal and passed the resolution 4461-For/D/IS/16/88 (see Appendix 1

¹⁹ I explore some of the important events that occurred during this period in Chapter 5.

for full text of resolution). Subsequently, the Forest Department amended this order in July 1990.

The JFM resolution as it stands currently outlines the composition of the FPCs, their duties and responsibilities and the benefits they shall receive. All village households (with two representatives—one male and one female from each household) are entitled to be members of the FPC. Each FPC has an Executive Committee comprising of the elected head of the village level *panchayat*, one member from the Ban-O-Bhoomi Sanaskar Sthayee Samiti, six elected representatives of the beneficiaries with the Beat Officer as the member secretary. Each FPC is expected to maintain a register with names of the members of the FPC, minutes of the meetings of the Executive Committee. It has to hold at least one Annual General Meeting in the presence of all beneficiary households. The FPC is expected to patrol the forests under their protection as necessary and apprehend or report offenders to the forest personnel. In exchange the members are eligible to take free of costs all fallen twigs, grass fruits, flowers, seeds and leaves.²⁰ They are also entitled to a 25% share of the intermediate yield from multiple shoot cuttings (thinning of the coppicing to ensure healthy growth of a single tree). Finally they are also eligible to 25% of the profits from the sale of the timber when it is harvested in the course of rotational felling; the FPCs need to have protected the forests for at least five years before they can be eligible for this benefit.

²⁰ There are some exceptions. Cashews from plantations cannot be collected and are treated similar to timber—FPC members are entitled to a 25% share of the profits from cashew sales. Certain other products such as *sal* seeds and kendu leaves can be collected but have to be sold to the local LAMPS.

B. Evaluation of the official account

1. Interests

The official account of Arabari and the FPCs in Purulia started with unusually progressive foresters. Through several interviews, I tried to understand their motivations and willingness to innovate. On the one hand, for Dr. Banerjee the initial trigger for starting the SEP project at Arabari was accidental—through the constant aggravation caused by villagers sabotaging his silvicultural experiments. Yet underlying this, his deep conviction about JFM came from working closely with the communities, understanding their needs and believing that any approach to save the forests had to save the communities first. Exemplifying this point of view, in my interviews Dr. Banerjee stressed that he saw JFM only as a first step towards complete community control of forests. On the other hand, Mr. Palit’s catalyst for supporting JFM was professionalism—he did not want to fail at the basic objective of forestry and “retire a failure.”²¹ Recalling his time in the early 1970s in the Soil Conservation at Purulia, he likened himself to “King Ashoka surveying the battlefield,²² looking around and seeing that people had destroyed the forests in their efforts to eke out a living.” In his zeal, he tried every possible method to protect the forests including strict regulations, the use of mobile patrols, *hat* (local market) raids, and increased policing in forest areas albeit without much success. Other foresters who were supportive of JFM later on, spoke of similar motivations—of a desire to protect the forests for reasons of professional pride, of a concern with the future of the Forest Department, of being sympathetic to villagers needs and for a desire to end the negative image of foresters. These different motivations while illuminating the process through which mid-level foresters conceived

²¹ Interview, Mr. Palit, Calcutta, 8 November, 1995.

²² King Ashoka, who ruled over a large part of eastern India, is known for his conversion to Buddhism when on the battlefield he looked around him at the destruction of human life and became aware of the futility of war.

of JFM and supported it, however tell us little about how such support is translated into action; why some are willing to take risks and not others. How are departures from the norm justified to themselves when the institutional norms are in conflict with their own perception of appropriate action?

One reason why some progressive senior officials were willing to take risks in promoting a collaborative protection strategy, was because they had nothing to lose. At the rate the forests were being degraded, they felt that soon there would be no forests left to protect. If innovation meant taking risks they were willing to do it. A second reason that progressive foresters were able to take risks was the long time frame of ten to fifteen years involved in natural regeneration. By offering benefits in exchange for people's cooperation in protection, progressive foresters like Dr. Banerjee were taking risks and going against established Forest Department practices of keeping distance from the villagers. Yet, because the experiments would take at least five years to show signs of success or failure, innovative foresters could safely assume that they would not be around to take the blame for failure of projects. At the same time, if the experiments were successful, the innovators reckoned that by then they would be in senior positions of power that would enable them to support their early efforts. For example, when Dr. Banerjee offered villagers twenty five percent of the profits from the sale of timber he knew that villagers could call upon these promises only after the forests had been regenerating for ten years. Moreover, the benefits were intrinsically linked to the regeneration of the forests. Thus, some of the same characteristics of forestry that made it difficult to generate collective action around forest protection—the long time frames involved, the difficulties of collective action among villagers highly dependent upon forests for livelihoods—made it possible for innovative foresters to take

risks. A few risk-taking innovative bureaucrats are present in most administrations. What is important then is to understand the conditions under which such experimentation was successful, diffused to other parts of the region, and was translated into policy. I examine how the official account deals with these issues in the next sub-section.

2. Mid-level foresters and diffusion

When the official account is examined closely, there is little that tells us about the mechanisms through which the Arabari model spread. Several possibilities arise that would be consistent with the official account that are not explicitly explored in the official account. The success at Arabari could have spread through the visits that foresters made to the Arabari Silvicultural station as a part of their training and research tours as some of my interviewees mentioned. During such routine visits they could have become aware of the Socio-Economic Project and seen first hand its impacts on the condition of the forests. Or because of the frequent transfer of public officials, many could have had first hand experience with the Arabari experiment. Yet another method might have been the spread of the word of success by progressive foresters themselves, through seminars, conferences and personal contacts. These forces of diffusion could be collectively termed mimetic or normative isomorphism as suggested by DiMaggio (1983)—the movement of professionals bringing in new approaches to problems.²³

²³ In DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) elaboration, professional influences from outside the organization allow for isomorphic influences to infiltrate the organization and diffuse. It is significant however, that forestry in India is different from other professional fields in a particular way—all foresters are all trained by the government and employed in Forest Departments. Unlike other professional fields, for example medicine or accounting, there are no professional groups for reference outside the organization—i.e. the Forest Department. Till recently (and only to a limited extent) there was no alternative employment for foresters besides government service as most private forests had been nationalised after independence.

In the field, as far as possible I attempted to trace these various threads. Rather than tracing diffusion of FPCs in West Bengal, the evidence suggests ways in which reformist professionals enabled the story of the experiment to spread within the Department and outside enabling the adoption of the JFM policy. One important event was a conference held in February 1972 at Hijli, where a group of forest officials working in Southwest Bengal met to discuss the problems of forest management in lateritic soil areas of the southwest. The foresters came to a consensus on the necessity of protection of forests from human interference and recognized the need for adopting a more pragmatic approach to the issue of protection than that advocated by the current policy. The twelve papers presented at the conference were published in two volumes of the journal West Bengal Forests that was circulated among forest officers in the state. Among the various papers presented in the conference, was one by Mr. Palit in which he identified the problem of forest protection as a socio-economic one (Palit 1973). He argued that it was rooted in the economic needs of rural populations, the lack of consciousness about the benefits of forests, the general indifference of the people towards government property and the lack of positive measures for catering to the needs of the people. In the paper, Palit presented his attempts to form informal village protection groups. These groups had been demanding recognition he argued, but constrained by the existing forest policy, all he could offer was verbal encouragement and occasional concessions as permitted by the rules. Further, in the resolutions adopted by the conference, the participants requested the Government of West Bengal to provide funds for the continuation of the Socio-Economic Project at Arabari which they thought was worthy of emulation.

Many of the foresters present at the conference later went on to take reformist positions and support Joint Forest Management. It is evident that Dr. Banerjee and Mr. Palit were already experimenting in their respective regions. Mr. Guhathakurta, who was a co-editor of the journal and a supporter of the JFM approach, later went on to assume the post of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and after that joined the World Bank. These early beginnings set up a group of foresters interested in the new approach to forest management. By 1984, Dr. Banerjee had left the West Bengal Forest Department and joined the World Bank and was stationed at their offices in New Delhi. His position in the Bank and regular interaction with other donor agency personnel provided him with an opportunity to draw attention to the experiment at Arabari that he had started many years ago. He convinced the Ford Foundation Forestry Project Officer to look at the Arabari case as a possible model that could be useful in arresting the rapid degradation of the forests that was going on in the country. Mr. Guhathakurta was then the PCCF, and under his tenure, JFM was given a huge boost through support as well as the influx of the World Bank supported Social Forestry Project (see next subsection). Reformists in some key positions within the Forest Department and outside promoted JFM from their respective positions. Thus the evidence suggests that they helped more in the adoption of JFM than the diffusion of FPCs on the ground.

3. The West Bengal Social Forestry Project

The development community has interpreted the role of the World Bank funded West Bengal Social Forestry Project in contributing to the emergence of JFM in different ways. On the one hand, there are those like Dr. Banerjee who claim that social forestry diverted attention away from JFM and thus the many years devoted to social forestry constrained the development of

JFM. On the other hand, there are those who suggest that social forestry contributed to a changing of attitudes of foresters towards people, thus paving the way for the more participatory approach of JFM to flourish ways (Poffenberger 1991).²⁴ In either case, social forestry undoubtedly changed the landscape of forest management in South-west Bengal.²⁵ It would be useful for our purposes to trace some of these changes and speculate on their impact on JFM.

Social forestry in West Bengal followed the larger trend of social forestry in India. Started in the state in the late seventies, the real impetus for social forestry came with the World Bank funded West Bengal Social Forestry Project. The first phase of the World Bank Social Forestry Project (hereby referred to as WBSFP) started in 1981-82 for an initial time frame of six years with a total budget of Rs. 282.36 million (Wbfd 1989). Later, it was extended to Phase II for another six years that ended in 1992. The WBSFP covered a total area of 24,1754 ha. of land of which the greatest proportion was on farm forestry (150, 554 ha.).

Of the four main components of social forestry (farm forestry, strip plantations, village woodlots and regeneration of degraded forests), farm forestry (tree-cultivation on private lands by farmers) was particularly successful. The impressive record of the Government of West Bengal in land reform has been a key factor in this success. Surplus vested land that had been distributed to the landless through pattas (leaseholds) had good potential for social forestry as it was largely land of poor quality for cultivation. In some areas, where the land lot sizes were small (approximately an

²⁴ Recall that social forestry involved the planting of trees on lands not under the control of the Forest Department, but on other governmental wastelands with help from the FD in the form of seedlings and technical assistance. In contrast Joint Forest Management involves the regeneration of and/or plantation of trees on lands under the control of the Forest Department with the help of local villagers.

acre) group farm forestry was successful. Villagers collectively planted, managed and marketed trees on their pooled contiguous areas of land. Such collective pooling enabled them to share the tasks of protection and care. As in other parts of India, farm forestry was also the most successful because the benefits accrued privately, plantations required little labor and farmers could reap significant profits within five years by planting eucalyptus and selling the poles for timber (Saxena 1994). It must be noted that farm forestry did not seriously alleviate the woodfuel situation in rural areas—most of the trees planted were commercial species such as eucalyptus and akashmoni that were of little value as fuelwood or fodder. Village wood lots that were to be the source of fuelwood for villagers fared the worst—only 2405 ha. were planted under this component. The reason for the poor performance of the wood-lot component lay partially in the fact that most villages had no common lands. Moreover, the commons that existed were in small lots belonging to schools or other public institutions—not ideal for social forestry. Strip plantations on government land did little better due to the indifference and sometimes even hostility of the local population to the plantations. Later, the government handed over village woodlots and strip plantations to the village *panchayats* to manage. Southwest Bengal was a key area in the WBSFP; more than 61 percent of the total area and 59 percent of the total farm forestry component planted under the WBSFP lay in the southwest districts of Bankura, Burdwan, Birbhum, Midnapore and Purulia (Shah 1989). Clearly, social forestry brought in large investments into the region, investments that were channeled through the Forest Department, mostly into farm forestry.

²⁵ For detailed accounts of social forestry in West Bengal see Shah (1989), Palit (1994), Shingi (1985) and Sen (1997).

Despite this mixed record of social forestry in West Bengal, one can argue that it had an important role in the genesis of JFM. The first and most important impact was that social forestry changed the attitudes of front-line foresters towards villagers. In contrast to some other states, where new personnel were hired for social forestry extension, in West Bengal front-line foresters were given the responsibilities for extension.²⁶ In implementing social forestry, the territorial divisions undertook the task of publicity and extension and trained 107 foresters for the work. In addition, the project hired 400 village level motivators (paid a nominal sum of Rs. 100 per month) to provide information at the village level (WBFD 1986). This changed the working style of the foresters as they now had to go out and persuade villagers to plant trees and protect them (Poffenberger 1991; Sivaramakrishnan 1996). In addition cooperation of the *panchayats*, local public agencies and other groups within the village had to be sought for social forestry to be successful. Some senior foresters I interviewed suggested that after the initial period, front-line staff began to like social forestry because it cast them in roles of public service, repositories of knowledge and controllers of material resources rather than as an oppressive police force. Frontline foresters began to like going to the villages and gaining an attentive audience who respected their knowledge about the planting and care of the seedlings that they distributed. Thus, although social forestry might not have increased the quantity of fuelwood in rural areas, it did improve the attitude of foresters towards villagers.

The second important effect of the WBSFP was that it created a basis for trust between villagers and the state. When the program first began, villagers were unwilling to plant trees on their own lands as they were afraid that the state would appropriate the land once it was planted. The

²⁶ Interview, SR, Calcutta, 12 April, 1996.

experience of the *zamindars* whose private forests had been taken over by the Forest Department under the West Bengal Private Forests Act 1948 was still fresh in their minds. Moreover, given the strict controls over the felling of trees and their transportation, they were afraid that they would not be able to sell the trees once ready for harvest. Thus, to the villagers, social forestry seemed like an investment with doubtful benefits and possibly high costs. This reluctance turned to enthusiasm when huge profits from the first fellings from social forestry were realized around 1985 (Shah 1989). The sale of the trees made villagers aware of the monetary value of trees from first hand experience, in a manner that they had not been aware before. Consequently, the area under farm forestry increased from 14,780 ha in 1983 to 62,024 ha in 1986.

Some scholars argue that a third way in which social forestry changed the landscape was that, despite allegations to the contrary, social forestry did alleviate the fuelwood crisis (Saxena 1992). Group farm forestry probably increased the average income of villagers. One might speculate that, as income rose, villagers could afford better, more effective fuels such as kerosene. The small branches that were rejected by the timber merchants also probably increased the supply of firewood.

A fourth quite different impact of the social forestry project on JFM was directly through the WBSFP. In 1987, when the JFM concept was showing early signs of success and there were over 467 informal protection groups in the southwest, the second phase of the WBSFP was restructured to explicitly include JFM type arrangements.²⁷ The funding that followed these changes was key to easing the early hardships that groups have to face in JFM. Under the

WBSFP, the FD undertook the construction of wells, earthen dams, rainwater collection tanks and other works that provided much needed employment for the villagers. The success with the JFM-type component also led to the World Bank indirectly supporting JFM when the Government of West Bengal was considering passing of the JFM order (see Chapter 5). The promise of continued future resources were helpful in overcoming the opposition both within the Forest Department and within the state.

Finally, the WBSFP contained within it provisions for the sharing of twenty five percent of the produce from the strip plantations with the village *panchayats*. This precedence within the social forestry project opened the door for a similar arrangement to be made when the JFM order was being considered—there was a formal precedent that could be cited (see Chapter 5). These various effects of the social forestry contributed to paving the way for JFM to be accepted, both by villagers who were distrustful of the state, and the state that was initially reluctant to pass the JFM order.

4. The pilot project

Advocates of the official account trace the origins and spread of JFM to the early experiment at Arabari and the actions of innovative mid-level foresters (Banerjee 1989; Roy 1989; Roy 1990). In this account, the experience of successful regeneration at Arabari, led to the diffusion of these experiences elsewhere in the state. For example, in a recent publication one forester recounts, “The success of the Arabari project led to the formation of more forest protection committees all over the South Western districts of West Bengal viz. Bankura, Purulia and Midnapore,” (Sen

²⁷ Interview, PG, Calcutta, 11 January, 1997.

1997,: 178). Official publications from the Department of Forests West Bengal, relate the same story. In my interviews, when I asked senior and mid-level foresters, they consistently pointed to the Arabari experiment as the genesis of Joint Forest Management.

In the official account then, the SEP at Arabari takes on the role of the pilot project, that once successful was replicated elsewhere throughout Southwest Bengal. Testing new ideas through pilot projects is a popular method in development because one can experiment without large commitments of time and resources, and develop a model that is likely to work, adapting it as needed (Tendler 1997). Piloting allows for testing first on a small scale in a controlled setting, prior to innovating on a large scale. The basic idea is to work out the potential problems in a small scale and then upscale the perfected model to other areas. There are many reasons why such pilot projects are likely to be successful. Blair and Olphadwala (1988) point out four factors that contribute to the success of pilot projects— (a) generous funding (b) strong leadership, (c) motivated staff, (d) insulation from political interference and (e) participation of beneficiaries. In addition, there is often a sense of mission in pilot projects, an excitement that comes from being specially chosen, that is similar to the excitement that is generated when tackling emergencies (Tendler 1982). Pilot projects then represent the best case scenario for attacking a particular problem.

Unfortunately, as the literature on pilot projects has pointed out long ago, the reasons for the success of pilot projects are the very reasons why subsequent adoptions of the pilot are less likely to be successful. Once the resource implications of the pilot for upscaling become clear, there is a reluctance to spend the resources that copying the model faithfully would require.

Consequently, when pilots are upscaled, there are many pressures to sacrifice quality of inputs in each project for quantity of projects (Pyle 1980; Sussman 1980). Political isolation of projects at the piloting stage can also result in problems at the diffusion stage. On the one hand, initial political insulation can lead to political indifference and a reluctance to support expansion at later stages, a feature that is likely to be true of foreign funded models (Sussman 1980). Alternatively, later projects can suffer from political interference in hiring, resource allocations or beneficiary selection, problems that the pilot project had been protected from.

The story of the SEP at Arabari in some ways fits this literature on pilot projects and in other ways departs from it. Certainly, the cards were stacked for its success as the literature suggests. First, like most pilots, the SEP was well funded at least for the first three years of the project. Second, Dr. Banerjee offered strong motivated leadership that helped in breaking down the old patterns of fear and mistrust between foresters and villagers.²⁸ He flaunted convention and went directly to the villagers to find out why they were cutting down trees. Villagers recalled that Dr. Banerjee was the first “sahib” to speak directly with the villagers (Chatterji 1996). Under his leadership and example, junior staff were motivated to working with the people in making the project a success. Third, Arabari was protected from political interference. It was a silvicultural research station that did not attract the kind of politics that the territorial divisions did. Another reason why it escaped political interference was because the SEP was billed as a special experiment and was supported by senior levels in the Forest Department. Fourth, SEP by its very nature attracted the support of the local people who were benefiting from the assured employment and the access to NTFPs. When the total demand for employment could no longer

be met from project funds, recall that Dr. Banerjee allowed villagers to cultivate paddy between the regenerating trees.²⁹ These factors provided a supportive environment for the experimental SEP to succeed and could be a cause for the less successful performance of later groups.

Unlike most pilot projects however, the SEP at Arabari differed in its structure from subsequent informal protection groups³⁰ in other ways as well. Dr. Banerjee could offer employment in forestry works to all villagers who wanted it, a luxury that was not affordable for the subsequent protection groups. Dealing with the costs incurred by villagers during the initial phases of protection is an important issue in JFM. If villagers are not offered adequate alternative sources of income, they can easily revert back to the old ways of illegal felling if not from their forests, then from the neighboring ones. In contrast, informal groups did not benefit from any additional employment or other benefits like the cashew plantations under the SEP in the Arabari forests. Instead in the degraded areas, there was an informal practice of not allocating departmental works as a sort of punishment for not being able to protect the forest area.

A second way in which the original SEP differed from the informal protection groups was that the SEP had eleven forest guards (one from each of the eleven SEP villages) to provide forest protection and who were paid from project funds. I bring this issue up separately from the

²⁸ In interviews, Dr. Banerjee stressed the role of leadership in innovations—he felt that innovations do not emerge from public institutions, rather they are the product of a few motivated individuals.

²⁹ In contrast, the experimental FPCs in Purulia that were not institutionalized in the form of a project were less sustainable. As Mr. Palit notes, the FPCs in Purulia floundered after he was transferred out of Purulia and worked sporadically in subsequent years till the passing of the JFM order.

³⁰ In this section, I am comparing the characteristics of the SEP at Arabari with informal protection groups that were started prior to the Government Order of 1989. Throughout, I shall call these “informal protection groups” (whether FD initiate or community initiated) and the later post 1989 formal groups as “Forest Protection Committees” their official name. These informal groups are discussed in greater detail in the next section on spontaneous community management.

employment aspects already discussed above because it implies that the informal protection groups had to invest time in forest protection in addition to their daily activities for survival.

A third way in which the early informal protection groups (at least till 1989) differed from the SEP was that the SEP villagers were promised the twenty-five percent share whereas the other informal protection groups were not promised twenty-five percent.³¹ Dr. Banerjee had promised SEP members a share and encouraged them to make direct demands on the government for this share as well. In contrast, Mr. Palit who started informal protection groups in Purulia, felt quite strongly about not promising any share of timber, but providing all the NTFPs they wanted as the FD did not have the authority to do so, and also because he thought it might undermine the protection efforts.³² He explained his position thus:

“At Arabari, initially we were trying to provide saturation employment to compensate surrounding villages for protecting the forest and for income lost due to the moratorium on cutting. While the Forest Department needed to meet some of the forest communities’ opportunity costs, the sustainability of community protection naturally depends primarily on the willing cooperation of the people. If they are paid for everything, the moment you stop payment, the forests will go” (Palit 1989, :5)

A fourth important difference between the SEP and informal protection groups was that of group size. The SEP consisted of 11 villages forming a large FPC (601 households with a population of 3536 people) organized at the Range level. In contrast, informal groups were relatively small, consisting of one or two villages at most and were organized at the level of the Beat.³³ From the

³¹ Later groups of course were promised 25% under the Government Order that made uniform rules about the formation, rights and responsibilities of FPCs.

³² The point is that if the FD was too invested in the approach (as the sharing of timber profits would indicate) the villagers could hold the FD to ransom—and not protect unless their demands were met. Some foresters I interviewed suggested that this situation had arisen at Arabari, especially after it was acclaimed as a success. Its not clear to what extent such fears might be true.

³³ Most FPCs formed since the order have under 250 households as members.

point of view of the Forest Department, forming one large FPC rather than eleven small ones was an advantage, since it was easier to deal with one FPC than eleven. Keeping records of meetings, distributing work to villagers and organizing funds was easier to do for a single project, especially when the work was in addition to the routine activities of the staff.³⁴ From the point of view of villagers the smaller size of informal groups comprising only a few villages organized at the level of a beat is advantageous as collective action is easier and the protection activities are more manageable.

Finally, informal groups differed from the SEP in that they were informal—were not officially recognized, did not have well defined members, nor well defined forest areas to protect. In such cases, conflicts were widespread and constant vigilance was needed to protect the forest areas. The ability of the SEP to survive under official recognition, full employment and paid forest guards is not surprising. The ability of the informal protection groups to regenerate forests in the absence of these factors sets them apart from the usual cases of subsequent adopters.

The existence of such variations (as the informal groups were) from the original pilot model is often perceived as a failure of the spreading of the original successful model. After all, the original model was replicated only after all possible flaws had been ironed out. Replications of the “model” project are thus thought to be failures because they are only partial imitations of the original, or because they differ from the model in many respects. Less attention is paid to the ways in which factors mentioned earlier such as the funding, political climate and leadership of

³⁴ In fact in 1995, the Forest Department was considering breaking down the SEP into several smaller FPCs to try and improve the functioning of the SEP. Even Chatterji (1996) in her detailed study notes that because of the large size of the FPC in which the FD did not allocate each village a specific area for protection, protection was sporadic.

replicators might contribute to their performance. Some scholars however do not see such variations in replications as a vice. As Tandler argues, deviation from the original model might represent improvements on it, or might be modifications to fit local conditions or might be a case of adopters picking the elements that they think will work in their situations. As such then, they are not necessarily failures, but might represent new successes the adaptations of a model to different contextual conditions (Tandler 1997).

At the heart of these differing views are two questions—a) what drives diffusion of particular innovations—is it success of a particular innovation, legitimacy, diffusion of professional practices or coercion? And b) what is it exactly that is being diffused—is it an institutional structure, an innovative practice or an interesting idea? While the former question has received a fair amount of attention in the literature on organizational isomorphism (e.g. see DiMaggio and Powell 1983) the latter question has received relatively less attention in the literature, not only in organizational theory, but also in the literature on diffusion of innovations in rural development.³⁵

The features of the informal forest protection groups and their performance differing from that of the original model at Arabari then might be explained by theories of imperfect imitation, or improvement. In fact, originally I was seeking similar explanations for the diffusion of JFM and imagined that differences between SEP and the subsequent informal protection groups was due to adaptation of the original model or due to failures to adopt the original. Evidence from the field led me to think otherwise. First, as I have pointed out, informal protection groups were not close

imitations of Arabari in the various ways that I have pointed out above. Such variation could be interpreted as a success or a failure, but more importantly, it calls to question the role of the SEP in spawning informal groups in the first place. Second, despite the differences between Arabari and the subsequent protection groups, in some ways the informal groups can be thought of as more successful than Arabari in that they overcame enormous constraints of resources and lack of official recognition to continue their protection activities. Simultaneously, the SEP at Arabari has since the early days faced a number of internal conflicts and problems between the Forest Department and the member villages. For example, the village of Chandmura that had originally declined to be part of the SEP subsequently took the FD to court when the question of felling the trees and sharing of benefits became real. In sum, informal protection groups accomplished more with fewer resources. Third, and more importantly, I found that many of the informal FPCs (formed between 1980 and 1986) had not even heard of Arabari prior to the JFM order; some not even then. Even field foresters when asked about when they had heard of Arabari varied in their replies—starting from the early seventies to relatively recently (since the Department received the prestigious Paul Getty award from the World Wildlife Fund for the work of the FPCs in 1995). As late as 1990, in a departmental report, one forester argues for increasing increased publicity about the success at Arabari, in order to try the approach elsewhere (Basu 1990). These various considerations suggest that at least from the point of view of the informal protection groups, Arabari did not necessarily play the role of a model.

Here, I am arguing that the reasons why the informal protection groups (and the later formal FPCs) differ from the SEP is because the latter was not a model for the former. Informal

³⁵ For one approach to this question relating to the transfer of Japanese management systems see Westney (1999).

protection groups did not draw their structure from the formal model at Arabari. Rather, the success of SEP and the spread of informal protection groups occurred concurrently. In this sense the relation between the two can be thought of as loosely coupled. SEP's success did shape the context within which the other informal groups emerged, but was not responsible for them. The position I am arguing is that the success of Arabari was transmitted through the region imperfectly, incompletely and intermittently. Personnel who worked at Arabari during the years of its success did remember its success and recount it. However such spreading was necessarily sporadic. Moreover, there was no complete understanding of what made Arabari work. Was it the intense inputs of time and relation-building in the beginning that made villagers receptive to the idea? Was it the highly degraded nature of the Arabari forests? Or was it the attraction of full employment offered by the SEP? Some of these factors could not be replicated in other areas. In sum, the tight linear relationship between original model and successors assumed by the official story is tenuous at best.

Some might argue that the argument I am making favors the spontaneously generated community management account that I elaborate in the next section. For reasons that will become clearer in the next chapter the evidence does not necessarily support such an interpretation either. Rather the evidence I present points to a somewhat different question. If Arabari itself faced difficulties later on, and if subsequent copiers are unlike Arabari in many respects, what then can we say about the role of Arabari in the diffusion of FPCs throughout South-west Bengal? Taken together these factors suggest that the diffusion of Arabari as a successful model might not have taken the linear path that the official account claims. Why then has the official account gained such a powerful grip on the official imagination?

The Arabari story is popular in official circles, I believe because it offers a simple explanation of the origins of JFM that is useful for foresters in making sense of events—enabling them to fit their individual experiences with forest protection management and the formation of Forest Protection Committees within a larger coherent narrative. It also resonates culturally with common understandings of innovation—with a charismatic leader rallying troops to create innovative arrangements. Without the story of Arabari, the history of JFM is left fragmented in numerous scattered accounts of forest protection and collaboration without a larger sense-making structure. Another role of the Arabari story might be that it offers foresters the “ownership” of JFM.³⁶ The story of JFM offers foresters a sharp example of what they can accomplish and how innovative they can be. Such morale building stories are especially important because Forest Departments throughout the country have come under increasing criticism about their ineffectiveness.

What then can we say about the actual contribution of Arabari to the spread of JFM in south-west Bengal? Several threads can be unraveled. First, I believe that the Arabari project showed that it was possible for amiable relations to be created between the Forest Department and communities, in an official fashion. Prior to this, where FPCs existed they did so informally, and the expectation was that the Forest Department formally frowned on such alliances. Second, as I suggest in the next section, Arabari played an important role in raising the expectations of villagers of participating in JFM. When the news of the villagers in Arabari getting their share in

³⁶ Some argue that such ownership has a downside. The strong feeling of JFM as being “their baby” has led to the Forest Department guarding JFM jealously as their domain with a reluctance to let NGOs play a role in the current implementation of JFM (see Chapter 5).

cash income spread “like wild-fire” and had an “electrifying effect”; there was suddenly a renewed interest in the informal protection groups that had formed in the expectation that they would be formalized and also receive a share. It also increased the credibility of the foresters’ promises to get them something when the forests were finally felled. Simultaneously, it made front-line foresters more confident in promising things to villagers when there was talk within the department of giving the Arabari villagers a twenty five percent share. Third, mid level officials who were involved in the early experiments were able to promote JFM from within the department and pressurize the Government of West Bengal to adopt JFM officially. Arabari served as the pilot success upon which the Government could base their decision to officially recognize FPCs throughout the southwest. Finally, the SEP at Arabari opened the door for the notion of giving 25% to the villagers. Initially the agreement of sharing twenty five percent was limited to the SEP membership. Soon however, other communities began making similar demands pointing to the sharing at Arabari as a precedent. The administration could not ignore these demands, especially as the condition of the forests were improving.

In sum, the origins and diffusion of Arabari and the informal protection groups was linked but not in the linear way that the official account suggests. Unlike the official account that relies on the pilot project or the larger literature on upscaling that it relies on, an examination of the role of the SEP in the spread of FPCs throughout southwest Bengal helps us understand what true upscaling looks like. Complementary to the role of Arabari were other forces that supported the rapid diffusion of informal groups: the impact of the formation of one group on other groups (as discussed further in Section III) and the active encouragement of such groups by front-line workers (see Chapter 4).

C. Remaining questions

As we saw, a detailed examination of the official account answers some questions yet raises others. I raise highlight these questions here in order to set the stage for and additional account of the emergence of JFM that I explore in the next chapter. First, if indeed Arabari's success was a catalyst, why did it take more than ten years for JFM to be adopted after its initial success? The forests at Arabari had shown signs of regeneration by 1977 and could have been easily adopted as an appropriate approach then. However it was not till 1987 that JFM was formally institutionalized, even though several informal protection groups already existed in the state. Some have argued that the West Bengal Social Forestry Project diverted attention away from the protection of state forests to the plantation of trees outside the forest lands.³⁷ Others suggest that it is not unusual for government orders—especially somewhat controversial ones—to take many months to emerge—files move slowly from desk to desk.³⁸ The question then is what revived the JFM file at that particular moment? We need to explain such contextual issues of timing and support to understand the pathways through which reforms might advance.

Second, the official account only partially explains how growing cooperation was possible in a climate of conflict and mistrust between the people and the foresters, that had been both the cause and consequence of increased degradation. The atmosphere in the seventies between the Forest Department and villagers had been a tense one, with foresters treating villagers as criminals, and villagers fearing the foresters while continuing to collect fuelwood and other

³⁷ Personal interview, Dr. Banerjee, 12 October, 1995.

³⁸ This position highlights the fact that since reform efforts progress only slowly, political stability and continuity can be a key factor for enabling reforms.

forest products for their needs. In the cases of the early experimental groups, strong leadership had helped to overcome distrust as was the case of Arabari; however, not all informal groups were fortunate in having such leadership. And although to some extent the West Bengal Social Forestry Project helped to ease this atmosphere after 1980, foresters continued to use policing tactics to prevent villagers from using state forests.

Finally, the official account still leaves us with the puzzle of how JFM spread rapidly even prior to the official governmental order in 1989. Even before 1989, the Forest Department acknowledges that there were at least 1040 informal groups functioning. How did these groups form? Why did, if indeed they did, mid level-foresters take risks and actively encourage villagers to form Forest Protection Committees? Why did the villagers believe them? How did foresters overcome the problems of not being able to provide full employment for the villagers as had been the case in Arabari? While the official account could be mined further for fuller explanations it can ultimately only offer partial answers to the questions posed above. The subaltern account presented below goes part way to providing an answer to these questions.

III. THE SUBALTERN ACCOUNT

A. History of protest and autonomous community management

The alternate account of the genesis of Joint Forest Management—the subaltern account—promoted by NGOs and activist groups, suggests that its emergence was a spontaneous community movement from ‘below’ (Deb 1993; Deb and Malhotra 1993; Poffenberger 1996). Independently, these observers argue that in many parts of Southwest Bengal, forest-dependent

villagers autonomously starting protecting patches of forest near their villages since the early 1980s.³⁹ One can discern two threads of argument in the subaltern account—the history of protest by forest communities in the region and current case studies of the genesis of autonomous community management groups.

One thread of the subaltern account argues that JFM is the latest struggle in a long line of tribal struggles against state control. (Poffenberger 1996; Sivaramakrishnan 1996). Supported by the recent subaltern interpretations of colonial history, this account largely draws on the history of tribals and peasants in South West Bengal to argue that the widespread formation of Forest Protection Committees is just another in a long line of tribal struggles against various intruders--the colonialists, the settled peasantry and more recently, the state. Subaltern historians have long argued that the history of colonial rule and politics in rural Bengal is not as one-sided or obvious as colonial history has suggested.⁴⁰ Historians have tended to merge tribals struggles within the larger nationalist movement against colonial rule. Instead, these subaltern historians argue that in many parts of India including West Bengal, tribal resistance to colonial rule is richer and follows a different dynamic than a simple alignment with the nationalist movement. Tribal resistance, subalternists claim, can neither be seen as nationalist in spirit, nor simply as localized rebellions against particular grievances; but as the defense of a traditional way of life that was threatened by alien incursions, nationalist as well as colonial. Thus, tribal resistance was aimed both at colonial rulers as well as the *dikus* (outsiders, largely landowners and moneylenders) from the plains.

³⁹ Such autonomous community protection groups, are also prevalent in the neighboring states of Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. For instance see Jewitt (1998), Kant (1998), Chatterji (1998).

⁴⁰ See Dasgupta (1985) and Duyker (1989) for the history of tribal resistance.

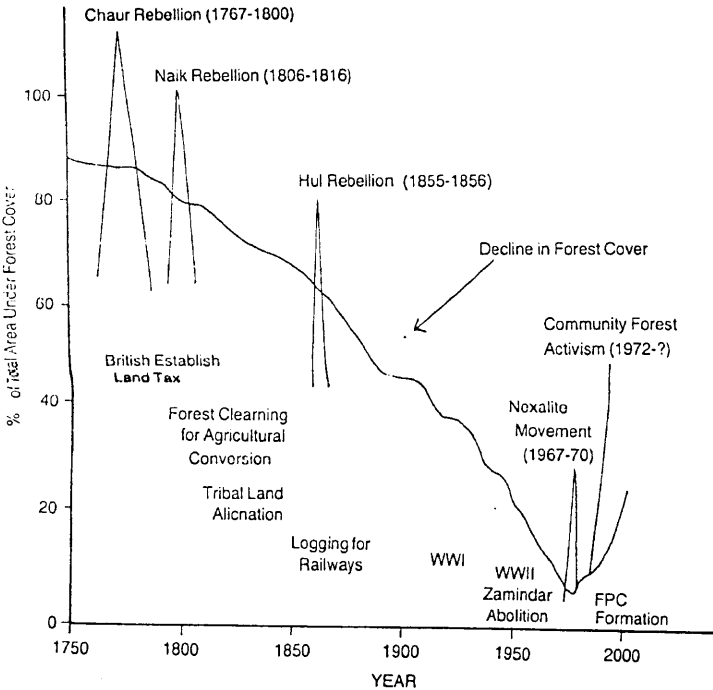
In the 17th century, most parts of Southwest Bengal were densely forested inaccessible tracts of land. In fact, although nominally under Mughal rule, the Mughals had never been able to establish control over the region. In 1760, Mir Qasim transferred the district of Midnapore to the East India Company. When the British attempted to establish control and extract revenue from the region, they met fierce resistance from the tribals characterized by violent sporadic rebellions over the first three decades of the nineteenth century including the Chaur unrest (1767-1800) and the Naik Revolt (1806-16).

By the 1830s the opposition to British rule intensified and took the form of a series of sporadic insurrections. The following years saw two separate rebellions in the region—the Kol insurrection of 1831 and the Bhumij revolt of 1832-33. While ethnicity played a part in the complex story of these insurrections, Dasgupta (1985) argues that it was a communal feeling of loss and powerlessness that triggered them. At stake was the preservation of their dignity, culture and a way of life that was intertwined with the fate of the forests. Again, in early 1855, responding to their growing marginalization, several thousand tribals from the Chottanagpur area offered organized resistance to the British, in what is now called the Hul Rebellion. The rebellion collapsed after half of the tribals were killed, yet it left an impact on the tribal *santhal* community through the oral tradition.

Despite this resistance, the British were gradually able to impose the Permanent Settlement Act over the next few decades of the nineteenth century. In order to collect taxes and ensure order, the British created a new class of intermediaries—the *zamindars*—who encouraged the

conversion of low revenue forest land into high value agricultural land. The *zamindars* supported the conversion of forest land to agricultural lands till the land became productive. The arduous task of clearing the forest lands was mostly undertaken by tribals under the leadership of their village chief (*mandal*). Once the land was cleared, tribals were increasingly displaced in the *zamindari* areas by peasant cultivators from the plains working for the zamindars. Driven from their lands, tribals became easy prey for the usurious interest of the moneylenders that put the tribals in lifelong debt. Dasgupta (1985) notes that between 1884 and 1909 the *Bhumij*, *Santal* and *Kurmi* tribes lost around 31 percent of the land originally held by them.

Figure 3.1 Changes in Forest Cover and Community Activism in Southwest Bengal



Source: From Poffenberger, 1995.

Thus, the period between the turn of the century and Indian independence was dotted with sporadic rebellions and a gradual displacement of the tribal communities from their lands.

Drawing on this history, the scholars in the subaltern account argue that post independence, the newly formed Indian state replaced the *zamindars* as adversaries of the tribals.⁴¹ Given their history of resistance to external control, these authors argue that tribals began resisting the threats to their livelihood by taking the initiative and forming forest protection groups (see Fig. 3.1) (Poffenberger 1995). Important to these accounts is the idea of villagers united against the state that is echoed more broadly in the NGO literature on JFM in India.

The second thread of the subaltern account focuses on the stories of formation of autonomous community management groups. It views the increased degradation of forests combined with the high dependency on forest resources as the primary force behind such forest protection movements. Given their high dependence on the forests, by the early eighties many villages scholars argue, were conscious of the need to protect the forests in order to survive. Through their experience of droughts villagers became aware of the environmental role of the forests and connected the drying up of wells and ponds, soil erosion, reduced fertility of the soil and the decreasing rainfall to the lack of tree cover. Tales of the bountiful supply of fuelwood, fodder, fruits and other NTFPs from the forests told by village elders reminded them of what they had lost and strengthened their resolve to regenerate the forests for future security. Some leaders and youth groups took the initiative and started to protect patches of land near their villages.

⁴¹ Tribal dissatisfaction with the post-independence state was largely due to continuing bureaucratic exploitation of the tribals and non-restoration of their rights to use the forests. In 1951, they formed the Jharkhand party to demand an independent state comprising of tribal dominated regions of the Chottanagpur plateau (the states of Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh). The party has widespread support in Southwest Bengal on the issue of tribal self-governance including from non-tribal communities such as the Kurmis.

These efforts at leadership and mobilization were aided by the political situation of the time. Spurred by Marxist ideology of land reform and revolution, one wing of the CPI (the extreme left Naxalites) started organizing violent movements against large landholders.⁴² From Naxalbari in the North, the unrest spread to Midnapore in the southwest. The Naxalite message of violent class conflict found the sympathetic ears of the *Santhals* and other tribal communities, who had been so far neglected in the process of development. Their political organizers nurtured a new generation of grassroots leaders as large landlords and moneylenders fled from the turbulence in the villages. This mobilization from “below” by political parties helped some villages in starting forest protection activities.⁴³

Scholars arguing in this line, evoke several case studies of various FPCs throughout the Southwest to support their case. For example, an account of the emergence of a FPC in Chingra, West Midnapore begins in 1984 with the youth becoming aware of the deteriorating state of their environment. They mobilized the community and started to protect a small area of plantation. As the *sal* regenerated, the rest of the village also became convinced of this approach (Poffenberger 1996). In a similar account, in the Jamboni range there were efforts to clear lands to extend cultivation. A few youth aware of the importance of forests asked people not to cultivate forest lands, and after some tension they succeeded. Subsequently, one of the youth leaders participated in a project at the Zilla Parishad level and gained exposure to workings of local government. Simultaneously, he also heard of the SEP at Arabari and wanted to have a

⁴² For a summarized history of this period see Kohli (1987).

⁴³ Ironically, as I noted earlier it is these very political parties that have been blamed by villagers for instigating the destruction of the forests (Poffenberger 1996, : 149).

similar project in his village but was unable to do so as in 1985 the official government order had not passed. Nevertheless, hearing about the possibilities at Arabari renewed their enthusiasm for their protection activities. Later the village was absorbed into the JFM program (Sivaramakrishnan 1998). These stories and the community initiatives that they suggest are not unique to Southwest Bengal. Research from neighboring states echoes these stories speaking of the strong conservationist concerns of the people.⁴⁴

In explaining the issue of adoption of the Governmental JFM Order, advocates of the subaltern account concede that the growing desire of communities to take actions for environmental conservation coincided with the West Bengal Forest Department's appeal to communities to help in the protection activities. Thus they show how communities who had been protecting small patches of forest land responded to the Forest Department's support for community protection on a larger scale. As one article in the Ford Foundation newsletter commenting on the West Bengal experience writes: "Although the idea to protect the forest originated with village groups, their efforts were encouraged by local foresters who are helping participating communities and their governing councils establish guidelines for controlling access to forest lands" (Lurie 1991). Such local support by the Forest Department, scholars acknowledge, was helpful in sustaining the activities of these autonomous groups. Yet, these scholars argue that the ability of local communities to take the lead in protection was key to the success of the program.

In the subaltern account then, the Government Order of 1989 is simply formalization and legitimization of such self-started protection groups. In this interpretation, the West Bengal

⁴⁴ For example see Jewitt (1998), Kant (1999) and Sundar (1999).

Forest Department finally realized the value of the existing protection groups and offered them formal standing. One scholar comments,

“Given the populist socio-political environment in West Bengal during this period, many villages had also been acting on their own to control forest access and assert their exclusive management rights in relation to other neighboring communities. ... (the West Bengal resolution) is perhaps most significant for its authority to provide legitimacy to more than 2000 community forest management groups currently projecting 300,000 hectares of state forest land. To that end, it provided *de jure* status to a *de facto* management system” (emphasis mine, Poffenberger 1996, : 64).

On close examination, the details of the subaltern account are complex. While the account is focused on community actions and concerns, a clear definition of a traditional community eludes it. Inspiration for autonomous protection in this account comes as much from educated youth as tribal elders, villagers protecting eucalyptus plantations (species not preferred by villagers) as assiduously as the more natural *sal* forests, villagers turning to the disliked Forest Department personnel for help in their forest protection against neighboring communities as much as their elected representatives in the *panchayats*. As Sivaramakrishnan points out, these stories simultaneously claim to be examples of “radical politics and grassroots democracy at work” (Sivaramakrishnan 1998). Among the various images evoked are images of preexisting communities of conservation, radical politics against oppression and democratic mobilization for policy change. Common to these various accounts of community management is a vision of development that is not pre-modern; rather, it embraces the notion of development and seeks to hold the state accountable to its programs. Villagers are not against development, nor arguing for a return to subsistence traditional livelihoods--they want a share of the gains from development in a manner that ensures their cultural and material survival. In this task they are willing to hold their elected representatives to task in making them accountable for their programs.

B. Evaluation of the subaltern account

In order to explore these questions and the dynamics behind the origins and diffusion of FPCs in Southwest Bengal, I focussed fieldwork in two regions of West Bengal—in Purulia in the Pancha Range and in Midnapore in the Godapeasal Range near Arabari. The aim of the research was to understand how communities explained the origins of JFM and its diffusion in these regions. In this section I draw on my interviews in various villages to clarify five issues in the spontaneous community account especially on the question of origins and diffusion.

1. Limited protected area

The subaltern account implies that informal protection groups were protecting vast areas of forest land before their formalization through the Government Order. My research suggests that initially the forest area under the protection of each village was quite small--in the range of 40-75 hectares. This is quite understandable, because of difficulties in protecting vast tracts of forest, at some distance from their villages, in the absence of external support. The forest area protected on the initiative of autonomous groups was limited compared to the total forest area: in 1985 the total protected area was about 5,000 ha—about four percent of the total forest area of the Southwestern districts (see Table 3.3).

Table 3.3 Percentage of state forests under community management in Southwest Bengal

District	1985	1989	1993	Geographical Area (ha.)*	Total Forest Area (ha.)*
Midnapore	2	40	72	1,408,100	170,189
Bankura	1	35	51	688,200	139,729
Purulia	1	39	65	625,900	92,254
Total Protected Area (ha.)	5,000	152,000	254,646	2,722,200	402,172

Source: Poffenberger, 1996. * Palit, 1989.

In my interviews, in all cases, informal groups that had started protection early, started small. In Dhakata (Midnapore), the initial area the group protected was about 40 ha. (the total area they are now protecting is 76 ha.) In another case, villagers asked the Beat Officer to give them a small area of plantation forests to protect; when they were successful, the area was increased by the Beat Officer to include what is currently the total area under the FPC. What this suggests that although many FPCs were protecting patches of forest even prior to formal JFM, the total impact of their efforts on forest area was limited. In other words, spontaneous community management on state forests although widespread had only a limited impact on the scale of regeneration of forest lands. It was only after the official order in 1989 that the area protected became significant.

2. Conservationist ethos

One of the important contributions of the subaltern account is to highlight the environmental concerns of the people and their awareness of the unsustainability of the practices of indiscriminate extraction. In contrast to the image of prodigal villagers that the Forest Department traditionally holds, the subaltern account proposes an image of responsible community action. By evoking stories of communities successfully protecting state forests this account attributes a conservationist ethos to communities. At the same time, there is an implicit assumption that villagers would promote conservation over development.

Stories similar to those evoked by scholars supporting the spontaneous community management account also emerged in my field research. For example, in Harinakuri, (Midnapore) villagers

started protection activities out of a concern with the continuing degradation of the forests at the instigation of a village elder Jyoti Naik since 1978. Conservation began with a violent confrontation with a timber merchant who had hired some villagers to cut mohul trees. The rest of the village was against the fellings and prevented them. Jyoti Naik not only mobilized the villagers for protection activities but also repeatedly visited neighboring villages to convince them of the environmental importance of the forests and the need for forest protection. While some responded to his challenge, others continued to exploit the forests indiscriminately.

While some of these efforts have been prompted partly by the realization of the larger ecological value of forests, I found that villager concerns have also been practical everyday issues. In Harinamari (Midnapore), villagers became aware of the need to protect the forests when they realized that the women did not have any forest patch left to use for their daily ablutions, and had to use the open ground thus compromising their dignity. In another case, nearby forests were so degraded that women had to go as far as eight miles to collect firewood. The villagers realized that this distance was going to increase unless they acted soon to conserve the remaining forest. In an interesting case at Binjuria (Midnapore), villagers resolved to protect the forests because of a Beat Officer who threatened that if the forest got degraded, he would convert the area into a eucalyptus plantation. Villagers were opposed to eucalyptus plantations because eucalyptus does not offer useful NTFPs, its leaves are not good for fodder, there is a belief that the trees reduce the fertility of the soil thus preventing undergrowth of useful shrubs, it does not offer much in the way of shade or privacy and does not support indigenous wildlife. Rather than surrender the forests to the fate of being converted into a eucalyptus plantation, they thought they would try to regenerate the original *sal* forest through protection. What stands out in these examples is that

practical concerns are intertwined with ecological ones; the broader relationship between tribals and forests is backdrop for everyday concerns that provoke action.

The coexistence of this duality can be illustrated by looking at the issue of sharing of profits.

The spontaneous community account argues that villagers would protect the forests for environmental reasons alone—it was not their idea after all to share the profits from the sale of timber. The assumption is that profit sharing was broached by the Forest Department because of its timber orientation, and its belief that communities would not protect unless they had a financial stake in doing so. In my fieldwork, I too heard often from villagers that they would protect the forests even if they had not been promised the twenty five percent share.⁴⁵ However, villagers are willing to protect without a share only on the condition that the FD does not fell the timber either. If the forests will be felled, then they too want a share of the profits. In fact, this sentiment was a common cause of collective action faltering prior to JFM. In one instance, a village was protecting a small patch of forest. A few years later when the timber became valuable, the FD or other outsiders (the villagers were not sure who) felled some trees. Fearing that they would lose out on the rest as well, the villagers cut down the remaining trees themselves and sold them. This situation is similar to the classical prisoner's dilemma: the possibility of losing while others gain makes villages want profit sharing. Villagers feel that if there is profit sharing, FPC members will be more watchful against illegal felling as the loss of timber is reflected in smaller shares at the time of felling. Thus, while many FPCs were willing to accept no monetary compensation for their protection, they are only prepared to do so if the forests are

⁴⁵ Some recent research supports the view that from the perspective of the villagers, forests need not be felled. The income from NTFPs produced by the regenerated forests is far more than their gains through profit sharing. Keeping the forests intact is a more sustainable way of managing livelihoods for the villagers (Malhotra, Deb et al. 1991).

not felled at all bringing into question the true conservationist ethos that some scholars advance.⁴⁶

Moreover, not all FPCs disagreed with the felling of the trees for timber. Rather, in some FPCs villagers were disgruntled at getting only twenty-five percent share of the profits and thought they should get a larger share of the profits.⁴⁷ In Amlia FPC (Lalgarh Range), for example, villagers were demanding 75 percent of the profits. They raised the example of sharecroppers who gave only 25 percent to the landowners. They also pointed out that the forest guards, had little protection work now and still got paid, whereas they undertook protection for no compensation except the expectation of benefits in the future.⁴⁸ Such dissatisfaction has been noted by other scholars as well and suggests that villagers are demanding more than just subsistence from forest lands (Agarwal and Saigal 1996). This question of subsistence vs.

⁴⁶ As I mentioned in the introduction, there is an odd problem with this stance. Because many of the *sal* forests in Southwest Bengal are fungus infected, the timber becomes valueless after approximately 15-20 years. Felling is necessary to sustain a healthy crop of *sal* trees, making the villagers point somewhat moot. For details see WWF (1994).

⁴⁷ In almost all villages, FPC members were unhappy with the profit sharing procedures as they did not understand how profits were calculated. Some villagers suggested that their share of the timber (rather than profits) should be demarcated so that they could chose to fell and sell or retain it for selling at a later date. This would also they felt prevent the high costs associated with the felling operations that were subtracted from the sale price to calculate profits. Foresters, strongly disagreed with this idea. First they felt that most of the operational costs of felling and transportation went to the villagers in the form of wages as they were hired in the felling and transportation operations. Second, if they were to allocate patches in the forest as the village's share, then villagers would have every incentive to protect only their patches well, and neglect (perhaps even extract) from the FD forests.

⁴⁸ Often these strong positions have a political basis. In Amlia most villagers are sympathetic to the Jharkhand movement for tribal autonomy.

economic needs of villagers, or in other words the rights of villagers to base their development on forests, is becoming more contentious as JFM ages and forests regenerate and gain in value.⁴⁹

In sum, the conservationist ethos underlying the subaltern account is simplistic. In other states, scholars examining the broader relationship between villagers and forests are already questioning the notion of a conservation minded community (Nadkarni 1989; Sinha and Herring 1993; Freeman 1998). In the same vein, the examples provided above show the complexities surrounding the conservationist ethos in JFM.

3. Collective Action

One issue that the subaltern account skips over is the way in which the collective management system originated—in other words how collective action problems were overcome. At the minimum the partial Common Property Resource (CPR) nature of state forests created three kinds of problems of cooperation for those willing to engage in collective protection—cooperation among themselves; cooperation with other neighboring villages and finally cooperation with the Forest Department. How did they overcome these obstacles?

My research suggests that these three problems are linked because of the fact that the legal property rights to the forest lay in the hands of the state, while de facto there were multiple

⁴⁹ One interesting aspect of the profit sharing issue is that as JFM progresses and shows success, villagers expectations about the amount of their share has heightened. At the same time, the relative abundance of *sal* poles in the market due to the very success of JFM has resulted in a drop in prices. Consequently, the per member share of profits from felling is likely to be much less than their expectations. For example, in one FPC, villagers told me that they thought the FPC would get at least 3 lakh collectively (approximately \$ 8500) that would be divided among 40 members with each member getting around Rs. 7500 (\$215 approx.). The DFO indicated that the expected share would be certainly less than this amount.

claims to the forest resources and much more ambiguity of property rights. Scholars often use the CPR framework to understand JFM (Commander 1986; Kolavalli 1995). The shift to JFM, such scholars suggest has converted what were de facto "open-access" state-owned resources into common property-like regimes. The formal JFM arrangement is similar to common property regimes in that it involves a well defined group (the Forest Protection Committee) with a clear set of rights (and responsibilities) to a well defined resource (demarcated forest area). The FPC has the responsibility of mobilizing members to patrol forests and inform forest officials of all illegal timber felling or extraction. How these patrols are organized is up to individual FPCs and varies in practice from organized rotational patrols to informal groups that patrol during the dry season. The FPC also has the responsibility and right to participate in the micro planning of the forests--for example planning the location of embankments, plantations or tanks. FPCs have the right to take fallen twigs and small branches, NTFPs such as *sal* leaves, mushrooms, *mahua* flowers (except those expressly forbidden) a share of the intermediate timber yield and a right to employment in the forest related activities in their area. They also have the power to exclude other groups from using their forests.

JFM is different from Common Property Regimes in other respects. Unlike most common property resources, the forest land is legally under the control of the Forest Department; the significant operational rules of use (how much can be extracted, what kind of resources can be extracted), or the collective choice rules (that include policy making about operational rules, management and adjudication), or constitutional rules (rules that determine who is eligible to participate in the setting up of the other rules) are not decided by collective decision-making by

the members but by the state; members are not a part of the direct governance of the resource.⁵⁰

Thus unlike many CPR's, the power to make meta-rules about the resource, including organizing for collective protection lay in the hands of the Forest Department—without their cooperation, collective action was difficult.

Prior to JFM then, cooperation among villagers was difficult because even if villagers cooperated, there was nothing to stop other communities (who had not agreed to cooperate) from over-extracting the resource. An intra-village cooperation strategy could be undermined by external threats. Inter-village cooperation was made difficult partly because of geographical distance, and partly because of the generic problems of collective action in large groups. Finally, cooperation between forest officials and villagers was made difficult by the atmosphere of fear and mistrust that prevailed at the time, mistrust that was a product of their past-relations with the state.

Some examples from fieldwork will help illustrate these difficulties. In Sagarbhanga (Midnapore), villagers had started protection on a small scale before 1986. When the villagers first started protection, they shifted from cutting firewood to using cowdung for fuel, till the trees regenerated, for at least two years. However, the villagers were unable to sustain protection activities for long because of disagreements between themselves, a fate that was common to many self-initiated efforts. In another village, Bara (Midnapore), there was an attempt to start an informal protection group before the official program. The village united and started patrolling the chosen patch of forest for intruders. However, villagers from neighboring villages repeatedly

⁵⁰ For an elaboration of this institutional framework with different levels of rules see Ostrom (1990).

entered the forests to collect firewood. Protection committee members were unable to stop these constant intrusions into their forests. As one local woman put it: “when we tried to stop outsiders they would say “Is it (the forest) your father’s?”” The outsiders felt that people from Bara had no rights to exclude them from benefiting from the resources of state forests. As forests regenerated and increased in value through the tentative protection attempts, they became more difficult to protect. The longer the efforts were maintained, the more difficult it was to sustain them without state support.⁵¹

In Dandudih (Purulia), villagers realized that they could only achieve limited protection without the support of the Forest Department. Their protection attempts were successful mostly for protecting against one or two offenders, usually from neighboring villages. When organized large-scale extraction took place, even united villagers were helpless without backup support from the Forest Department. At one point the regenerated forest was successfully raided by a large group of organized outsiders and the incentive to continue protection activities was lost. In another village faced with the same situation, villagers began cutting down the regenerated trees so that at least they themselves could benefit from their protection efforts.

Of course, one could imagine that such problems would occur initially till all villages were organized into Forest Protection Committees with their own forest areas. However, this is not necessarily the case. Even if offered the opportunity not all villages are likely to engage in collective restraint that forest protection involves. In some villages, forest dependence is more

⁵¹ Viegas and Menon (1991) concur on this issue. They argue that the most significant impact of the Government Order is the empowerment of the people through the legal authorization to apprehend offenders. They contrast the

intense and of a different nature than the subsistence need for fuel-wood. For example, in villages where a majority of the villagers are potters, it is difficult to initiate FPCs. To sustain their traditional occupation requires consumption of large quantities of firewood that they would have to give up if they went in for JFM, since alternatives are not easily available. Similarly, in villages that have a large livestock population forming robust FPC's has been difficult. Villagers use forest lands for grazing; stall feeding is expensive and alternative pasture lands are almost non-existent. Collective protection requires that grazing be prohibited in the first few years of the regeneration process in order to give the saplings a chance to establish themselves. Again, such forbearance is difficult for herders who are dependent on selling milk etc. for livelihoods. Even at Arabari, the village of Chandmura had refused to participate in the SEP as they were dependent on their cattle and could not promise to forswear grazing.⁵²

This point about the difficulties of spontaneous collective action on state forest lands can be made sharper by another recent example. Advocates of community management systems have argued that state forest lands should gradually be handed over to communities for management once the capacity of the FPCs is built up (Banerjee 1998). The argument is that State Forest Departments can then devote themselves to areas that have little or no habitation and to other areas of such as remote wildlife preserves. When FPCs need technical advice or support they could hire foresters to advise them as and when necessary. My field research suggests that such a strategy might be problematic. Unless tenure rights to forest lands were given over to

FPCs in West Bengal to the ones in the bordering region of Bihar where protection efforts are faltering because no legal order was prevalent at the time in 1991 (Viegas and Menon 1991).

⁵² When the forests were felled in 1987 and the profits shared, Chandmura claimed that they too deserved a part of the profits as they had been part of the protection activities. The village brought a court case against the FD that they went on to win and are currently included in the Arabari FPC (Chatterji 1996).

communities (something the Forest Department would never concede to doing) it would be difficult to sustain collective action. In some areas, frontline foresters told me that if they (the foresters) gave up patrolling, villagers would become lax and revert to the old ways of exploitation. Not all FPCs are homogenous and members can have different interests in the forest resources—leading to conflicts among the membership about responsibilities and benefits. Although this might seem to be a forester-biased viewpoint, I think we should not underestimate the role of the frontline foresters in providing an alternative system of enforcement (besides the FPCs) to backup the protection efforts in at least what appears to be an impartial manner. Moreover, villagers need foresters as a backup to support their protection efforts against outsiders, who might be more powerful than them.⁵³

Villagers intuitively understand this dynamic of collective action and play off conflicts among themselves and between themselves and the Forest Department. An example will serve to illustrate this point. After a big storm had struck Arabari I was interviewing the Ranger while he checked the produce being taken away by the villagers. Many trees had been felled by the storm. Villagers from distant villages had arrived at dawn and started carting away the fallen trees. The Ranger and Beat Officers were having a hard time monitoring the forests to make sure that valuable trees were not being extracted, and that people were only taking away felled trees and firewood. After a couple of hours of a steady stream of people carrying away firewood and timber while the Ranger and Beat Officers examined the carts and headloads and collected the

⁵³ Unlike other CPRs (with the exception of fisheries); forests have multiple benefits of different value to various stakeholders. In commonly held pasture-lands, or water channels, the resource is mainly of local use and is not worth transporting by external agents. In contrast, timber is a valuable commodity even after transportation costs are incorporated. So, unscrupulous timber merchants might be willing to intimidate villagers (or perhaps even bribe

small fee for the cartloads, a confrontation arose. Villagers from the SEP at Arabari came in a delegation to protest that the Ranger was letting villagers from outside the SEP villages take the timber, which would ultimately reduce their share in the final felling. They argued that they had been protecting the forests for so long and now because of the storm they would lose the benefits of their protection effort. Not only were they losing their share of the profits, they claimed that they had also not been able to take much timber themselves. They asked the Ranger to prohibit the taking of timber by outsiders.

The Ranger, aware that the situation required delicate handling, pointed out that the storm had not affected the forests of the other villages as much, so other villagers were coming to Arabari to collect fallen firewood. Moreover, they had come much earlier than the SEP villagers, so they were able to take timber even before the Ranger could start monitoring the situation. In any case, if they would not take it someone else would have stolen it—the Ranger was unable to protect the vast tracts of forests from theft till the next day. The Ranger explained that he was obliged to recover some of the revenue lost by charging a small fee for the larger pieces of timber, so he decided to charge whoever was taking away the timber. Outsiders, reassured that they could take the timber legitimately after the payment of a small fee, preferred paying, thus avoiding the wrath of the SEP villagers and the threat of being caught. After a confrontation, the Ranger left, saying that he would deal with the issue the next morning. After his departure, the villagers from the SEP reassured the outsiders that they understood their firewood needs and were willing to share the timber that had been felled by the storm. In front of the Ranger, they were enemies, behind his back they were willing to cooperate. Behind this somewhat peculiar behavior was a

them) to gain access to the high value timber. In the case of fisheries, collective efforts have only been successful

monitoring of the Ranger's activities to make sure that he was following the rules and not being lenient to outsiders. At the same time, the villagers wanted to be the one's that extended understanding and sympathy and building goodwill by allowing the outsiders to also benefit from the storm. This incident shows how villagers can also use the existence of the Forest Department to advance positions they favor. It also illustrates the kind of empowerment that villagers desired—if outsiders were to be allowed to take timber—they wanted to be the ones making that decision, yet they welcomed the restrictions placed on their generosity by the impersonal state in the form of the Ranger.

The subaltern account has tended to treat the conflicts and problems of cooperation as of one between the (wicked) Forest Department and the (good) villagers. But it seems clear from the illustration offered above that the problem is a more complex one that often pits villages against other villages and villagers against each other where there is much strategic behavior and the frontline foresters are deeply involved. The collective action problems of protection were not resolvable independently of the Forest Department. The increasing cooperation with local forest officers that I describe in the next chapter gave villagers some authority to exclude other communities from their forests. In turn, this helped alleviate the collective action problem among themselves by providing assurance that their collective protection efforts would not be wasted.

when backed by the state (Bromley 1992).

4. Community led diffusion

Like the official account, the issue of the diffusion of informal protection groups is not explicitly explained in the subaltern account. Rather, in the subaltern account informal groups seem to form independently of one another in response to degradation. Thus, this account would predict that FPC formation would appear at random throughout the region, depending on which areas had the most degradation. In the case of various districts, Purulia could be expected to have the largest number of early FPCs, since its forests were the most degraded in the region (as one forester remarked to me, “if we can succeed with JFM in Purulia, we can succeed with JFM anywhere”).⁵⁴ The broad evidence on FPC formation does not support this contention—apart from the few FPCs in the Pancha Beat, Purulia seems to have been more backward than other districts like Bankura and Midnapore in the formation of the early informal groups. Alternative explanations of diffusion are essential to understand the pattern of spread of informal groups.

One of my early ideas was that perhaps community-led JFM spread through West Bengal informally through word of mouth by those who migrated out of their villages to work in other districts to work as labor and earn cash income in the dry season. I thought they might see, or speak of the efforts of community protection and how they were working to protect the forests. This hypothesis would predict that the regions with the greatest migration might have the earliest and most numerous FPCs. Yet, I found that this was not the case either. In my interviews, no one reported hearing about protection groups through such migration. This is probably because villagers migrated to the rich agricultural regions such as Burdwan or to the industries near the coal belt. These regions were not highly forested and did not have any working protection

groups. The information on FPC formation also supports this possibility as almost all the FPCs in Burdwan and Birbhum (the two main regions of migration) were not formed in the 1990s.⁵⁵

The dynamic of community-led diffusion that I did find was far more interesting. Some villages that had started protection groups in their villages were firm in preventing neighboring villages from raiding their forests, especially as the forests regenerated and became an attractive source of firewood and NTFPs.⁵⁶ When outsiders were caught, villagers would tell them to go to their Beat Officer and demand formation of their own protection groups. Then they would have their own forests for firewood and would not have to be caught like criminals in other people's forests.⁵⁷ This set off a chain reaction. Neighboring villages responded by starting protection groups if they had access to some forest on their own. Then they too began to similarly prevent other villagers from entering their patches of protected forests. The formation of autonomous forest protection committees then followed like ripples in a wave, spreading out from the first protection group.

In this process of diffusion, the nature of the problem and the solution itself became the driving force spreading the idea of FPC formation. In most cases of innovation, diffusion is problematic because people are not willing to change or experiment with new forms. External agents, for example extension workers, have to persuade people to adopt the innovation through explanations of the benefits, motivation and often subsidized inputs. Yet, in the case of JFM the

⁵⁴ Interview, SP, Calcutta, 22 January 1997.

⁵⁵ The earliest FPCs in Burdwan and Birbhum were formed in 1988.

⁵⁶ In other cases, as mentioned earlier, the protection efforts of the group faltered as they were unable to prevent neighboring villages from entering the protected area.

closure of protected forests to neighboring villagers forced them to accept the formation of FPCs in their own villages as the only way out. What it suggests is that adoption of new ideas is difficult unless not doing so impinges directly on the status quo—in this case not being able to continue with the previous patterns of collecting firewood. When the nature of the problem and solution has an inbuilt mechanism to promote diffusion, as in the case of JFM, it becomes easier to upscale.

C. Remaining questions

The subaltern account laid out above raises several questions regarding the trajectory of JFM in West Bengal. First, as I outlined above the account does not explain how villagers overcame problems of collective action, and also raises the question of how one defines “community”. As the literature suggests, in places where villages were small and homogenous collective action was likely to be less of a problem than in large heterogeneous villages. There is also the more important related question, how did the cooperation emerge in a climate of mistrust and conflict between the Forest Department and communities? Examples from my research suggest that such obstacles to collective action were widespread in grassroots attempts to form protection groups.

Second, in the subaltern account, the mechanism explaining the widespread diffusion of these FPCs is left unclear. It suggests that many of these FPCs were formed independently of each other, based on the extent of degradation of the forests in question. Yet, this explanation seems unsatisfactory for it suggests that communities would wait till the forests were degraded in order to initiate protection activities. Some have argued that spontaneous community management

⁵⁷ However, in many cases formation of their own FPC did not deter the newly formed FPC members from poaching

gathered momentum only under the supportive Left Front government rule. However, this leaves us with the related question--why did these spontaneous groups not emerge earlier between 1977 and 1980 when the degradation of the forests was fairly severe and the Left Front government had already come to power? Rural mobilization by the CPI (M) and other members of the Left Front coalition had started as early as the late sixties and seventies. By the early eighties, political parties were well entrenched in the rural areas. After it came to power the Left Front was not pressured by forest protection groups to make policy inclusive. In fact, the subject of forests was included in *zilla parishad* (the district level tier of the three-tier *panchayat* system) responsibilities only in 1985.

The third question is how and why did these dispersed instances of protection lead to a formalized policy change, a question that the subaltern account is silent about. As I pointed out earlier, although there were several groups in the state prior to the JFM order, the total area that they protected was quite small. Moreover, in other states in India, when communities have directly impacted policy changes, they have formed groups and done so largely through political struggles (Gadgil and Guha 1994). The most famous of these is the Chipko movement where women of Gopeshwar prevented contractors from felling mature oak forests by hugging the trees with their bodies. The Government of Uttar Pradesh was forced to give in to the demands of the Chipko protesters and stop felling of the forests. In another part of the country, the villagers of Karnataka, through a series of protests won the battle against the leasing of forest produce to industry at subsidized rates (Kulkarni 1983). In the case of JFM in West Bengal, communities

on the older FPCs' more attractive forests, leading to conflicts between communities.

were not demanding participation in state forest management, nor did communities start social movements to regain control over access to forest produce.

A fourth question this account raises is that if the emergence of informal protection groups was indeed a spontaneous movement, why did the state concede a 25 percent share to the FPCs in its formal orders? If villagers had been protecting forests spontaneously through informal protection groups, there was no real need to promise them a share of the produce—the promise of firewood for personal use and NTFPs might have been adequate to secure their cooperation. The sharing of twenty-five percent of the profits is quite significant—in no other revenue earning sector does the state share the revenue at source—distribution of state revenues is done through the state planning process. Thus, while partially correct, the spontaneous community protection account also leaves many questions in the JFM story unanswered.

IV. Conclusions

In this chapter I examined some of the explanations for the origins of JFM in southwest Bengal. I discussed two accounts of the origins—the official account and the subaltern account with the aim of finding points of consistency and contradiction within and between them. As we saw, at first glance the official account presents a good explanation of the origins of JFM in southwest Bengal. It is useful in negating the poor prevalent image of public officials in development by pointing to cases where public officials have innovated. Yet, in its narrative it follows the conventional understandings of innovative officials, an experimental project that was successful, diffusion of the project and subsequent adoption. In my fieldwork I found however, that the diffusion of FPCs did not follow quite the linear path that the official account suggests. Further,

as we saw in this chapter, this account also leaves many questions about the trajectory of JFM in West Bengal open.

The spontaneous community management account highlights certain aspects of JFM that are obscured by the official account. The idea that villagers had been protecting forests independently suggests that indigenous systems of protection and management can be in conflict with officially structured Forest Protect Committees putting the JFM program in jeopardy. Administrative boundaries of the FD do not always overlap with the boundaries adopted by the informal FPCs. Similarly, one of the biggest sources of dispute in the JFM program today is the question of when protection activities started. The specific dates are important because FPCs can get the benefits of profit sharing through timber felling only after a minimum of five years of protection (and only when the *sal* trees are at least ten years old). Village groups who have been protecting forests since the early eighties are unhappy when they are registered as having started much later, as this will increase the period before they can get the benefits of profit sharing. For example, in Karandih FPC, which has been protecting forests intermittently since 1970 and has documented evidence to prove it, has been registered only in 1991. Chatterji reports similar issues arising in the neighboring state of Orissa where the Forest Department has imposed official Van Samrakshana Samiti (VSS) structures on traditional protection groups.⁵⁸ Villagers do not agree with the composition of the Executive Committee of the official VSS as they feel that it is elitist and would prefer to retain their informal executive committee with elected members from the poorer groups (Chatterji 1998). Negotiating such issues requires recognition of the indigenous efforts of the people a task that is well accomplished by the subaltern account.

Yet, as we saw in this chapter, this account too leaves several questions about the trajectory of the JFM policy unanswered.

Besides highlighting different aspects of agency, the questions raised by examining these alternative accounts foretell some of the problems facing JFM today. The most obvious is the fact that communities have different interests in the regenerating forests than the Forest Department—FPCs prefer low and spread out *sal* trees for ease of collection of leaves and firewood whereas the FD prefers tall trees for their valuable timber. FPCs would like to control the cutting of timber according to their needs of cash and firewood, whereas the FD has its own rotational plans for felling based on balancing the fellings within each range and ensuring adequate marketing capacity. Some FPCs for example, are willing to wait till the price of *sal* poles goes up. Other FPCs who have been protecting forests for a long time are ready to cash in now and would like the trees to be felled soon.⁵⁹ These wishes might not fit in with the FD rules as well as their working plans. FPCs would like more fruit bearing and medicinal trees whereas the FD would prefer to plant high-value timber trees. The different roots of protection activities are reflected in the preferences of communities and the Forest Department. Currently, these interests are kept from conflicting in the tentative equilibrium that JFM represents—but could easily pose serious problems in the future.

One of the issues of contention around JFM is the question of whether FPCs are largely community initiated or Forest Department initiated. My research as well as a quick survey of the research on JFM suggests that the number of protection groups formed with the initiative of the

⁵⁸ VSSs are the Orissan equivalent of FPCs in West Bengal.

Forest Department are almost equal to the number of groups formed independently from the Forest Department. Of the fifteen FPCs whose stories I collected, about half said they were self-initiated and the other half claimed to have been motivated by the Forest Department. In cases where the Forest Department was a significant actor, it was always the front-line foresters (the Beat and Range Officers) who motivated the villagers. Similar findings are reported by other research. In one of the earliest studies of five FPCs in Southwest Bengal Chandra found that Range or Beat Officers were instrumental in the formation of FPCs in all the cases (Chandra and Poffenberger 1989).⁶⁰ In another study Harvey found that the Forest Department initiated FPCs equaled the number of community initiated FPCs (in one village he found that villagers were still not enthusiastic about JFM because it was an economically better of village) (Harvey 1994). These stories of FPC origins from my fieldwork and the wider literature indicate that the issue of understanding the origins of JFM through individual case studies is not simple. While field research partially supports the spontaneous community forest management account, it also suggests that support from the Forest Department was critical to the formation and success of FPCs, especially in cases where protection groups have sustained their efforts in the long run.

Such mixed evidence raises several issues. To what extent is the account of spontaneous community a “true” subaltern account? Do communities give credit to the Forest Department even though they have initiated protection systems on their own because they realize that the FD still holds all the power over the distribution of benefits and allocation of departmental works over JFM? Or alternatively, can we understand the self-initiated portrayal of FPCs as a process

⁵⁹ Due to limited capacity, the FD took a decision to restrict the felling in each FPC to only 20 ha.

of recreation and reinterpretation of the origins of JFM by communities, and therefore an indicator of successful formation of autonomous groups by the state? As many observers note, new autonomous community management systems are continuously being “discovered” (Sivaramakrishnan 1998). How do the everyday interactions between villagers and foresters contribute to the mutual constitution of FPCs?

These questions, though unanswered, are important in light of the prevailing support for all kinds of groups in civil society. In current development discourse, social capital in the form of grassroots organizations, clubs, networks and ties, is viewed as the missing ingredient for development. Research has raised the question of whether social capital is historically predetermined or whether governments have the ability to catalyze the formation of social capital. The case of JFM from the official perspective appears to be a case of successful creation of social capital—the creation of grassroots institutions for the collective management of natural resources. From the community perspective, the case of JFM can appear to be a case of the co-optation of grassroots social capital into an institutional form that is controlled by the state. Whatever perspective one takes, the issue of origins and diffusion is complex and multiple layered.

Moreover, the issue of FD-led vs. community-led FPCs is not simply one of academic interest. The question of agency and initiative in the past, contributes to empowerment for action today. Understanding the protection efforts as their own initiative is empowering for communities and

⁶⁰In some cases the field staff had met with community groups up to twenty times in order to generate interest and point out the economic and environmental benefits of protection.

reinforces their capacity to control their environment. At stake are current questions of knowledge, control and power in which JFM operates today. The past is implicitly brought to bear upon practical questions such as what species to plant, or questions about the role of indigenous knowledge in forestry, or questions of whether communities can be trusted not to overexploit the forests if they are given greater control over decision-making. Thus, for communities, understanding the formation of FPCs as originating in their own efforts is not of abstract historical importance, but is empowering and provides them with agency today.

The larger material issue concerns the allocation of resources. With the increasing interest of international donors in JFM and their eagerness to support these partnerships, resources from aid agencies have poured into the country. These alternative accounts of the origins of JFM speak directly to the donors in suggesting how JFM should be supported. Put crudely, the alternatives lie between channeling the funds by supporting community groups or the Forest Department. For Forest Departments strapped of cash in the prevailing period of economic reforms and reduced returns from forestry, the donor inputs are a significant source of income. For communities, they are ways of gaining from resources directly, and building their own capacity to bootstrap their development. What this chapter has illustrated is that it is not a question of either/or—the two alternative views are not mutually exclusive—one needs a strong Forest Department to have strong and vibrant FPCs.

Chapter 4

A THIRD NARRATIVE:

THE ROLE OF FRONT LINE WORKERS AND THE WEST BENGAL SUBORDINATE FOREST SERVICE ASSOCIATION

I. Introduction

The previous chapter argued that in the existing literature there are two main, contrasting explanations of the origins of JFM in West Bengal: the “official” account that locates agency in progressive mid-level foresters, and the “subaltern” account that locates agency in activist local communities (Chapter 2). In this chapter, I present a third explanation, that has been missed by earlier researchers: the active and progressive role played by the trades union representing the front-line forestry workers —the West Bengal Subordinate Forest Service Association (WBSFSA or the Association). In demonstrating the significance of the union, I am not suggesting that the official and subaltern accounts are wrong. They are simply incomplete. A more complete story, incorporating the role of the union, helps us to better understand both the prospects for the continuation of JFM in West Bengal and its potential replicability in other states of India.

The WBSFSA’s active support of a participatory forest policy is surprising because it contrasts with the picture of public sector unions opposing reforms that is prevalent in the literature. Further, the WBSFSA not only supported reform, it was proactive in pursuing it. For a union that had not spoken up on forest policy issues before, taking up the banner of participatory forest management was very radical, especially as participatory management meant that its members,

the front-line workers would lose some of their own powers. In pursuing its policy stance moreover, it publicly opposed the position of the mid and senior forest officers (the gazetted forest officers) a situation that was quite unusual. Other public sector unions in West Bengal have not been as active in pursuing particular policy positions making the WBSFSA's stance even more curious.

In Section II following this introduction, I demonstrate that the union has indeed been active in promoting JFM, through several channels and over an extended period. In Section III, I explain why it has been influential - and thus to some degree why union leadership felt that policy activism was worth the effort and investment. The key part of the story is the close relationship between the union and the CPI (M), the political party that has dominated the ruling coalition in West Bengal from 1977 to the present day. The union was on the inside track in policy formulation. I then ask why the union was in favor of JFM, rather than some alternative policy reforms. There are two parts to that story. The first and more general, treated in Section IV, is that there was a crisis in the state forests of West Bengal from the late sixties to the early eighties, that had complex political, ecological, and economic dimensions. It was not clear that either the forests or the Forestry Department had much of a future. There was a widespread feeling that something had to be done. JFM appeared to offer a solution that was not only technically viable but also politically attractive from the perspective of the CPI(M) and its cadres within the WBSFSA. The second part of the story, treated in Section 5, is more specific. One consequence of this general forest crisis was that working conditions became very uncomfortable for the front-line forest workers. First, they were subjected to an increased level of physical assault, including murder, from other parties—local villagers and small-scale illegal commercial

timber poachers—who were staking their claim to forest produce in a very aggressive fashion. Second, the frontline forest workers and their families were finding themselves socially isolated from, and ostracized by, the villagers among whom they and their families lived. In sum, the combined work-cum-social situation of front line forest workers was becoming very unpleasant and dangerous. JFM was seen as a way of alleviating this problem through improving relations between the forest service and villagers. I conclude in Section 6.

II. UNION ACTIVISM FOR POLICY REFORM

The West Bengal Subordinate Forest Service Association is a union of the subordinate forest workers (front-line workers)—i.e. those employees in the Forest Service who are not Gazetted Officers.¹ This includes all employees below the rank of the Assistant Divisional Forest Officer (ADFO). A total of forty-seven categories of field workers are eligible to become members of the Association including Rangers, Beat Officers, Forest Guards, Van Mazdoors (forest laborers), Mahouts (elephant trainers), Majhis (boatmen), and Malis (gardeners). What unites these diverse members of the WBSFSA and distinguishes them from other lower level employees (for example office clerks), are two features of their work situation—(a) front-line forestry workers do not have fixed hours of work, and (b) they are required to live in the areas they work.² Of the approximately 10,000 subordinate forest service employees (compared to the approximately 200 gazetted forest officers), around 95 percent belong to the WBSFSA, the remaining five percent

¹ Literally, gazetted officers are officers whose promotions and transfers appear in the official state gazette. The difference between gazetted officers and non-gazetted officers is similar to the distinction between management and labor in private firms. Gazetted officers bear greater responsibilities and higher privileges than non-gazetted officers.

² Office staff such as clerks and accountants have their own union and are not part of the WBSFSA.

belong to other regional associations, for example the Hill Employees Association active in Darjeeling.³

Table 4.1 Strength of West Bengal Forest Department in 1987

Service	Strength
Indian Forest Service, West Bengal Forest Service and others (Gazetted Staff)	207
Subordinate Forest Service (Non Gazette staff)	4333
Others	5217
Total	9757

Source: West Bengal Forest Statistics 1986-87.

Note: The category “others” includes muster roll workers who were later regularized.

The WBSFSA is organized in a relatively decentralized manner, similar to the organization of the CPI (M) in West Bengal. There are 25 Divisional Committees that are divided into 172 units.

The units are the main focus for mobilizational work as well as a point for collecting and representing grievances. Unit leaders meet with members once a week to discuss problems, and also convey information about the status of their demands. There is an element of awareness building in these meetings in which Marxist ideology and its relevance to the prevailing situation in the country are discussed. The discussion is also used to clarify the position of the Association on various issues of labor in West Bengal. The Divisional Committees handle similar discussions at the Divisional level. These organizational networks are efficient in disseminating information as well as keeping tabs on developments in the units.

³ In the 1970s almost all eligible front-line workers belonged to the WBSFSA. Since the emergence of a separatist Gorkha movement in the Darjeeling Hills in the early eighties, the employees of the hill regions have formed their own union that has sympathies with the separatist movement. Most of the employees supporting the Hill Employees Association are not native Bengali, but are of a different ethnic background—Nepali, Bhutani, Assamese etc. They speak a dialect that is a cross between Nepali and Hindi with a different script than Bengali.

The Association's headquarters are located in Calcutta along with the offices of other CPI (M) affiliated government employees associations. All such CPI (M) sympathetic associations are federated into the State Coordination Committee (SCC) that speaks for approximately 250,000 public sector employees. The State Coordination Committee is the main mediating body between the Left Front Government and the government employees. Although the WBSFSA is not significant in the SCC relative to membership size, as one of the founding members, it wields considerable influence. As a result, the WBSFSA has been an active player in worker-management relations of public sector employees in West Bengal.

Unlike other public sector unions (even in West Bengal), the WBSFSA has since the early 1970s taken a strong policy stance and actively promoted participatory forest management. It has done this mainly through four channels: (a) taking an independent stand; (b) petitioning Forest Ministers and other political leaders; (c) appealing to villagers through extension and publicity; and (d) mobilizing its own rank and file. These four strategies have been successful to varying degrees depending upon the political context. From the advent of the Left Front government, the WBSFSA has gained influence in the policy process and has been able to lobby effectively for a participatory policy.

A. Taking an independent stand

The incident that crystallized WBSFSA's stand against the existing forest policy of protection through policing was also responsible for WBSFSA taking an independent position from the Forest Department on policy issues. The incident occurred during a *hat* (regional market) raid at Badatand in Purulia on the 18th of June 1973. At the time, a new strategy had been adopted—

rather than attempting to increase the policing of forest areas (which was difficult given limited manpower) the plan was to mount surprise raids on the weekly *hats*. This would enable the Forest Department to catch offenders at the point of sale rather than in the process of illegal tree felling.⁴ It was the practice to raid hats with a police escort in case problems should arise in the process of seizing illegal timber. During the raid in question, there was a confrontation between the forest officers and the villagers. While the exact sequence of events on that day is not known, it is evident that the police escort opened fire on the villagers, resulting in the deaths of two persons and injuries to three others.

The incident attracted wide publicity and the Forest Department was cast in a poor light. The DFO of Purulia was telegraphically transferred and several officers suspended. A one-man commission of inquiry—the Sarkar Commission—was appointed to investigate the firing, particularly to see if there were grounds to believe that the firing was justified (Calcutta Gazette 1974). The Commission invited written statements from all the parties involved in the incident; in response members of the public, the Forest Department and the police filed statements. The villagers contention was that the seizure of forest produce was illegal and the firing excessive and unjustified. The Forest Department and the police filed statements that were nearly identical and suggested the firing was necessary for the defense of persons and of government property.

In an unprecedented move, the Subordinate Forest Service Association filed its own statement apart from that of the Forest Department. This statement referred particularly to the “defective” forest policy that had led to the violence and bloodshed. In their statement, the Association was

⁴ As mentioned earlier, all civilians needed a permit for the transportation of timber. At these market raids, it was

sympathetic to the villager's viewpoint. It pointed out that villagers in the vicinity of the forests owned by the *zamindars* used to enjoy certain rights and privileges such as pasturage, dry wood, tree leaves, timber for agricultural implements and wood for personal house-building at low cost. The Association argued that since the vesting of the forests with the government, villagers were deprived of these privileges and resented it. Because of these unfair constraints, villagers sided with the smugglers and unscrupulous traders rather than with government employees. The Association warned that if the situation were not addressed through an appropriate amendment of the forest policy, forest protection would not be possible. Such a move reflected the deep resentment within the subordinate forest service about the conditions of their work and dissatisfaction with the existing policy that put them in a difficult position. Senior forest officers were deeply hurt by what they thought was a betrayal of the usual code of keeping dissatisfaction within the organization and presenting a united face to the public.⁵ As a result of this incident, the WBSFSA publicly took an independent stand on forest policy—a situation unprecedented in the public sector unions at the time.

B. Petitioning Ministers

To advance its independent policy stand, the Association repeatedly lobbied forest ministers through organized protest marches in Calcutta, the capital city. A strategy of marching on the capital and forcing ministers and other political leaders to give public assurances that their demands will be met is a popular means of getting demands heard in developing countries, especially for weaker rural groups whose strength lies in numbers. Although the Association has pursued this strategy consistently, it did not have much success during the days of the Congress

easy to ascertain which operators were selling timber without permits, arrest them and seize the produce.

government. It has been more successful since the Left Front government in 1977 because of the sympathies of the political parties to rural issues, as well as the close relationship between the Ministers and the Association.

The Association officeholders have met various Forest Ministers in order to alert them to the problems faced in implementing existing forest policies.⁶ As early as 1969, during the second rule of the United Front government, the WBSFSA held a massive protest march to the Writers Building⁷ (the headquarters of government administration in Calcutta) on 27 December 1969 (see Photo 4.1). Besides the usual demands relating to basic needs of forest workers, the memorandum submitted to the then Forest Minister Bhabhatosh Soren included concerns about forest degradation and critiques of existing forest policy for contributing to degradation. However, the United Front government was replaced soon thereafter, and no action was taken on the memorandum.

In May 1972 (prior to the hat incident in Purulia), representatives of the Association again led a protest march in the capital (see Photo 4.2). They met with the new Forest Minister Sitaram Mahato (Congress) to present the problems and demands of forest workers.⁸ The two main issues under discussion were the preservation of the forests and the security of the staff. The

⁵ Ironically, this very incident led the District Forest Officer in charge to realize that the policy of policing was not going to work and made him committed to involving forest villagers in protection.

⁶ Unfortunately three key Forest Minister's (Sitaram Mahato, Parimal Mitra and Ambarish Mukherjee) in the JFM story had died before the research was conducted.

⁷ The Writers Building, the seat of administration in Calcutta has come to epitomize the worst of bureaucracy—inept public officials, lost files and waste of public resources.

⁸ Interview, RKS, Barasat, 1997 and VP, Purulia, 1997.

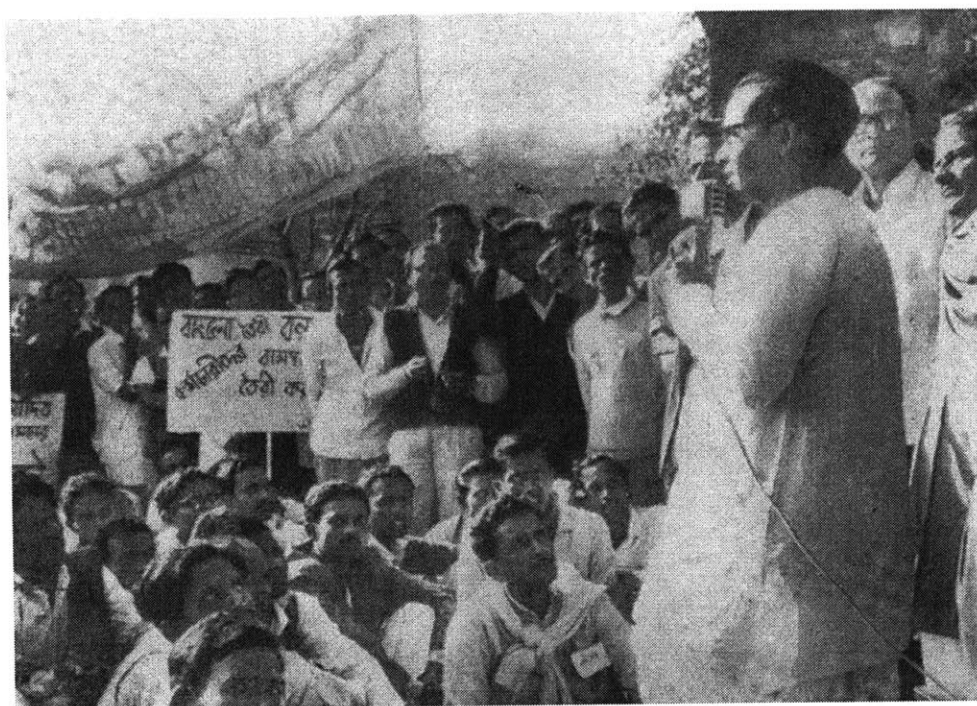


Photo 4.1 Forest Minister Bhabotosh Soren addresses the WBSFSA delegation, 1969.



Photo 4.2 Demonstration led by SCC and WBSFSA, Calcutta, 1972.

Association was critical of the administration and the prevailing forest policy and argued that due to faulty practices, the subordinate staff was being put in a difficult position and valuable forest resources lost. An ex-officeholder recalled that the Minister responded by asking the Association to give him comprehensive suggestions as to how the forests should be managed. This was an enormous task for the Association who had “no real interest in the formation of plans”⁹. The Association decided to take up the challenge.

The leaders of the Association drew up a broad memorandum of several pages including suggestions for improvement. The memorandum critiqued the existing forest policy and offered several suggestions for the improved protection and management of the forests. One of the central points in the memorandum was the need to involve people in the management of forests. The Association felt there was the need for “mass awareness” of the importance of forests and solutions to the problems of degradation should simultaneously deal with the needs of the rural people (Chakravarty 1982). Each suggestion was discussed at great length in a 3-day meeting about the memorandum prior to its submission to the Forest Minister.¹⁰ This memorandum was also sent to the Chief Minister to draw his attention to the problems of front-line workers. Following the drafting of this memorandum, the Association held a series of meetings with the various related Departments, such as Land Reforms and Rural Development to discuss the proposals made by the WBSFSA. Simultaneously the proposals were submitted to the Chief Conservator and deputations were dispatched to each level of management including the Divisional Forest Officers suggesting this as a preferred policy alternative. As one ex-

⁹ Interview, RKS Barasat, 1997.

¹⁰ I made several efforts to locate a copy of this memorandum but without success. Its existence however was corroborated independently by several people.

officeholder recounted, senior staff was astonished by the depth of the analysis presented and the detailed recommendations offered in the memorandum. As a result of these activities, the government commissioned a committee for revising the forest manual and an attempt was made to form an advisory committee to the Forest Department that would include Members of the Legislative Assembly (M.L.A.'s), Anchal Pradhans (elected representatives at the district level) and officials of other Departments at the local level (Chakravarty 1982). Unfortunately, these initiatives became victims of the political turmoil that characterized the period from 1967 to 1977.

By 1977, the situation had changed. The Left Front came to power with a sweeping victory at the polls. The new Forest Minister, Parimal Mitra was sympathetic to the problems of forest workers and the activities of the Association to improve their situation. He addressed the State Conference of the Association in early 1978 saying, "You have no security of life, and therefore you've got the right to organize movements. I congratulate the foresters, rangers and forest guards for their performance of duties against all odds" (Mitra 1978). The Minister was also aware of the demands of the organization for a participatory policy and was personally committed to it because he himself came from a background of organizing.¹¹ "Many (senior forest officers) say that vehicles are essential to protect forests. We shall surely give the vehicles, but that will not save the forests. Forest protection can only be ensured by the forest-fringe people"; and further, "The issue of cooperation with the people has remained only in theory with the officers. You must cooperate with the villagers" (Mitra 1978).

Between July and September of that year, the Association leaders met with the Minister several times.¹² An officer of the Association related that while the Minister agreed in principle, with their proposals, he also acknowledged that it was very difficult to “change things from the Writers Building.”¹³ According to my interviewee, the Minister said, “go and show in the field, convince the people, start a movement.”¹⁴ The Association took the Minister’s suggestions seriously and started efforts to motivate the forest-fringe communities as we shall see in the next section.

C. Appealing to villagers

The late 1970s were a turning point for the Association as it began working directly with forest fringe villages to promote its vision of community involvement in forest protection and regeneration. The idea was to build up a popular support for a participatory policy. The Association was explicit about the need for a mass movement—“we think that no Government declarations or legal adjustments can alter the situation, for which movements and organizational set up are necessary” (WBSFSA 1982). The Association worked through the *panchayats*, the members of other trade union movements, the Kisan Sabha (farmers organization) and local

¹¹ In the forties, Parimal Mitra was a leader in the historic Tebhaga movement in Jalpaiguri district. Later he organized railway workers and tea-garden laborers.

¹² Including August 10th, and August 14th 1977.

¹³ In the beginning, the newly formed Left Front Ministry faced the problem of getting the administration to implement its policies. For example, land reforms were the first policy to be implemented by the Left Front government, as it had been a part of its election promises. However, in the end, to implement land reforms, the government sought to go around the bureaucracy. In places where land reform was not effectively administered, some argue that they have been thwarted by the bureaucracy (Kohli 1987). In the forestry sector, the Minister, Mr. Parimal Mitra complained of bureaucratic resistance. In one instance he stated, “When we asked them (gazetted Forest Officers) to implement the minimum wage policy, they said there were no funds. I have told them that we shall give the funds. But even then there is much dilly dallying” (Mitra 1978).

¹⁴ Interview, RKS, Barasat, 1997.

schoolteachers and doctors.¹⁵ They distributed flyers and held meetings and seminars appealing to the people to involve them in the regeneration and reforestation efforts. They sought widespread publicity in regional newspapers about the problems of deforestation, the security of forest workers and the need to involve forest fringe villagers in forest management.

Further, the WBSFSA sought to use mass media to make its position known. In a press conference at the Press Club, Calcutta in 1982 the WBSFSA stated their concerns:¹⁶

“For a pretty long time, forests have become the target of *mass vandalism*. In broad daylight, forest wealth valued at lakhs and lakhs of rupees, are being looted from forests from North Bengal to Sunderbans in South Bengal. Fire arms are being increasingly used during the loot. Forest Guards and others engaged in protection work are being harassed and even killed” ((WBSFSA 1982, italics mine).

This move of holding an independent press conference on a policy issue was unprecedented for public sector unions at the time. In addition, the Association inserted several articles in regional newspapers outlining the serious problem of forest degradation and the numerous constraints to effective forest protection. The articles stressed the difficult situation that the front-line workers faced—working in the public interest while facing the violence of villagers.¹⁷ One headline read, “Unprotected workers in Protected Forest Areas” (Bhumilokhi 1981). Another article described the many problems faced by the forest workers and the movement that they had started (Ganashakti 1980). Such publicity increased public awareness of the problems of violence that front-line workers faced.

¹⁵ As these other organizations were also connected to the CPI (M) it was easier to gain credibility by working through them rather than going to the people directly.

¹⁶ It is important to note that for a public sector union to hold a press conference on a policy issue was totally unprecedented at the time and illustrates the pro-activism of the Association in promoting their policy stance.

¹⁷ For example, see Ganashakti, Sept 12, 1980, Jugantar, October 7, 1981, and Basumati, February 9, 1980.

To spread their message, the WBSFSA organized more than one hundred conventions in South West Bengal between 1977 and 1981. Each member donated a day's wage to the Association in order to fund these conventions. The Association also sought support from the Forest Administration who helped by sanctioning transport and arranging venues for the seminars. In these seminars, the Association invited senior forest officers, elected local officials, important local leaders and villagers to participate in an open discussion about the problems of forest protection. The anger and resentment of the villagers against foresters (both senior and subordinate) was evident in such meetings. Sivaramakrishnan (1996) notes that often villagers asked senior forest officers awkward questions and consequently embarrassed them. Although difficult at times, these meetings helped to bring the various parties together on a common platform to air grievances and build consensus that action was needed to prevent further degradation.

Such dissemination activities were carried out more intensely during the *Aranya Saptah* (forest week) that began informally as an Association led activity around 1977-78. At the time, the only official people-related forestry activity was the *Van Mahotsava* (forest festival) held on the 14th of July every year to encourage tree-planting activities by the people. The Association was against the *Van Mahotsava*, because it was limited to one day, and no follow-up care was planned for the trees that were planted. The *Aranya Saptah* was the Association's effort to extend forest related activities to a whole week. During the *Aranya Saptah*, the Association distributed thousands of seedlings with instructions of their proper care. Other activities included seminars on the importance of the forests, field visits and tours by important dignitaries to the most successful projects. At first, it was not a fixed period of a week, but varied between three

and fifteen days. By 1983-84 the state forest minister Parimal Mitra recognized the work of the Association and formalized the *Aranya Saptah*.¹⁸ Since its formalization, the last two days of the *Aranya Saptah* have been reserved exclusively for Association's activities.

These activities were supplemented by several non-forestry related developmental activities that WBSFSA undertook. For example, during the floods of 1978, the front-line foresters together with other government employee associations started a relief and rehabilitation program in flood affected areas. In addition, the Association held several blood donation camps, promoted the use of the smokeless chullahs and undertaken other such developmental activities from time to time. The main impetus behind these non forestry activities was to improve relations with the villagers and convey their sympathy with the villagers' difficulties.

In these efforts to improve relations with villagers and to create a mass movement, the Association appealed to the people at various levels. For the first time, the Association made the connection between environmental problems and forest degradation explicit, especially with respect to regarding groundwater reduction, recurring droughts, soil erosion and flooding. One flyer said,

“Small rivers and ponds are drying up, the canals are dry, tube wells are not drawing water, bore wells exhausted. Agriculture has become unproductive. There is also a scarcity of drinking water in many places. We have not forgotten the devastating flood of 1978. Scientists say that the indiscreet deforestation is the main reason for such droughts and floods” (WBSFSA 1982).

¹⁸ That year, the West Bengal pavilion at the Delhi Trade Fair carried a picture of the Association's activities. They were also featured in the magazine *Pashim Banga Patrika* (West Bengal Newsletter).

Other more direct concerns were also highlighted. The publicity pointed out how fuelwood was getting scarcer, affecting the rural economy both directly and indirectly. For example, one flyer said:

“Forests are disappearing at an alarming rate.... Villagers, especially those living in the forest fringes are dependent on the forests, since time immemorial for their daily requirement of fuel and subsistence. Where else can they go for fuel? Coal and kerosene are beyond their reach. Many use cowing as an alternative fuel, thereby depriving farm lands of valuable manure” (WBSFSA 1980).

The Association also showed that with the disappearance of the forests, employment for villagers in routine forestry work, such as clear felling, reforestation, lopping etc. would no longer be available. “According to an estimate, about 100,000 persons have lost their annual wage work due to forest destruction” (WBSFSA 1982).

Through such publicity, the Association not only sought to increase awareness among the rural population about the negative effects of deforestation but also sought to indicate that the Association and front-line workers were sympathetic to their difficulties. In this spirit, front-line foresters sought to increase publicity about government programs that were underutilized due to lack of awareness. For example, a Government Order had directed the Forest Department to sell forest products (firewood, NTFPs) at nominal prices to villagers, yet not many had taken advantage of this scheme. They also pointed out that the Government was implementing the social forestry program and that villagers should take advantage of the free seedlings being offered. As per their calculations villagers could earn “Rs. 500 per month from a 3 hectare plantation after ten years” (WBSFSA 1980). Such concrete information was publicized to encourage the people to participate in halting rapid deforestation.

The Association promoted action on two levels: (a) protecting the existing state forests (what later became JFM) and, (b) planting trees on non-forest wastelands (social forestry). First, in asking villagers to refrain from destroying state forest lands, the Association reminded people of their dependence. In cases where villagers were enthusiastic about protecting state forests, front-line foresters encouraged and supported them informally (see following subsection). They also made their own position regarding forest policy clear: “The monopoly of rights over state forest resources is still in the hands of traders-contractors and forest industries. This should be changed totally, and the forests should be instituted as the source of livelihood to the local poor including the tribal and economically and socially backward communities” (WBSFSA 1982). Till such policy change materialized however, the Association argued that villagers should help front-line foresters in conserving the remaining state forests.

Second, the Association reasoned that encouraging people to plant trees on common and private wastelands was one way of preventing villagers from denuding state forests for their subsistence needs. Further, the latter appeal dovetailed neatly with the state level social forestry program started in 1980. In fact, some front-line foresters were at the forefront of social forestry prior to the World Bank Social Forestry program. One Forest Ranger (an officeholder of the Association) devoted a part of his own landholding in the village of Ulidih to growing trees in order to encourage people to plant trees on their own land.¹⁹ When villagers saw that a forester was risking his own land (from appropriation by the state) by planting trees, they were convinced

¹⁹ Personal interview 1997. Also see Shingi (1986).

of the value of this approach and started planting trees on their own lands thus jumpstarting social forestry.²⁰

In sum, the WBSFSA's attempts to involve forest-fringe people in discussions about forestry sought to accomplish two main tasks. Foremost, the Association sought to improve the relations between foresters and villagers by encouraging dialogue, and showing sympathy towards the villagers' difficulties. Villagers could then be encouraged to cooperate with front-line foresters in protecting state forest lands and meeting their fuelwood needs by planting trees on their own lands. Second, the Association sought to highlight the difficulties of the work situation of front-line foresters and the public service nature of their work. Thus although frontline workers policed villagers, they were doing jobs that were in the larger interests of society.

D. Supporting rank and file

Apart from lobbying forest ministers and appealing to the villagers, the Association worked to support its members and implement the participatory approach that it was promoting. Towards this end, the Association encouraged its members to facilitate the formation of informal protection groups in their areas, indicating that it was likely that villagers would get something in return for their protection. Backed by the Association's support, front-line workers used the resources under their control (for example, discretion over the allocation of work e.g. in the harvesting of timber) to bring the villagers to their side. Typically, they would point out to the

²⁰ Later, when the World Bank was thinking about funding the social forestry program in the state, senior forest officials mentioned the work of front-line foresters at Ulidih. The Association was invited to meet with the World Bank mission to relate their experiences of motivating people. The success of such small social forestry projects initiated by the Association, even prior to the World Bank Social Forestry Project bears testimony to the fact that front-line workers were already working towards a participatory forestry.

villagers that they were not asking people to protect forests out of any self-interest. Even if the forests were destroyed the forest front-line workers would continue to have their jobs—so they would not suffer if the forests were degraded. Similarly, the front-line officers said that they would soon be transferred out of their particular locality—they could not take the regenerated forests with them. The only people who would benefit, they argued, would be the villagers themselves. In order to initiate protection, front-line foresters helped villagers informally to overcome the initial costs of protection.

Uncharacteristically, these foresters acted without authority to promote cooperation between villagers and the Forest Department, often at cost to themselves. In fact, this appears to be a classic case of front-line workers identifying with and lobbying for their clients.²¹ Between around 1980 and 1989, many front-line workers motivated people into forming protection committees by saying they would get some benefit at the final felling without getting approval for such steps from higher levels of authority. They promised that they would try and get the villagers a share, and the villagers should try as well. Senior officers were not aware of these promises by front-line foresters.²² When I questioned this, many of them said that even if the government order had not come out, they would have used their discretion and given the villagers some thing informally—a position that was supported by their Association. This suggests that front-line workers have always had discretion over a pool of assets that have been systematically unaccounted for by higher authorities. The point however is that by promising these assets to the

²¹ For example, see Kaufman (1967) for factors that encourage such a bonding between locals and foresters in the U.S. Forest Service.

²² One Ranger commented that even when senior forest officers were aware of what front-line foresters were doing, they ignored these activities because as he put it, the risk was borne by the front-line officers and seniors could always take the credit if the activities were successful in curbing forest degradation.

people they were directly reducing their own “unearned” incomes.²³ The consequence of these informal promises was a constituency that would demand profit-sharing and create a pressure for change.

Meanwhile, by the mid-eighties scattered news of the success of the Arabari experiment was circulating within the department. The regenerated trees at Arabari were now more than ten years old, and ready for felling. The villagers of the Arabari SEP project communities had started demanding their share of the profits from the sale of timber as they had been promised by Dr. Banerjee. In response to their demands and support of progressive foresters, there was on-going discussion within the Forest Department about giving the SEP communities twenty five percent of the timber share. The Association knew of these efforts and kept its members informed about these efforts through informal channels.

Simultaneously the Association recognized the need to increase awareness and discussion of its stance on policy within the organization and keep members abreast of developments in the field. In order to accomplish this, from 1980 onwards the Association started an occasional publication called the Bulletin (later called Sangati).²⁴ The journal served as a means of keeping members abreast of relevant developments in forestry, forest administration and forest policy. For example, it reported in detail the status of various petitions, the minutes of the state conferences of the Association and the responses of the Forest Administration to their demands. Apart from

²³ The point is that if front-line foresters were selling or otherwise profiting from their discretion over a certain pool of assets, they were reducing such “unearned” by promising something to the villagers.

²⁴ In 1982, the Association celebrated its 60th anniversary and published a commemorative issue for the occasion. From 1984 onwards the magazine was named Sangathi and was published quarterly. In 1991 it was registered as a newspaper and renamed Sangathana Sangati.

general articles (commentary on the developments in India, poems, short stories) the articles in the journal deal with issues of organizational culture, corruption, forest protection, people's participation and the history of the trade union movement. What is remarkable about the reports in the publication is the extent to which the discussion of problems of front-line workers are related to larger themes. For example, the report from one state conference laid out various points that local units ought to discuss, including the twenty one demands of the State Coordination Committee, details about how the Central Government was thwarting the State Government's attempts to improve employee conditions, and the various demands of the Association for improving the conditions of their members.²⁵ The dissemination of information through this journal was very successful and kept otherwise isolated front-line workers abreast of various issues.

Through the strategies outlined above, the WBSFSA sought to distinguish its position on forest policy from that of the Forest Department, to lobby for a change in the existing policy by making concrete suggestions for reform, and to support its own members in the informal implementation of these suggestions.²⁶ These activities were far from the original mandate of the association and are very unusual for a public sector union in India. Such a strong policy stance raises two questions—why did the Association invest so heavily in this activism and what was the reason it took a policy stand? These two questions are addressed in the following Sections (III and IV).

²⁵ Considering that the Association is informally associated with the CPI (M) however, discussion of the relation between the problems of forestry workers and larger forces of capitalism is not surprising.

III. ACTIVISM AND POLICY INFLUENCE

Activism on the part of the WBSFSA raises the question of why the Association thought it worthwhile to invest in policy lobbying. A high level of activism on policy issues does not necessarily imply that the Association would have been influential in the policy change that followed. Indeed, since policy change occurs through a variety of processes, it is difficult to sort out the influence of the Association's activities. As I show in this section however, the WBSFSA had reasons to believe that its activism would bear fruit. First, the WBSFSA is a union with strong historical connections to the CPI (M) and is deeply embedded in state politics.²⁷ The CPI (M) views the support of government employee associations as important in their ability to implement developmental programs.²⁸ The WBSFSA is especially important to CPI (M)'s strategy for another reason. Front-line forestry workers embody the deepest penetration of government administration in rural areas and is in a position to feel the pulse of politics at the local level.²⁹ For these reasons, strong suggestions made by the WBSFSA are unlikely to be ignored. Second, the WBSFSA has maintained close connections with the Forest

²⁶ My portrayal of the Association's work might seem as though they were singularly interested in policy issues. This is of course not true—from time to time, deputations were sent to the Office of the Chief Conservator of Forests to demand action on general issues. For example, a meeting with the CCF in 1984 included demands that the vacant posts of Forest Rangers be filled by promotion of Beat Officers at the earliest date, that successful completion of training at the West Bengal Forest School be rewarded through some benefits, that proper uniforms be issued to all staff below the rank of a Forest Guard and that regular medical checkups of Mahouts (elephant trainers) and Patwalas be done at their work sites (WBSFSA 1984).

²⁷ By law, public sector employees and their associations are banned from participating in political activities (Bag and Bag 1989). In practice however, most public sector unions are affiliated with political parties.

²⁸ Jyoti Basu realized this early on. In 1981 he wrote, "the future of West Bengal and the whole future of the political situation in India depends on ordinary government employees who through their dedicated work in government can implement progressive programmes benefiting the poor" (Basu quoted in Mallick 1993, :174). The tone of the new Left Front government was to be set by the CPI (M)'s own supporters in the State Coordination Committee. In fact, the CPM has gained the support of most government employees at lower levels through the use of pay increments and the support of trade union rights.

Ministers, especially in the Left Front government. This support of Forest Ministers was key in overcoming the objections of opposition within the bureaucracy (see Chapter 5).

To understand this influence of the Association with the CPI (M) since 1977, it is necessary to understand the roots of the Association within the larger labor movement in West Bengal, and its subsequent affiliation with the CPI (M).³⁰ Much has been written about the history of trade-unionism in India, particularly West Bengal. It is beyond the scope of this paper to review this history here.³¹ Here I confine myself to elements of this history that are important to showing how the Association came to be closely connected with the CPI (M) in West Bengal.

A. 1922-50 Early years.

The WBSFSA was formed in 1922 as a part of the wave of unionization that took place throughout India in the aftermath of World War I. Given relatively early industrialization in Bengal, one would have expected an early organization of workers. Curiously, there was not much union activity in Bengal till the turn of the century. In fact, it was not till 1905 that labor leaders in West Bengal realized their advantageous position in organizing labor while retaining the support of the nationalist movement. The nationalist movement in India was split on the question of worker unions—although it was hostile to the issue of labor legislation because it might harm nascent indigenous industry, it was sympathetic to the problems of workers under

²⁹ Forestry front-line workers are government employees that are the closest and most visible continuous presence of the administration for villagers. Tahsildars (land revenue administrators) and other government officials, are common for several villages and are not required to live in their area of work.

³⁰ My interpretation of the history of the organization comes mainly from interviews with ex-officeholders of the association and examination of old records available to me of the association. Unfortunately, many of the old records were considered of no value and destroyed when the association moved into its new offices near Sealdah Station.

British entrepreneurs and public services. In Bengal industry was dominated by the British, so labor leaders could take advantage of the support of the nationalist movement and organize public sector workers. Consequently, 1905 saw a series of strikes by public sector workers including the tram-workers, East Indian Railway workers and jute mill workers. This first period of unionization was short-lived however, and from 1908 to 1920 was a period of relative inactivity.

The second period of unionization began in the early twenties after World War I. In 1921, the British Government lifted the ban on the formation of unions by public sector workers. The difficult economic conditions after World War I were characterized by price rises and unavailability of essential commodities. There were fears of wage cuts and threats to security of employment. These conditions fueled the formation of many public sector unions. Responding to this opening, S.K. Mukherjee founded the West Bengal Subordinate Forest Service Association at Kurseong making it one of the first public sector employee unions to be formed in this period.³² Initially the organization was limited to *vankarmi* (forest laborers). The impetus was to protect the “subordinate” staff from the inhuman treatment and the arbitrary system of promotion at the hands of the senior forest officers, most of who were British.

In the beginning the public sector unions were not very active in getting benefits for their members. From the early 1930s this picture began to change and at least four federations of

³¹ For good overviews of the history of trade unionism in India see among others Chatterji (1980), Gupta (1984); Sen, (1982).

³² The first public sector union was that of the clerks of West Bengal Government--the West Bengal Ministers Office Staff Association--formed in 1920. Other unions included the Calcutta Tramway Workers Union and the Railway Workers Union.

unions were operating in Bengal. Most of their leaders were influenced by Marxist ideas about capitalism and its impact on labor (Chatterji 1980). By the 1940s, union coverage expanded to include most white collar employees in the government, the railways and the printing presses, in addition to manual workers in the jute, cotton textiles and paper mills.³³ The WBSFSA itself increased its union activism only in the late thirties when forest guards joined and swelled its ranks. The Association institutionalized its procedures, elected office-holders and held regularly scheduled meetings. Important popular leaders of the time were invited to participate in these meetings and the Association kept close contact with them.³⁴ During this phase however, its demands were still restricted to issues of wages and promotion. Three features of this early history are of significance--(a) that the WBSFSA was a part of the early emergence of organized labor in Bengal, (b) that it had roots in the anti-British and pro-nationalist movement, and (c) from its inception it had been influenced by Marxist ideas prevalent in the larger labor union movement of the time.

No records are available of Association activities in India's early post-independence years. We do know that the administration tried to limit the influence and activities of the Association. The Association lost official recognition in 1948, later regaining it in 1949. The main concerns of the organization continued to be those of pay scales, promotion procedures and other worker

³³ The unions formed at the time included the Bengal-Nagpur Railway Indian Labor Union, the Bengal Transport Workers Union and the Calcutta Port and Dock Shramik Union.

³⁴ An interesting aspect of this pre-independence phase was that senior forest officers would send representatives to the meetings of the Association. The Association interpreted their presence of course as a way of keeping a careful watch over the activities of the organization.

benefits.³⁵ However, it seems clear that till the mid sixties it was not very active on behalf of its members. As one ex-officeholder reminisced of the late forties and fifties:

—“The resolutions of those days adopted at the conference (the Annual Conferences of the WBSFSA) hardly had any bearing with the actual problems of the Forest Subordinates. Over and above that, the custodians of the then Association did not give much efforts to follow up whatever resolutions were forwarded to the Government for their implementation. In other word it was just annual congregation during the close of every calendar year. ...The result was that yearly resolutions were allowed to pile up at the Secretariat as the votaries of the Association had little scope to fight up things utilizing the banner of the Association as an instrument for collective bargaining” (Lala 1982,: 49).

Till the late fifties, the Association appears to have been dormant, not playing an important role in the labor movement or within the Forest Department. Some have suggested that Association officeholders were often coopted by management resulting in “penal measures” of its members (Lala 1982). Although it seems to have had a high political profile (Forest Ministers and leading journalists attended its annual conferences) it was not very successful in delivering benefits to its two to three thousand members.

B. 1950-1977 Political Turmoil

The history of the next three decades (50s, 60s and 70s) of the Association is intricately linked to the political history in West Bengal. In West Bengal as in the rest of India, the Congress Party dominated electoral politics from 1952-67 winning a majority of the seats (Weiner and Field 1974). During this early period, the various communist parties in the state were looking for possibilities of gaining political support, including rural workers and other employees. The opportunity to mobilize government employees appeared in 1953. In 1952-53, there was a bumper harvest, and the Food Minister Mr. Rafi Ahmed withdrew the public rationing system

³⁵ RKS claimed that there was an extensive discussion on the issue of forest protection in the report of the Annual

arguing that since there was a surplus in the food supply it was no longer needed. Sixteen thousand employees of the Public Distribution System were retrenched as a result. The retrenched employees protested and were supported by the communist parties and many leaders of the other government employee associations. The protest against retrenchment was successful and the chief minister Dr. B.C. Roy was compelled to absorb the retrenched workers in other government departments.³⁶ As a result, public sector employees realized that they needed to organize collectively in order to prevent such sudden retrenchment in the future and that the communist parties were the most sympathetic to their cause. Consequently, the State Coordination Committee (SCC) was formed in 1957 with the support of the pre-split Communist Party of India (CPI) as an umbrella organization to coordinate the activities of all the state employees associations in West Bengal. The formation of the Committee strengthened the power of the Association, as the WBSFSA was one of the founding members of the SCC.

Subsequently, the Chief Minister of the Congress Government S. S. Ray attempted to reduce the influence of the unions, especially those controlled by the left. The government banned the State Coordination Committee and 13 leaders were expelled under article 310 and 311 of the Constitution. Of these, two belonged to the WBSFSA. The SCC went underground and continued organizing public sector workers. The WBSFSA fared not much better.³⁷ One strategy of the government to limit union activity was to convert the post of a Ranger to a Gazetted Officer. This would have reduced the membership of the WBSFSA by about 250, almost ten

General Meeting of the Association in 1948.

³⁶ Some of these were absorbed by the Forest Department.

³⁷ After the formation of the State Coordination Committee, representatives of the management of the Forest Department no longer attended the state conferences of the Association, a practice that had been prevalent in the past.

percent.³⁸ More importantly, the Association would have lost a cadre of well-trained members that controlled real power in the forest areas and who occupied key posts in the organization.³⁹ Although the Association saw through this move to break their unity and successfully resisted the attempt, the struggle was far from over. Another strategy was to transfer confrontational officeholders of the Association to remote posts. Some were suspended for unlawful activities such as taking part in strikes and protests. Subsequently in 1959, the Government threatened to withdraw recognition of the Association if outsiders (some of who were the now suspended employees of the FD) continued to hold office.⁴⁰ The position was later rectified, but the dissatisfaction of the government with Associational activities continued and the late fifties and early sixties were punctuated by several protests against the Forest Department administration.⁴¹ Because of the conflictual relationship with the administration, running the organization became a difficult task.⁴²

³⁸ Figures are approximates from Biswas (1987).

³⁹ Rangers fill key posts in the operational side of forest management. For example, they are the only people authorized to handle cash in the divisions, ranges and beats. Moreover, since they are the highest ranking subordinate staff, they are better educated and trained than the other members.

⁴⁰ The constitution of India guarantees the right to form an association for any lawful person. However, as far as public sector workers are concerned, these rights are somewhat restricted. The Central Government Service Rule constrain unions through various conditions: i) that no person, who is not a government servant, is connected with the affairs of the association; ii) the association must consist of a distinct class of state government employees; iii) an association must represent not less than twenty percent of the category or categories of government servants; iv) the executive of the association is appointed from amongst the members only; v) the association shall not espouse or support the cause of individual civil servants; vi) the association shall not maintain any political funds or lend itself to propagation of views of any political party or politician; vii) the association shall not act against the code of conduct rules; viii) the association shall not enter into correspondence with a foreign agency or foreigner without the prior permission of government and, ix) the association shall maintain records.

⁴¹ For example in 1959, the Association fought to get nearly 300 employees of the Forest Department regularized. In another incident, the staff of the Bengal Forestry School went on an undeclared strike and the Association supported their efforts. This conflict resulted in the suspension of two General Secretaries of the organization.

⁴² For example, if important officeholders were transferred to remote locations, it became impossible to run the Association headquarters in Calcutta and continue the routine work of the organization. The Association claims that they continued the work throughout this difficult period with the help of other member organizations of the State Coordination Committee.

The period between 1966 and 1977 was one of extreme political turmoil in Bengal. As I discussed earlier (Chapter 1), between March 1967 and September 1977 there were a succession of governments formed by different political parties interspersed with short periods of direct rule by the Center. In 1967, for the first time a coalition comprising the various communist parties in the region—the United Front—had come to power. The victory of the left took the state by surprise, the parties that formed the coalition had never expected to win with such a strong support. The victory was also short-lived and the Center imposed Governor's rule soon thereafter. After a brief period of governor's rule, following the fall of the United Front government, in 1972 the Congress returned to power amidst widespread allegations of election fraud. The United Front, during their short period of rule (1967 and 1969) had realized that its support was tenuous. Aware that electoral strength could be mobilized in the rural areas, the left parties (particularly the CPI (M)) began organizing the peasantry. At the same time, they continued mobilizing government employees in order to reduce opposition to their policies in implementation. This strategy of the painstaking mobilization of the rural population paid off in the post Emergency elections of 1977 when the Left Front won in a landslide victory.

The experiences of the Association and the CPI (M) during this period of political turmoil served to consolidate the relationship of the Association and the CPI (M). While the CPI (M) had tried to accommodate the demands of the Association during its two brief periods of rule, the growing problems of governance prevented it from following through on its promises. However, it was well aware of the importance of the Association to its own political agenda and was more responsive in the period that followed.

C. Post 1977 The Left Front Government

When the Left Front came to power in 1977, the labor union movement in West Bengal got strong boost. Within the first eighteen months of the new regime, all but a few of the workers retrenched for trade union militancy during Congress rule were reinstated, the government appointed a pay commission to revise the salary structure of public servants in the state, and gave each low paid employee an ex-gratia payment of one hundred rupees during the festival season in lieu of a bonus (Sen Gupta 1979). Besides these immediate gains, the unions were encouraged by the fact that the Left Front welcomed direct communication with the grassroots and had a strong organization at the lower levels.⁴³ The general secretary of the WBSFSA echoed the jubilant mood in his report at the annual conference—

“..a govt. that is a friend of the people has come to rule the state of West Bengal. It goes without saying that in bringing about the process of change, the gathering of valuable experience and valiant struggles of mass organizations for existence, during the period of Emergency have played a crucial role” (Sengupta 1977).

The difficult years of political turmoil helped forge unity and strength within the Association and tightened its relationship with the CPI (M). At the same time, because of its key role in the SCC during its formation, the Association gained increasing power within the SCC that was now the main body for coordination of demands of state employees. The SCC works as a two way channel—demands of the state employees are conveyed to the CPI (M), but the party also constrains workers into limiting their demands in the interests of greater good of the party in power. So for example, although wage increases have been granted by the CPI (M), they were made in smaller steps than the employees would desire. With a strong hold over the SCC, the party is able to both retain the support of the workers as well as allow concessions to reasonable

limits. As an important member of the SCC, the WBSFSA was able to command the attention of the CPI (M).

Naturally, along with other public sector unions, the Association began to restate its long held demands. These demands included traditional ones such as wage raises, reinstatement of suspended workers, stopping the policy of penalizing workers for political and union activity as well as the improvement of working conditions through a reexamination of existing forest policy.

The Association succeeded in obtaining several concessions, both through the reinstated State Coordination Committee and directly by gaining hearings with the Minister. The General Secretary of the Association reported to the General Meeting on September 1977:

“The new Govt. of West Bengal has implemented the policy that there will be no punishment for participating in movements; and has re-appointed the many workers who were in leading positions in the staff associations of the State Govt. Departments. Also, the system of routine investigation into the worker’s past political involvement has been abolished. The Govt. has also declared its decision to re-appoint workers who were suspended or sacked on account of police reports; and to disburse salaries that were previously deducted as punishment for having participated in cease-works, strikes etc. The State Coordination Committee has retrieved lost privileges. Many black circulars of oppression have been withdrawn, and the Govt. has pledged in a circular to remove the obstacles to promotion and conferring of selection grade for the staff. Similar beneficial circulars and orders are being issued. You may also have been aware that there was a resolution to institute a pay commission to look into, and give recommendations about matters regarding wages and service opportunities of the staff....” (Sengupta 1977).

More importantly for our story, the WBSFSA enjoyed the freedom to organize protests and marches in the capital that increased its profile and gave its demands greater publicity. Since coming to power, the Left Front had given public sector unions the right to strike.⁴⁴ This was a

⁴³ The extent to which the Left Front was close to public sector unions is evident from the fact that despite criticism, the Left Front government allowed the Coordination Committee of State Government Employees (a CPI-M dominated trade union) a prominent role in organizing flood relief in the districts (Sen Gupta 1979:283-84)

⁴⁴ The leniency of the Left Front Government towards government employees has been criticized by several observers. By creating a base in the lower levels of the bureaucracy through increased benefits and concessions without corresponding expectations of performance, critics argue that the Left Front has created a gigantic unwieldy administrative structure that is not efficient in carrying out its own policies (Mallick, 1993).

significant concession since in many states in India, government employees are not allowed to strike.⁴⁵ These powers were used regularly by the WBSFSA to demonstrate in the capital as we saw in Section II.

Apart from its strong position in the SCC and consequently its connections with the CPI (M), the Association had since the late 1960s also forged direct connections with the Forest Ministers. In contrast to the Forest Ministers in the Congress led government who were largely of urban, educated background,⁴⁶ the Forest Ministers in the Left Front Government are from rural areas with histories of grassroots organization and concerns with the rural poor. Some have been involved with trade union organizing. This, one might argue has made them more sympathetic to the cause of forestry workers as well as the rural villagers.⁴⁷ The first forest minister in the Left Front government Mr. Parimal Mitra, had a strong commitment to communism and the trade-union movement.⁴⁸ With a background of organizing plantation workers, he was especially sympathetic to the difficulties faced by forestry frontline staff. Addressing the 39th conference of the WBSFSA in 1978 he said, “Your recommendations are valuable indeed. Our government will comply with them. Let me tell you that your role is important to our government” (Mitra

⁴⁵ Members of the West Bengal Civil Service and other allied executive and administrative services do not have the right to resort to strikes. For a fuller exposition of the service rules see Bag (1989).

⁴⁶ One exception was Sitaram Mahato who was the Minister of Forests in the Congress government from 1972-1977. He came from a rural area in Purulia and was active in the Agricultural Development Committee in his district. Coincidentally, he was also one of the two Forest Ministers who visited the Karandih informal forest protection group in 1971 and encouraged them.

⁴⁷ The CPI (M) since coming to power has long sought to retain the support of government employees by using pay increments and supporting trade union rights. There is some criticism that rather than making the administrative machinery more efficient in implementing reformist programs, it has made them indifferent to their jobs. Thus, attendance at government offices is low, procrastination is widespread and allegations of corruption are rampant. For example, the sluggishness in implementing land reforms after the first few years has been attributed to the indifference of the bureaucracy. As we shall see later, this is not the general situation with respect to forestry workers.

1978). This close relationship of the Association with the Forest Minister continued till his untimely death in 1985.⁴⁹ The next forest minister, Achintya Roy, was a committed party worker from Bankura. During his short tenure, he supported the Association and moved the case of JFM forward. Subsequently, Dr. Ambarish Mukherjee took over the Minister of Forests in 1987 and held his post till 1991.⁵⁰ Coming from a background of organizing peasant movements in Purulia, he too was sympathetic to the difficulties of front-line workers and was close to the Association. He was known for popularizing community forestry in the state. Subsequent ministers also come from rural backgrounds and have maintained a relationship with the Association.⁵¹

In sum, the Association's close connection with and influence over the political party arises from two sources—an active role in the State Coordination Committee (the main organ of CPI (M) influence over government employees) and a close relationship with the Forest Ministers in the Left Front government. Both state Forest Ministers and Association leaders acknowledge that their close relationship was forged in the early years of the Association and the period of political turmoil. However, having a close association and potential influence does not mean that the Association would have necessarily taken an interest in matters of forest policy. They might have continued in their conventional role of bargaining for better wages, pensions and service

⁴⁸Mr. Mitra was the Vice President of the Bengal Doars Railroad workers Union, and of the Bengal and Assam Rail Workers Union. Later, he was the General Secretary of the Tea-Garden Laborers Union and of the Working Committee of the CITU. In the 1940s he had also been part of the historic Tebhaga movement.

⁴⁹ Ironically, he died while attending a ceremony organized to recognize the success of the Arabari experiment in March 1985.

⁵⁰ Dr. Mukherjee came from Huda in Purulia district, one of the worst regions in terms of forest degradation.

⁵¹ Banamali Roy (1991-1996) from Jalpaiguri worked in tribal affairs; Jogesh Chandra Barman (1996-present) from Jalpaiguri, associated with Democratic Writers and Artists Union; Bilasi Bala Sahis (1996-present) from Purulia has worked on tribal affairs.

opportunities. To understand why the Association took the unusual step of commenting on policy matters we have to look elsewhere.

IV. WHY TAKE A POLICY POSITION?

The key factor that led the WBSFSA to take a position on forest policy was the general political and related forestry crisis in the years from the mid-sixties to the early eighties. As I have already suggested previously, the years between the early sixties and mid seventies were one of a general political crisis that was in turn manifested in the management of forests. The point that needs to be stressed here is that the political crisis led to unsurpassed violence in the rural areas. And although the violence was not always related to forestry, no sector was spared its effects, especially rural sectors that worked at the heart of the disorder.

The situation became quite difficult for many of the actors in the forestry sector—the government was losing revenue, a situation of lawlessness prevailed, and forest workers were suffering from assaults. Many foresters characterized the years between the late sixties and early eighties as a “tough” time characterized by violence and increased conflict. Some observers have described the period as a “lost decade” (Sivaramakrishnan 1996). “Confrontations and conflicts were so intense that hundreds of forest staff... lost their lives fighting to defend forests from illegal extraction and overexploitation”, remarked a senior forest officer (Palit 1993). Most acknowledged that it was the front line workers—“Rangers and Beat Officers were victims of confrontation”.⁵²

By the early eighties the Association was under growing pressure from its front-line staff to do something about the difficult situation regarding the security of front-line staff. The immediate concerns were to gain appropriate compensation for murdered and injured staff. So for example, the Association demanded that the murdered workers families be given Rs. 15,000 in addition to their group insurance pollicies and that injured workers be provided free treatment and given appropriate leave with pay.⁵³ In the case of deaths or loss of organs, they demanded that compensatory employment be provided to one person of the victim's family. For those injured in the course of duty, they demanded that Deputy Rangers and Forest Guards should be granted special leave (GOWB 1980). They also demanded that communications between Divisional Headquarters and Beat and Range Offices be strengthened. More broadly, they wanted more publicity about the socially beneficial role they play so that the villagers would be aware that they were not enemies of the people.

At the base of the general crisis and the crisis in forestry was politics. Since 1962, the Congress party (that had been in power since independence) was losing its stronghold on politics in the state and opposition parties were mobilizing to occupy political space. By 1967, a group of communist parties were successful in challenging the Congress in the elections and formed the first United Front government.⁵⁴ In the first short period of rule, the United Front government, especially the CPI (M) had confronted a difficult dilemma. The splinter Maoist group from within its own party was starting mass-based revolutionary movements of peasants against

⁵² Interview, AB., Calcutta, 1997.

⁵³ Resolutions of the Association conference, 1979.

landowners in Naxalbari (North Bengal) in the belief that its ideological ally the CPI (M) would not act against it. At first, in fact, the CPI (M) who controlled the Home Ministry (under which the Police Department was located) ordered the police not to interfere in “class struggles.” Later however, the United Front cracked down on the Naxalbari movement and in the blood-bath that followed most of the Maoists were wiped out (Mallick 1993). The violence continued into the period of presidential rule that followed the fall of the United Front, and later its second ascent to power in 1969. Prior to the elections of 1972 (in which the Congress came into power again under widespread allegations of vote rigging) the violence took a different turn. In the election campaigning, the Congress, with the help of the police, sought to unleash a reign of terror particularly in CPI (M) controlled districts. Several CPI (M) leaders were falsely arrested.⁵⁵ As an observer reported—“not that there (were) no more killings; in fact the daily average was three to four, which was higher than the average during the peak period of the Naxalite movement” (Ghosh quoted in Kohli 1991). In short, the period between 1967 and 1977 was characterized by extreme violence in rural West Bengal, violence that got intermingled with the question of forests.

Forest related issues both fed the violence and were affected by it. In the spirit of the revolutionary ideology, forest villages, (villages that were given land in forested areas in order to provide labor for forestry related work—a practice started by the British) began a series of protests against the unfair labor conditions they were subjected to. There were several clashes

⁵⁴ The Communist Party of India (CPI) split into the CPI and the Communist Party of India Marxist CPI (M) in 1964. In the 1964 elections, The CPI (M) joined forces with the Socialist Unity Center, the Forward Bloc Marxist, the Revolutionary Socialist Party and some other leftist parties to form the United Front. See Weiner (1974) for a good overview of the electoral politics of the period.

between front-line foresters and forest villagers in the course of such protests, leading to some isolated posts being abandoned. Another factor that contributed to the increased violence was the renewed demand for a separate tribal state—Jharkhand—that began during the period of Janata Party rule at the Center (1977-79). The movement was centered the areas of Bihar, Orissa and Bengal that were dominated by tribal populations. In Bihar there was looting of the Forest Development Corporation godowns (storages) and tree-felling work was obstructed. In 1978, several foresters were *gheraoed* (surrounded) and assaulted and forest ranger quarters were burned. These developments in neighboring Bihar had ripple effects in Bengal and influenced the perceptions of foresters about the dangers of working in the field.

The general situation of increased political turmoil was also partly responsible for the rapid degradation of the forests. Recall that the CPI (M) since 1967 had sought to increase its support in the rural areas through mass mobilization. The resultant political awakening and mobilization of the rural poor emboldened the villagers towards the administration (Mallick 1993; Lieten 1996). For example, during the brief periods of United Front rule in the late sixties, encouraged by the political parties and without the restraining hand of the police, the rural population became involved in many confrontations with the administration. Moreover, as part of its mass-based message, the CPI (M) popularized the idea that forest resources were the wealth of forest dependent villagers not the state government. The popular slogan “land to the tiller” had a counterpart relating to forests—“forests to those who are dependent upon it” (*laangal jaar, jomin taar; kural jaar, jungle taar*). The previous attitudes of fear and avoidance were replaced by a willingness to directly confront the administration⁵⁶ Simultaneously, local arms of the CPI (M) in some locations also began deforesting some areas in order to fund the mass mobilizations. As one villager charitably

⁵⁵Lieten argues that this strategy backfired on the Congress and crystallized support for the CPI (M) in the elections of 1977 (Lieten 1996).

put it “political parties of all sides used the forests as open banks.”⁵⁷ Such behavior on the part of political parties further encouraged villagers to try and gain at least some of the resources that were being plundered, and that they now felt they had rights to.⁵⁸

Table 4.2. No. of forest offence cases (illicit felling).

	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86
Kurseong	690	600	594	345
Jalpaiguri	1509	1416	1193	595
Buxa	351	727	2198	1337
Baikunthapur	1194	946	854	1179
Cooch Behar	312	922	1094	833
Bankura North	3586	2008	1885	1842
Bankura South	1622	1551	2016	1701
East Midnapore	3408	2611	3072	3310
West Midnapore	2317	2452	1899	2182
Purulia	1253	1040	1177	1509
Birbhum	891	695	489	505
Burdwan	801	532	585	720
Nadia- Murshidabad	126	122	107	127
Malda-W. Dinajpur	51	168	18	71
24 Parganas	246	308	91	267
Sundarbans	332	390	159	114
TOTAL				

Source: Adapted from, West Bengal Forest Statistics, Various Years
Shaded districts comprise the main districts of the Southwestern region

These emboldened villagers were further driven by subsistence needs. As I elaborated in the previous chapter, Bengal experienced severe drought in 1980-82. In fact, the years of 1977 to

⁵⁶ Other scholars found similar evidence. As one of Sivaramakrishnan’s (1996) interviewees from Jhargram (Midnapore) relates, the Left front government found it expedient to encourage forest destruction during their campaign, as a way to gain support from the rural poor who had largely been excluded from the illicit gains from forest encroachments and illegal organized theft. “As a stratagem for political mobilization, such forest destruction not only undermined the Naxalite land grab platform, it also worked through the ideas of regional identity and channeled regionalism against a national government described as partisan and hostile to the development of West Bengal” (Sivaramakrishnan 1996,:643).

⁵⁷ AK, Midnapore.

1982 were a period a drought or near drought in West Bengal and in desperation villagers had taken to looting the forests. Desperate for any income, they cut trees and sold them to the saw mills or middle men at throwaway prices simply to survive through the difficult period. In some areas after the severe drought of 1982, there was nothing left to plunder except root-stock—even that was being dug up by villagers for firewood. The situation was the worst in the dry laterite zones of the Southwest (see Table 4.1) where confrontations with foresters was a daily occurrence.

Table 4.3 No. of forest personnel assaulted and murdered between 1981 and 1990

Year	Assaults	Murders	Category of Staff
1981-82*	48	-	
1982-83	60	1	Daily labor
1983-84	48	4	Forester-1, Forest Guard -2, Watcher-1
1984-85	50	2	Ranger -1, Watcher-1
1985-86	29	1	Forest Guard
1986-87	55	-	
1987-88	29	-	
1988-89	38	-	
1989-90	40	-	
Total	397	8	

Source: State Report on West Bengal Forests, 1989-90

*Data on years prior to 1981-82 was not available.

Thus, while some of the violence against foresters was due to politics, personal grudges and grievances against corrupt officials, many incidents were provoked by foresters attempting to prevent villagers from extracting forest produce illegally. Official figures on assaults and murders of forest personnel that are available do not reflect the seriousness of the situation (see Table 4.2). Partly, this is because many of the assaults and murders occurred during non-office hours or outside forested areas and do not count as assaults or murders in the line of duty. There

⁵⁸ Within the Forest Department there was growing alarm at the rapid degradation of the forests. One concern was with the loss in revenue from forests. Believing that the timber was likely to be lost anyway through degradation by villagers, the Forest Department increased its own felling operations. Thus the figures for timber extraction from the southwest do not reflect a decrease in revenue (see Table 4.3).

might have also been some underreporting to keep a clean image of the Department. Some assaults and deaths were likely due to political or personal reasons. Finally, many foresters died because of injuries or illnesses in remote areas—they could not reach help in time. Such deaths are not counted in this list. Front-line foresters remember the period as being more violent than the official figures suggest. The General Secretary of the Association in 1971 reported facing a situation of acute crisis.⁵⁹ He claimed that, at the time, between one and three people were being murdered every month.⁶⁰ The 60th anniversary Souvenir of the WBSFSA (1982) lists the names of nineteen colleagues who died in line of duty. Numerous others were assaulted. Many of the older front-line officers that I spoke to had personally experienced violence in the course of duty.

In sum, the problems in forestry sector that became a catalyst for WBSFSA action were much more than simply deforestation and its impact on local people as the two accounts presented in the previous chapter suggest. There was a general political crisis, in which forests and foresters were victims of the turbulent times. The main discontent of WBSFSA's membership with official policy arose out of the inability of the existing policy to deal with this crisis in which front-line foresters bore the brunt of the difficult conditions.

Growing conflict, however, need not have pushed the Association into a pro-people stance. The Association could have alternatively pushed for more police backup and mobile forest forces in order to protect the forests. In fact they did. The Association's demands included a mixture of increased policing and pressuring for a pro-people policy. For example, in 1983-84, the year in which four murders were reported, the Association compiled a list of demands that they

⁵⁹ Interview, RKS, Barasat, 1997.

submitted to the Administration. As previously, the Association reiterated the inappropriateness of the existing forest policy and forest management practice for protecting the forests or the forestry staff. At the same time some of the practical measures they suggested were punitive/preventive. Among these were measures like a) clubbing of beats with common headquarters, b) abolition of isolated outposts and shifting them to the nearest beat headquarters; c) posting of police pickets; d) establishing a Forest Protection Force in each Division and e) assistance to police by providing them information about vulnerable areas and suspected clandestine operators (WBSFSA 1983). The administration responded favorably to these more practical demands and initiated action towards implementing these suggestions. Yet as we shall see in the next section, these measures could not fully resolve the problems of the front-line workers and the Association was forced into a pro-people stand.⁶¹

V. FRONT LINE WORKERS AND THE WORK SITUATION

To explain why front-line workers supported a participatory policy in particular, I argue that we need to take a closer look at their work situation and how it was affected by the general crisis and its manifestations in the forestry sector. Front-line forestry workers are the “operators” in the Forest Department—those who carry out the tasks that justify the existence of the organization

⁶⁰ Villagers were also sometimes killed in these clashes since some subordinate staff in North Bengal were issued firearms.

⁶¹ That support for progressive reforms need not arise of professional conviction or ideology is also illustrated by Cook's (1996) examination of the Mexican teacher's movement. At first the Mexican teachers movement avoided taking a policy position because they believed changes in educational policy could not be discussed till their other demands were met, and thus alienated parents. When in 1987, they decided to forge cooperative links with parents, they were did so “out of concern for their own political survival as much as out of professional conviction” (Cook 1996,: 246).

(Wilson 1989).⁶² Like other public sector workers, the work situation of frontline workers is characterized by limited resources, a heavy work load, dispersed work sites and a somewhat distant relationship with superiors within the organization. Front-line workers have considerable discretionary economic authority over local people from whom they are often widely separated by way of having higher status, education and often caste. At the same time, unlike other public services, front-line forestry workers are also alienated from forest fringe villagers, since their core task is to protect and manage the forests rather than provide services for the villagers.⁶³ This work situation, I argue, was somewhat tolerable for front-line forestry workers till they were faced with increased violence and antagonism from forest-fringe villagers.

Before we turn to key elements of the work situation of the forestry front-line workers, a brief explanation of who these workers are and what they do will set the stage for the arguments to follow. As mentioned earlier, front-line workers consist of the lower level staff of the Forest Department—including Rangers, Beat Officers, Forest Guards, Forest Workers and several other categories of workers. They are non-gazetted staff and have lower status, pay, responsibilities and perks than gazetted officers, (who are akin to the management level in organizations). All front-line workers are eligible to be members of the WBSFSA. Front line workers conduct the day to day tasks of managing the forests—tending plantations, patrolling forests, raising nurseries, monitoring wildlife and from time to time organizing timber felling and sales.

⁶² Unlike Wilson's operators who could be located at any level of the organization (for example ambassadors in the foreign service), I define front-line workers as operators who are invariably at the lower levels of the organizational hierarchy.

⁶³ In this sense they are somewhat different from Lipsky's (1980) "street-level bureaucrats" whose core task is to provide services to client communities.

For *van mazdoor*, the lowest front-line workers in the hierarchy, duties consist of manual tasks in planting, pruning, and other work involved in the day to day forest operations (see Table 4.4).

Unlike the seasonal labor hired from villages, *van mazdoors* are full time employees of the Forest Department, usually from the nearby villages. They help in patrolling when required, yet that is not their chief responsibility. The forest guards are next in the hierarchy whose main task is to patrol the forest beats to prevent illegal extraction of forest products. They are assigned uniforms similar to those of the police officers and have been perceived to be like the police by the local people. Forest guards also supervise village labor hired in forestry operations, maintain muster rolls of workers, measure work progress and distribute wages. Forest guards and *van mazdoor* are not required to have much education, are locally hired, trained on the job and are generally not transferred out of their home districts. This does not mean that they are not transferred as often as the other staff, only that they are transferred to different beats and ranges within their home districts.

Beat Officers are next in line, in charge of forest beats and responsibility for the successful management of the beat lies with them. They supervise the work of the forest guards and *van mazdoor* under them, assign duties, make decisions regarding work allocations. As foresters with intimate knowledge of their beats, they advise the Forest Rangers on appropriate actions that need to be taken. Beat Officers also help in patrolling beats and keep an eye out for signs of illegal activities. They are also responsible for dealing with offenders and have the choice of compounding offences (letting offender go upon payment of a fine) or arresting the offenders.⁶⁴ In addition to their outdoor duties, Beat Officers have to keep extensive records of all the

⁶⁴ No other public sector workers have this power of arresting citizens without a warrant.

activities in their beat including a daily diary, forms indicating the progress of various projects, and details on the personnel under them. In addition, from time to time they have to respond to queries originating from senior officers. Rangers are responsible for the management of a range and supervise the staff under them including Beat Officers, forest guards van mazdoor etc.⁶⁵ Their tasks are similar to those of the Beat Officer in the beats, albeit with a different level of involvement in the day to day activities of each beat. An important part of the Ranger's responsibility is managing the cash box in the Ranges and the divisions. The remaining front-line foresters have specialized tasks such as the mahout (elephant trainer) and the majhi (boatman), and are posted to areas in need of their services. Together the front-line officers through their cumulative activities interpret and implement forest policy on the ground.

Table 4.4 Organizational hierarchy of territorial forestry in the West Bengal Forest Department

Functional Organization	Location	Service
Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF)	Forest Directorate (Calcutta)	IFS
Chief Conservator of Forests (CCF)	(Calcutta)	IFS
Conservator of Forests (CF) (for each circle)	(Calcutta)	IFS
Divisional Forest Officers (DFO)	District Headquarters	IFS and WBFS
Assistance Divisional Forest Officers (ADFO)	District Headquarters	WBFS
Rangers	Ranges	WBSFS
Beat Officers	Beat Offices	WBSFS
Forest Guards	Beat Offices	WBSFS
Van Mazdoors	Beat Offices	WBSFS

Note: Shaded areas represent the non-gazetted officers, members of the WBSFSA.

The WBFS and the IFS officers have their own association.

⁶⁵ Approximately sixty percent of the posts of Forest Rangers are filled through promotion of Beat Officers (Deputy Rangers/Foresters) and the remaining forty percent are filled by direct recruitment of science graduates.

A distinguishing feature of the work situation of front-line workers is that it does not have fixed hours, unlike the 9-5 hours of clerical staff. In the hot summer months forestry front line workers have to restrict activities to the early morning and late evening hours. Especially in their task of forest protection, they can be required to patrol at any time. Often this means at night since most illegal fellings take place at night under the cover of darkness. Thus they work odd hours in carrying out their duties. Another distinguishing feature of their work situation is that front-line workers have to live in the areas they work in—i.e. within or close to the forests. The significance of these features becomes clearer in the following sections in which I describe the old work situation (prior to the years of political turmoil) and how crisis changed the work situation making it intolerable.

A. The old work situation

Although several features of the work situation merit attention, here I focus on two key elements here that are of relevance to the argument.

1. Relationship with senior officers

The first important feature of the work situation is the relationship with the senior forest officers, a relationship that has roots in India's colonial parts. Public administration in India in the post independence period has drawn from the organization and practices of the British and state Forest Departments are no exception. Like most public bureaucracies in developing countries, the State Forest Departments are extremely hierarchical structures. Recall that there are three distinct routes of entry into the Forest Department that correspond to three different levels of the

service (Chapter 1). At the top, there are the members of the Indian Forest Service (an all India Service similar to the elite Indian Administrative Service); the State Forest Service (in this case the West Bengal Forest Service) and the subordinate Forest Service that comprises our front-line foresters. Although there are possibilities of promotion from the subordinate services to the Indian Forest Service—these are limited. The senior levels of the service (the IFS and the WBFS) form the management under whom the subordinate staff carries out their tasks. During the period of British rule, there was no Indian Forest Service—instead there was the Senior Forest Service, largely manned by the British, and the Junior Forest Service manned by Indians) and the Subordinate Forest Service manned by Indians.

The colonial administrators believed that subordinate staff were not committed to their work, were lazy and would not perform adequately unless closely supervised. Organizations faced with this problem of monitoring work resort to one of three classic solutions to ensure worker compliance—close supervision, extensive feedback mechanisms, and indoctrination (Heginbotham 1975). Close supervision of widely dispersed forestry staff was naturally not feasible. Indoctrination was unlikely to be successful because of the colonial domination of Indians.⁶⁶ Consequently, the colonial administrative structure used extensive feedback mechanisms (such as detailed reporting and paperwork) to monitor performance.⁶⁷

Numerous studies have shown that the extensive feedback mechanism is vulnerable to misappropriation (Heginbotham 1975; Montgomery 1988). First, many of the reports relate to

⁶⁶ Some successful development programs have used indoctrination to overcome principal-agent problems. For example, in the case of the Grameen Bank see Jain (1996).

quantifiable data whose progress (or regress) can be easily ascertained—for example the number of hectares of plantation work done. However, getting at the issue of whether organizational goals are being attained is not easily accomplished through quantifiable targets as many tasks do not have quantifiable outputs. Second, resource poor field workers faced with mountains of paperwork to fulfil develop routines to manage their work—paying attention to those reports that are prioritized by the seniors, seeking to fulfil targets rather than ascertain quality of work and fudging reports if necessary to cover up for poor performance (especially as these are the reports that are used to assess performance for promotions and other benefits).

The Forest Department exemplifies these problems. The problem of isolation from the senior staff is somewhat exacerbated in forestry by the physical distance of the field offices from the central office and the poor communication links between the two.⁶⁸ This has resulted in the alienation of the subordinates from the senior staff. In a rare and frank critical appraisal of the Indian Forest Service N.C. Saxena, a senior IAS officer with much experience of forestry writes:

“There is generally one-way communication between the central office and the subordinate offices. The letters/queries originate from the central office seeking all sorts of information from the subordinate offices. There is no system of the feedback of problems from the subordinate offices to the central office which generally tends to isolate itself from field realities and problems.” (Saxena undated,: 11)

Referring specifically to the feelings of isolation of subordinate staff within the service he writes:

“The lower staff of the Forest Department is increasingly feeling alienated from their Officers with resulting loss of motivation for work... ..The chief cause of course, for alienation appears to be the lack of involvement of the lower subordinates and the junior officers in the decision making process. If they are consulted before decisions are made and imposed on them, they will feel a sense of participation and commitment to the decision arrived at” (Saxena undated,: 25).

⁶⁷ As Gouldner (1954) shows, such compliance comes at the cost of escalating the distance between the senior and lower staff—subordinate workers realize that they are not trusted by the senior levels.

⁶⁸ Till the late eighties, most Indian villages were not connected by telephones.

In sum, front-line foresters are literally and metaphorically distanced from the senior staff who are involved in shaping policy and the broad direction of their tasks. As a result of this distancing (and the hierachichal structure) subordinate staff identify themselves closely with their colleagues and their Association, rather than with the region or organizational division that they are a part of.⁶⁹

2. Relationship with forest fringe communities

The second important feature of the work situation is the nature of the relationship between front-line foresters and forest fringe communities that has in the past been, by definition, adversarial. In their task of forest protection, front-line foresters played a policing role, in which the villagers were cast as the villains responsible for degradation.⁷⁰ Note that such a strong policing role is in contrast with the role of front-line foresters in the U.S. where one of the main tasks of the foresters is to maintain good relations with the communities and find ways to balance the needs of forestry with those of the community (Kaufman 1967). The policing role of foresters is typical of developing countries, especially in those with a history of colonialism. For example, in Mali, foresters were recruited from the previous paramilitary troops in the belief that such recruits were better suited to the task at hand (Degnbol 1996). This adversarial relationship created a distance between forest fringe communities and front-line foresters.

⁶⁹ For an illustration of how such horizontal alliances (vs. regional ones) might impact on public sector performance see Wade (1989).

⁷⁰ The role of legal timber contractors has decreased since the mid seventies (see Chapter 2). When small timber firms are involved in illegal extraction without the knowledge of front-line foresters, they employ villagers to do the dirty work, increasing the perception that villagers are the main culprits in deforestation. Alternatively, illegal extraction can occur in collusion with front-line workers.

Such an adversarial relationship was specifically encouraged by the British. The British feared that forestry workers would collude with the local population in corrupt practices at the cost of colonial revenues. To ensure worker loyalty and to prevent corruption, they discouraged the mixing of subordinate forestry staff with the local people.⁷¹ Since independence this practice has continued in most sectors including forestry. One forester commented:

“Prior to that (social forestry) foresters had no or little interaction with villagers and were almost disallowed to interact with them as the DFOs etc. thought that they would form undesirable alliances” (personal interview, SB Burdwan 11 April, 1996).

Keeping the desired distance between villagers and front-line foresters was accomplished through a variety of means—through training, administrative practices and physical measures. Forestry training consistently portrayed villagers as the main culprits in deforestation through their indiscriminate and illegal felling of trees, irresponsible practices of slash and burn agriculture and their overgrazing of forest lands. Villagers were considered “biotic interference” in the practice of scientific forestry. As a result, not only did scientific forestry portray villagers as villains it also saw no need for imparting training in extension work to front-line foresters. The administrative practice of rapid transfer of forestry staff (similar to most other services) was also created to prevent collusion between forestry staff and villagers. Most front-line staff were (and still are) transferred within one and three years reducing their ability to form lasting connections with the villagers.

The system of rapid transfer also required that the state provide housing for staff. The location of such housing was an important way of maintaining distance. All forest officers working in a particular beat or range live together in a common Forest Office compound. A typical Beat

⁷¹ This tactic is quite common. Many aid agencies rotate people in the field for the same reason.

Office compound consisted of the Beat Office, housing for the Beat Officer and between two to eight forest guards. Similarly Range Office compounds contain the Range Office, housing for the Range Officer, a couple of Beat Officers and between five and ten forest guards and other personnel. While the Range Offices are typically located near small townships or large villages and partially integrated into the physical fabric of the settlement, the Beat Offices are usually at the outskirts of villages or near forested areas. While Beat and Range Offices were of necessity located in the rural areas where the ranges and beats were, they were intentionally located at some distance from the villages sometimes in the middle of the forested areas. While part of the reason for the distant location of the Beat Offices had to do with the fact that the Forest Department could build on land under its control at no extra cost—it reinforced the physical distance between the forestry staff and villagers.

There was also social distance between them. Forestry staff enjoyed many more benefits than even the better-off villagers. In contrast to the ‘kucha’ mud houses in the village, the buildings in the Beat Office were ‘pucca’ brick and concrete structures, better able to withstand the rains. In many areas, the forest office compounds were the only places in the villages with electricity. Beat and Range Offices often had their own wells, that were deeper and less likely to dry up in the lean season. Since the mid seventies most Beat and Range Offices had been equipped with wireless sets in order to improve communications between the field offices and district headquarters. In villages that were not yet connected with telephone lines, the Beat Offices were an important source of communication with the outside world, a situation that prevails in some villages even today. Beat and Range Officers considered themselves socially above the villagers

who were viewed as 'ignorant' and poor. There was some truth in this as Beat Officers were among the few educated people in the village.

Even after independence, the policy of encouraging distance was continued. As an observer notes, while the British had a patronizing attitude towards forest fringe villagers, post-independence, the Forest Department adopted a stronger policing attitude. As forests were to generate revenue for the national industrialization project, forest fringe communities were expected to sacrifice in the interests of national progress (see Table 4.5). To support this policing role, the powers of front-line foresters were solidified, and in some areas increased.

**Table 4.5 Timber and Firewood Extraction, West Bengal
(Forest Development Corporation and Forest Directorate)**

Year	Outturn of Total Timber (Cu. M.)	Outturn of Total Firewood (Cu. M.)	Total Outturn (Cu. M.)
1976-77	301319	526173	827492
1977-78	350646	582797	933443
1978-79	329405	591000	920405
1979-80	295374	417613	712987
1980-81	273118	396005	669123
1981-82	303222	793145	1096367
1982-83	294450	642584	937034
1983-84	242890	778812	1021702
1984-85	233720	491782	725502
1985-86	210748	454096	66484
1986-87	140101	305456	445557
1987-88	143707	258462	402169
1988-89	152808	277312	430120
1989-90	72590	285862	358452
1990-91	88252	210692	298944
1991-92	94754	180645	275399
1992-93	117164	184052	301216
1993-94	84489	191572	276061
1994-95	84903	125807	210710

Source: State Report on West Bengal Forests 1994-95

Again, as a result of the distant relations between front-line foresters and senior staff, and front line foresters and villagers, front-line foresters formed strong horizontal links within their ranks. In contrast to vertical solidarity (between villagers and foresters or within senior and subordinate levels of the forest service) front-line foresters identify with their colleagues rather than with particular geographic locations. Moreover, the system of rapid transfers supports such solidarity, by preventing attachment to a region or part of the FD (e.g. the research vs. territorial wings). The strength of the WBSFSA is one manifestation of this. In practice this has meant that the subordinate staff have common experiences of the problems of deforestation and similar approaches to what can be done about them. When the political and related forestry crisis unfolded, front-line foresters had similar experiences of dissatisfaction with their work situations.

B. The effects of the crisis

These relations of distance from senior forest officers as well as long as the villagers were uncomfortable for the front-line foresters, yet they could perform their protection duties as the villagers were afraid of them. Some front-line foresters characterized the earlier period of no confrontation thus—“*tokhon shasan chilo* (then there was the rule of law)” (personal interview, MM, Belda, 4 April, 1996). The sustained and sometimes open looting of forest timbers put front-line officers in a difficult position. Now, for the first time, their authority and position did not inspire fear in the village populations who were increasingly willing to confront forest officials rather than avoid conflict. One forest officer commented:

“Initially the forests had been preserved by fear—once this element of fear was removed through a change in the political situation, no departmental activities to save the forests worked. Many people died and nothing could be done” (interview, SD, Calcutta, 1996).

These problems of violence and forest degradation were worsened due to several organizational factors. First, earlier the limited front-line staff could patrol large areas of forest because they could go out singly or in two's for patrolling. However, with the fear of violence, foresters would only go out in bands of five to ten, leaving large tracts of forest land unpatrolled. Night patrolling was negligible. As one forester recounted:

“Forget the forest, I couldn't even protect this little head from the intruders. ... We told the bosses to protect our life and the forest, and so we have FPCs now that has saved the FD, local people and the forest” (Beat Officer Lalmohan Pal quoted in Farooque n.d.).

Second, when timber or fuelwood was being illegally extracted by women (which was often the case, since women are responsible for the collection of firewood), the male forest guards were put in a bind; when women were confrontational, they found it difficult to arrest women because they were vulnerable to accusations of molestation. One Ranger recounted: “Male foresters could not apprehend women offenders. This was a reason for many of the assaults” (Ranger, Ranibandh). Third, when violent confrontations occurred villagers were not willing to come forward as witnesses to the assaults. Thus forest officials had a difficult time pressing charges against offenders in a climate where the *panchayats* were strong and the political party supported the rural populations.

Finally, there were instances of large groups of people raiding the forest rendering the small forestry staff helpless. Often the single Beat Officer assisted by a couple of forest guards was ineffective against large groups of invaders. The words “mass looting” was used by many of my interviewees to describe what happened at the time. As one forester recounted:

“While posted in Chandra beat in Midnapore district, one day there was an incident when I was patrolling with mobile unit. One hundred and fifty people, male and female, were destroying the

forest. We go forward to prevent them. They rushed towards us with their implements. My old staff knew one offender—why are you so annoyed and arrogant? (he asked). One staff knew well one offender. But suddenly one lathi (short stick) beat him on the head. All the staff fled. Another was wounded. I launched (filed) the FIR (First Information Report) as per the voter list” (Mr. P, Ranibandh 1996).

In tribal areas, this practice had some precedence in the traditional annual tribal hunting festivals. Large groups of tribals would invade the hills and forests looking for game. Earlier, when wild game was abundant, they would each return with the game and hold a large feast. When wild game became scarce, they returned with felled trees. It was difficult for foresters to confront villagers in such situations because of the large number of villagers compared to foresters and also because of the cultural issues involved. As a result of these difficulties, in many areas, foresters refused to patrol and there was “protection of the forests only in name” (Beat Officer, Godapiasal).⁷²

The resultant chaos exacerbated the two key features of the work situation that I outlined earlier. On the one hand, front-line foresters came under increased pressure from senior officers to protect the forests. Senior officers themselves were facing criticism because of the inability of the Forest Department to curb the violence and protect the forests. They passed the blame onto the lower ranks, and demanded that the forests be protected at all costs. Many of my interviewees mentioned that front-line workers who were unable to protect the forests were punished in various ways. The harshest was suspension under “negligence of duty.” Alternatively, areas that were degrading were not given work allocations as punishment (work allocations are funds to undertake regeneration activities—these funds were desired by front-line

foresters because they gave them control over resources), although these were precisely the areas that needed them the most. Despite these strong pressures from above, front-line workers, when faced with danger in the field often chose to “work-to-rule” or abandoned patrolling altogether. In particularly violent regions patrolling was almost abandoned (Beat Officer, Anandpur).

On the other hand, the increased violence combined with the pressure to catch offenders served to further deteriorate relations between villagers and foresters. Whereas earlier they lived together in an uncomfortable proximity, now they were openly conflictual. Besides violence, villagers socially ostracized front-line foresters and their families. Such ostracism was particularly harsh on front-line foresters because unlike other rural services, field officers were required to live in the forested areas with their families. The nearest help that they could turn to in the case of emergencies (including those caused by the violence) were the very villagers who they policed and were distanced from and hostile towards. Additionally, field staff felt insecure about having their families live in relative isolation under these difficult conditions. Many of my interviewees said the social isolation of their families was the most difficult to bear. Several had their families living apart from them in the nearest large town in order to protect them from the hardships of life on the beats and ranges.⁷³ In addition, they were subject to dissonance in their work conditions—expected to police and act against people with whom they were likely

⁷² Refusals to work under dangerous conditions are common. Gouldner (1974) in his classic study of a gypsum plant shows how miners would defy management orders in face of the acute physical dangers their jobs involved. “Down here, we are our own bosses” the miners would say, and refuse to work in dangerous zones.

⁷³ Another reason why many front-line forester’s families lived in nearby towns or cities was to ensure quality and continuity for their children’s education.

sympathetic—for even though front-line foresters were better off than the villagers, many came from similar regions of poverty and forest dependency.⁷⁴

Thus field staff were caught between several pressures—on the one hand they were facing potential violence from villagers making their work increasingly dangerous; on the other hand, front-line foresters were often held responsible for rapid forest degradation by the senior officials. Most importantly, they were expected to live in relative isolation in the forested areas with their families among the very people that they policed as a part of their duties. The increased danger involved in protection activities, the difficulties in getting assaults on forest police appropriately punished as well as the constraints to direct action by foresters led to a feeling among front-line officials of a dissatisfaction with existing policies that put them in a difficult position.

While it seems clear that the work situation of front-line foresters became progressively intolerable in the years from the mid sixties to the early eighties, it does not follow that they would have taken a pro-people stance and advocated for participatory forest policy. In fact, as I discussed earlier, they had demanded various measures that would support the policing strategy. However several factors made a participatory forest policy the only viable one given the problems in their work situation.

⁷⁴ Forest field staff, especially forest guards and van mazdoors usually come from within the division that they work in and are usually not transferred outside the district, unlike beat and range officers who can be transferred throughout the state.

First, alienation from higher levels of the bureaucracy precluded turning to them for help in order to deal with the difficult situation on the ground. The forest bureaucracy's channels of communication usually worked in one direction—information flowed from the field to the office (mediated by what senior officers wanted to hear), and orders flowed from the headquarters to the field. As a senior bureaucrat writes: “The letters/queries originate from the central office seeking all sorts of information from the subordinate offices. There is no system of the feed-back of problems from the subordinate offices to the central office which generally tends to isolate itself from field realities and problems” (Saxena undated). Front-line foresters felt that most senior officers would not listen to the problems with their work situation.

Second, field staff felt that even if senior staff listened, it was difficult from within the Forest Department structure to do anything about the problem. For example, increased policing and policing powers did not work well. Communications between the field and the district were very poor—below the level of the Range, most travelling is done by foot or on bicycle. At the division level, the single jeep was often away on the pretext of law and order or VIPs. Although there were wireless sets in most field offices, the times of transmission and receiving are fixed to three times a day—morning, noon, and evening. Quick responses outside of these times was extremely difficult. The spread of telecommunications in West Bengal (as in other parts of India) was limited till the late eighties. There were a few mobile units whose role it was to respond to calls from various offices, but these were few, and because of the large distances involved took a while to get to where required. Thus even if the department had been theoretically sympathetic, practical solutions to the problem were not available. Rather, the nearest help that they could

turn to in case of emergencies were the very villagers whom they policed and were distanced from.

Front-line foresters support for a participatory approach was also driven in part by the increasingly negative image of the Forest Department on two fronts—inability to protect the forests and corruption. The general criticism of the Forest Department in West Bengal paralleled a country wide criticism of State Forest Departments by NGOs. In West Bengal, the criticism was linked to the political changes in the state. With the advent of the Left Front, some rural villagers suggested that corruption slowly seeped into the forest administration. As one interviewee put it, “with the new government both people and the Forest Department got ‘loose’”(TP, Belda). Another observer noted that with the decentralization of power in administration, there was a parallel “decentralization of corruption” (AK, Harinamari). The Forest Department, where earlier corruption had not been perceived as being widespread (at least to outsiders), began to face increasing criticisms of collusion between contractors and forest officials. Such perceptions further fueled the anger of the villagers against the foresters. From the point of view of front-line foresters, this negative image needed to be reversed.

Thus front-line workers were seeking a policy approach that would deal with the issue of worker safety, worker performance and an improved image of their work. By gaining villager sympathy and getting their help in protection activities, front-line workers would be safer from assaults.

Their work would also be made easier they thought, for they could concentrate on activities that they considered as more “professional” such as plantation, planning watersheds, cutting earthen dams etc. rather than peripheral activities that were more akin to police work such as patrolling.

An improved relationship with forest-fringe villages in turn would help reverse the negative image of the Forest Department.

The argument I'm forwarding here is that the positions front-line workers take arise out of the concrete conditions of their work—their relationships with client communities, their ability to carry out tasks, the demands for their services and the pressures under which they operate. Such an argument is not new: the literature on public bureaucracies highlights the constraints they work under and the discretion they exercise (Lipsky 1980; Wilson 1989; Goetz 1996). In fact, Lipsky argues that it is the cumulative actions of these “street-level” bureaucrats that constitutes policy as people experience it. It is not clear however, how such informal “policy-in-practice” can be institutionalized into “policy-on-paper.” In the JFM case, the strong Association motivated by the concerns of the front-line workers strategized to get the people-oriented policy institutionalized.

Skeptical interpretations of the role of front-line workers in promoting a participatory policy might argue that the degradation of the forests had resulted in a reduction in the “informal” assets that they had discretion over. There is no doubt that foresters as well as front line workers were apprehensive that if the forests continued degrading then the Forest Department would not have any reason for existing. Part of their (unspoken) fear was probably that the sources of informal revenue (including bribes), would dry up as trees were cut down. To the extent that this concern could not be voiced in public debates, the concerns about safety, environmental degradation would have to be forwarded instead. The real test of this interpretation lies in whether or not

corruption has decreased as a result of the increased transparency demanded by JFM.⁷⁵ While not denying this interpretation, I would like to suggest that the JFM story is interesting because of the way in which JFM invoked both the material and ideal interests of both sets of actors, the front-line workers as the forest-fringe villagers.

VI. RECENT TRENDS

The argument I make above of the importance of the work situation in explaining the policy stance of front-line workers and their Association is supported by the more recent experience with the implementation of JFM in West Bengal. First, the importance of the work situation argument I made earlier, can be seen in the day to day practices of the frontline forestry staff in West Bengal today. Concerns with maintaining good relations with the nearby villagers are reflected in the manner in which staff allocate the development assets related to JFM. Beat and range officers who have some control over the distribution of community benefits (e.g. wells) under JFM are careful to keep the nearest communities satisfied. One field officer put it thus—“I have to keep the nearby village happy even if they do not meet the technical criteria for the project, because after all they are the ones who are going to help me in times of need.” Besides, he argued, projects located closer to the Beat and Range Offices are easier to supervise for the already stretched field staff.⁷⁶ In a quick informal tally in one beat I discovered that out of 12 projects allocated over a period of six years, half were given to the village closest to the beat

⁷⁵ Most of my interviewees agreed that the JFM program demanded increased transparency within the Forest Department. Most obvious, where previously the Forest Department kept the accounts of fellings and sales of timber to themselves, they now had to publicly announce these because villagers were entitled to a share of the profits.

⁷⁶ Serrano (1996) found similar concerns determining the areas in which firms implementing social funds programs chose to work.

office, even when the village had no forests under its protection! Such evidence emphasizes the importance of the relationship with nearby villages.

Second, within West Bengal, problems of front-line worker discontent with JFM are arising—raising the question—why has the earlier support now changed to reluctance. The main reason is that as the years of violence become a thing of the past, front-line foresters are likely less enthusiastic about JFM and more aware of the loss of power and control.⁷⁷ Such loss of enthusiasm was pointed out to me by an officeholder of WBSFSA—“younger foresters who have not seen the days of violence and conflict cannot imagine what it means to be in that situation. They don’t know.”⁷⁸ Moreover, JFM has not had quite the effect on the work-situation as was anticipated by the field officers. The time spent in policing activities has not declined as was expected; instead in some cases it has increased. As one forester put it, “I cannot reduce the time in the policing activities because if I am not there villagers suggest that I am not earning my living, they will not carry out their duties as well.”⁷⁹ Increased amounts of time are spent in motivating villagers, holding meetings, monitoring FPCs (including their accounts etc.) and dealing with offenders and conflicts. These time requirements are multiplied during the felling operations when the timber has to be sold and the profits divided among the members of the FPCs. The implementation of JFM has not yet come to terms with this or allowed for the increased work that it entails.

⁷⁷ In fact, one study found that when field staff were asked about reasons why they might support JFM, the main answer given was the reduction of conflict (Bahuguna and Luthra 1991).

⁷⁸ Interview, RKS, Barasat, 1997.

⁷⁹ Interview, VK, Belda 1996.

Experience with implementation in other states is similar. For example, in Haryana, research examining the attitudes of forest guards in JFM found that a number of those interviewed felt that JFM increased their workload without a corresponding increase in their remuneration or time allotment for JFM related activities (Kurian, 1997). There has been an increase in the amount of time the Range Officers have to devote to meetings or handling cash, especially since there has been an increase in cash flow in the department with all the village development activities that are undertaken under JFM (Reddy 199?). These activities eat into the time for technical activities like silviculture, planting and MS cutting, activities that foresters consider as their proper technical domain.

JFM in its implementation has also opened the Forest Department to questions about expertise and legitimacy that many had not envisaged when they first conceived of JFM. The sharing of management (as opposed to protection) responsibilities are not viewed kindly by field staff that regard management as a domain of scientific and technical matters beyond the ability of communities to understand. Frontline foresters do not like to be questioned by communities about the appropriateness of their scientific recommendations especially when indigenous knowledge presents diametrically opposite recommendations. Moreover, in practice participation in JFM means different things to NGOs, activists and communities, the senior staff and front-line workers. Forest guards continue to view participation as increasing the employment of members of the communities in forest related activities (Kurian, 1996). Field staff resent community insistence on knowing financial details of the works in progress—their support for JFM did not mean that they supported increased transparency in the department.

Further, frontline foresters are voicing concerns about the ways in which JFM is being implemented. They are unsure about the capacity of communities to carry out their responsibilities under JFM. Particularly in villages that are highly hierarchical or in areas facing Naxalite disturbances or weak NGOs front-line workers are doubtful about the potential of JFM. Further, field staff is unsure about the political commitment to JFM in some states and fear that political interference will hinder effective implementation. These concerns regarding implementation should not however be construed to mean that JFM is a failure. For, despite these recent problems, JFM is still an improvement on the situation before when foresters and villagers were engaged in conflicts and the forests were degrading.

VII. Conclusions

In this chapter I traced the role of the West Bengal Subordinate Forest Service Association in promoting a people-oriented forest policy in West Bengal. The main argument was that the support of front-line workers seemed key to understanding the emergence and success of Joint Forest Management in West Bengal. The reasons why progressive foresters pushed for participatory management rest in the general crisis caused by rapid degradation of the forests and the increasing conflicts around forest resources. Similarly, many communities had realized the importance of forests and needed the authority of the state to support them in their efforts. A constellation of factors came together in the late seventies and early eighties leading to a change in the approach to forest management.

In contrast to the “official” and “subaltern” accounts presented in Chapter 3, the account of the front-line workers and their union draws attention to the differences within the state on policy

issues that arise from structural features of the work situation. By focussing on the work situation this account exposes the ways in which foresters needed the cooperation of communities in order to carry out their tasks. As the work situation changes (as it has) the motivations for front-line workers to implement JFM will also need to be realigned. Further this account shifts the attention from just the state (as in the official account) or just society (as in the subaltern account) to the interface between state and society at the local level. By holding the relationship between villagers and foresters under a magnifying lens, this account illuminates the ways in which interaction between the two parties shapes the actions of villagers as well as foresters.

The account of reformist front-line foresters and their union presented in this chapter helps complement the earlier official and subaltern accounts of the emergence of JFM. Foremost, this account explains how the climate of conflict and mistrust that was viewed as the main impediment to Joint Forest Management in the previous accounts was precisely the catalyst that pushed front-line foresters into supporting the participatory approach. Front-line foresters, were put in an impossible work situation with the increasing violence, and that subsequently led them to demanding a more participatory forest policy. This account also explains why it took till 1989 for JFM to be formalized as a policy. Till 1977, the Associations efforts to lobby the minister's had met with little success. Even after the Left Front came to power, its first priorities were to implement land reforms. Meanwhile, the WBSFSA took their message to the people. Simultaneously, social forestry helped improve the relations between the people and the Forest Department. With the encouragement of the Association, front-line foresters had also started forming informal protection groups throughout the south-west. These groups were widespread--

neither restricted to the areas under one or two progressive senior foresters, nor solely dependent on action by enlightened communities. Rather, they were geographically dispersed depending upon the attitudes and enthusiasm of various front-line foresters. This supplementary account also helps account for how villagers overcame collective action through active support to communities who were enthusiastic in protecting their forest patches. Finally it makes clear that since front-line foresters had promised something to villagers. Consequently front-line foresters lobbied from within the FD for villagers to get a share of the final timber harvesting. The order formalizing these committees was essential to sustaining these efforts (for otherwise the protection efforts might have been short-lived). Thus together the three accounts help explain better the trajectory of JFM's emergence and diffusion in West Bengal.

This chapter served to illustrate several issues that I flag here and elaborate further in the concluding chapter. First, in contrast to the statist (progressive bureaucrats) or societal (spontaneous community) explanations for the emergence of a participatory forest management policy—I highlighted the role of the public sector union and workplace issues, the West Bengal Subordinate Forest Service Association. In studies of policy reform, we need to be alert to such unexpected mechanisms for policy change, mechanisms that are often hidden because of strong prior commitment to a particular perspective, whether statist or communitarian. Second, scholars have already widely critiqued neo-liberal perspectives on the motivations of public officers for being misleading. To develop a better understanding on the difficult issue of bureaucratic motivations, we need detailed cases of good performance. The case of JFM presented here adds to the small number of such cases. The most significant point that the case illustrates is the importance of understanding the actual work situation of public officials rather than abstract

notions of what behavior would result from individual maximizing strategies if one is to grasp what actually motivates public officials. Relationships with client-communities form an important feature of the work situation. Demands from communities can lead to improved performance of public agencies; or as happened in this case, progressive foresters can mobilize communities to push for policy changes. Further, the case also illustrates how under conditions of conflict and alienation, at the periphery the boundaries between the state and society can be blurred; front-line workers can begin to identify more with the communities they serve rather than their own organization within the state. In some cases such blurring can lead to innovative solutions to problems, as happened in the case of JFM presented here. Finally, the case emphasizes the importance of unpacking the state to understand policy outcomes as suggested by some recent literature (Migdal, Kohli et al. 1994). Separating the front-line workers from other policy actors in this case helped us understand some of the forces that shaped the policy change, and might offer insights into other cases of policy making.

Chapter 5

POLICY ADOPTION: WEST BENGAL IN CONTEXT

I. Introduction

In the late eighties a constellation of factors converged to create an environment favorable to the emergence of Joint Forest Management. While in the previous two chapters I focussed largely on the origins and diffusion of JFM through informal channels in West Bengal; in this chapter, I return to the policymaking context that led to the adoption of Joint Forest Management at the state and later the national level. I do not go into detail about the policy adoption at the national level (the Center) but introduce it here partly to demonstrate how policy-making at the national level is different from that at the state level.

Two points stand out about the story of policymaking in forestry in West Bengal. First, policy adoption was predominantly determined by (a) local forces (rather than external/international actors) and (b) interest groups, i.e. groups that had a direct and immediate interest in outcomes rather than by particular influential individuals or groups with a symbolic interest in policy such as NGOs. Second, in contrast to the official and subaltern explanations that do not consider politics as central, policy reform was integrated into the politics of the state. Thus policy adoption was governed by a range of considerations—the concerns of bureaucracy about their own conditions, relations between the bureaucracy and the ruling party, and the electoral concerns of the ruling party.

In comparing the process of policy adoption at the state and national level I attempt to throw two features of policy-making into relief. First, the pressures that work against the adoption of a participatory forest policy in the states (for example the need for revenue or the need to divert forests to developmental projects) are either absent or much lower at the Center. Consequently, the Center has greater autonomy to make and sustain participatory forest policies than the states. Instead, the Center has been facing the converse pressures, with international agencies and domestic NGOs lobbying the state to adopt participatory forest policies.

Second, through the comparison between the States and the Center, one can argue that the ability of interest groups to influence policy making depends less on their relative strength or level of resources as the conventional pluralist perspective suggests (Truman 1951). It depends more on the history of the relationship of interest groups with the state as the recent literature on policy networks has pointed out (Jordan 1990; Rhodes and Marsh 1992; Smith 1993).¹ Thus for example in West Bengal, NGOs did not play a significant role in policy making because they have not been significant actors in the development process since the mid-seventies when the Left Front came to power. In contrast, at the national level, for a variety of reasons, organized domestic NGOs have been regular participants in policymaking through confrontational as well as cooperative strategies.²

¹ This literature represents an interesting advance on thinking about the role of groups in the policymaking process. Scholars arguing in favor of policy networks as a way of understanding outcomes suggest that relationships between groups and state are important. They draw on an earlier body of work on “issue-networks” (see Hecllo 1978) and build on it.

² In India, NGOs have a long history of policy advocacy and are accepted as legitimate actors in representing a grassroots perspective on policy. This legitimacy has increased in recent years through two important developments. First, the prevailing emphasis on civil society actors by the international community has highlighted NGOs as significant legitimate actors in the formulation of development policies. Second, in countries like India where the private sector has always been viewed with suspicion in its ability to act in the public interest, the neoliberal emphasis on privatization has translated into the use of NGOs for service delivery, as they are more politically acceptable than the private profit-making sector.

It will be clear that in both these points of comparison, the West Bengal case stands out as somewhat unusual. For one, given that states are less likely to independently adopt participatory forest policies (in the absence of pressure from the Center) as suggested earlier, West Bengal is an exceptional case. For another, in other states in India, groups such as environmental NGOs that have a long history of policy advocacy are not present to the same degree in West Bengal.³ Yet my purpose in highlighting these differences is to draw lessons from the West Bengal case for the larger literature on policymaking and policy reform, a task I undertake in the next, concluding chapter.

In the second section that follows this introduction, I highlight features of West Bengal context that led to the adoption of JFM. In the third section, picking up from where Chapter 2 left off, I describe the key features of the national context that led to the passing of the national JFM order. In the fourth and final section, I discuss some recent developments around the implementation of JFM that are rooted in deeper controversies about the rights of communities to forest resources and the role of the state in forest management.

II. WEST BENGAL IN CONTEXT

Strong pressures from the WBSFSA to change policy as I described in the previous chapter, or the initiative of a few progressive senior forest officers need not have led to policy reform. The proposed policy change could have failed to gain necessary support or could have been buried.

³ For example in Karnataka, NGOs have been active in lobbying for changes in forest policy although they have not always been successful. For a good discussion of the role of NGOs in policy advocacy in Karnataka see Potter 1998.

Yet, because of several factors that I elaborate below, JFM encountered a favorable context and was consequently adopted.

A. Supportive political climate

In the previous chapter, I showed how the CPI (M) has been enmeshed with public sector unions in a relationship that secures control over them by acceding to some of their demands. In late eighties, these demands fortunately coincided with a difficult situation internal to the party for which participatory forest management offered a good solution. After coming to power in 1977, there were two important changes in CPI (M)'s political strategy⁴. First, its focus shifted from mobilization and expansion of influence to consolidation of its support base. Second, learning from the experience of the United Front Governments in 1967 and 1969, the CPI (M) had realized that in order to stay in power, it needed to provide an effective and stable government. Consequently, the CPI (M) restrained industrial labor, included middle farmers in the political transformations in the countryside, and increased their control over the administrative machinery by gaining the support of the public sector unions. In the words of some observers, the party's strategy turned from being "radical" to being "reformist" (Mallick 1993).

Simultaneously, the Left Front undertook several reformist developmental programs to strengthen its organizational base and increase its rural support. The most important program was that of land reform. By 1984, the CPI (M) had appropriated and redistributed 80,000 hectares (approximately 0.92 percent of total land area of West Bengal). In addition, through Operation Barga, it organized registration of *bargadars* (sharecroppers) thus providing security and some protection to an otherwise exploited group of landless labor. By 1985, approximately

3 million sharecroppers had been registered and crop sharing arrangements were revised to favor the sharecropper in a seventy-five twenty-five split (Kohli 1987). Simultaneously, the Left Front government implemented the centrally funded Integrated Rural Development Program (IDRP) in the rural areas. The IDRP mostly consisted of loans for the creation of income-generating assets by the rural poor. IDRP loan beneficiaries were selected by the local *panchayats* and provided an opportunity for local party units to woo new supporters and reward existing supporters⁵. The successful implementation of these two programs went a long way to increasing the support for the Left Front government during the early years of its rule.

Yet, both these programs soon declined in importance. The land reforms program slowed down by the mid-eighties, because most of the vested land had been redistributed and many of the informal sharecroppers registered. Despite the low interest on the loans, IDRP suffered from high default rates; a problem exacerbated by the loan forgiveness camps that were held for political reasons from time to time. Consequently the program slowed down as funding from the Center was reduced. By the 1987 elections, the benefits of these programs were fading from public memory and the CPI (M) was looking for new reformist programs to sustain its support base.⁶ At this political moment, JFM appeared an attractive solution.

JFM offered several advantages for CPI (M)'s political agenda. The right to forest resources was an important issue for a majority of the forest dependent rural poor, who were the main support

⁴ For a good discussion of the CPI (M)'s strategy in the post 1977 period, see Kohli (1991).

⁵ On coming to power, the CPI (M) amended the *panchayat* system from the earlier four-tier system to the current three-tier system. In addition to increasing the *panchayat's* power over local developmental funds, an important change was allowing the *panchayat* elections to be fought explicitly on party lines. Not surprisingly as a result the allocation of development funds became an important means of sustaining support for the ruling Left Front.

⁶ Interview, TP, Midnapore, 1995.

base of the Left Front government. Granting the rural population greater access to forest resources was also politically timely as it offered benefits for tribal groups who were increasingly sympathetic to the Jharkhand movement for a separate tribal state.⁷ Further, fortunately for the CPI (M) the demand for greater involvement of people in forest management came from the WBSFSA. By acceding to the WBSFSA's demands, the CPI (M) could further consolidate its support within the Association at little cost.⁸ Adopting JFM also provided the CPI (M) an additional opportunity to decentralize the implementation of development projects and increase the powers of the locally elected *panchayats*.⁹ Finally, adopting JFM portrayed the Left Front administration in a progressive light (compared to other states) to international agencies such as the World Bank and the Ford Foundation who favored participatory policies.

Moreover JFM was expected to bring these political gains at minimal cost. Compared to the high costs of policing and protection, the per hectare cost of JFM was much lower—a mere Rs. 250 per hectare as compared to approximately Rs. 750 for social forestry (Singh 1994). Further, the World Bank was willing to fund even this low investment in the second phase of the World Bank Social Forestry Program. Additionally, the cash share of profit promised to FPC members was contingent upon the forests regenerating—the Left Front would not have to invest the money

⁷ The Jharkand movement in West Bengal was embodied in a political party—the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha—that was a rival for rural support in many tribal dominated areas in the southwest. Although largely located in the tribal districts of Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh, the movement had considerable support in the three southwestern districts of Midnapore, Purulia and Bankura that had a significant tribal population. For a detailed discussion of the relationship of the Jharkhand movement and forests see Part III in Das (1992).

⁸ It is important to note that earlier, the CPI (M) had sustained support in the WBSFSA (and the State Coordination Committee) by increasing pays scales and benefits that put a heavy burden on the state budget. According to Mallick, (1993: 175) out of the 27,000 million Rs. Annual State Plan, 22,000 million Rs. goes towards paying government salaries, leaving little for developmental work.

⁹ The panchayats have slowly been given control over a large share of state developmental funds. For details on the financial and oversight powers of the panchayats see Gent (1993), chapter 4.

upfront. At best, by adopting JFM the state would increase its revenues from forests, and at worst, the state would gain some political capital.

Finally, there were good reasons for the CPI (M) to believe that JFM would be successfully implemented. This was an important issue for the CPI (M) because many programs in India fail due to inefficient implementation. In this case however, front-line workers supported the new policy almost guaranteeing its efficient implementation. Further, there was concrete evidence that communities would play their part in the collaborative arrangements, for JFM involved formalizing already existing informal FPCs. The informal FPCs had managed to regenerate patches of forest in the southwestern districts. In such a situation, the official JFM Order would provide them official recognition, thus boosting their morale. Besides, apart from JFM, the Left Front had no real alternative policy options that could halt the total degradation of the forests. In sum, for the Left Front dominated by the CPI (M), JFM looked politically attractive.

B. Lack of opposition from industry

One potential source of opposition could have come from the timber interests (contractors, saw mills etc.) whose illegal operations would have been threatened by the imposition of JFM. In essence JFM was a mutually beneficial agreement between the Forest Department and the villagers that excluded timber interests. Such opposition did not materialize because there was not enough timber left for industry to be interested in. JFM in West Bengal was initially restricted to the three main districts in the southwest. Unlike the large-scale legal (and illegal) operators in North Bengal, the timber industry in the southwest is fragmented, not organized and

most timber trading and processing operations are small.¹⁰ This is partly because the timber from the *sal* tree is not as valuable as the old growth teak trees of the North (See Table 1). Partly it is because the forests of the southwest are geographically dispersed and interlaced with settlements in contrast to the dense and thinly populated forests in the north. Therefore, in the south-west, most illegal extraction comprised of *sal* poles that fed small saw mills and firewood for sale in the local markets.

Table 5.1 Revenue from Forests (1994-95) Rs. in Lakhs.

Circle	Timber Poles	Firewood	Minor Forest Products
Hill Circle and Northern Circle	2845.4	93.11	21.28
Western Circle	77.95	64.80	26.99
Rest	940.45	22.32	120.37
Total	3863.80	180.23	168.64

Source: Adapted from WBFD 1995.

These small-scale operators had nothing much to lose from JFM even though they were excluded from the new arrangements. Rather, if JFM was successful and there was an increase in the quantity of produce, these operators felt that they could give up their illegal operations and obtain timber through legal means.¹¹

C. Reluctant Bureaucracy

The second potential source of opposition to JFM was within the senior levels of the forest bureaucracy.¹² Senior bureaucrats were reluctant to give up power and control over state

¹⁰ The two circles (Northern and Hill Circle) contribute approximately seventy-five percent of the total revenue from timber poles in the state (WBFD 1995). Most of this timber goes to the three saw mills owned by the Forest Development Corporation, a public sector undertaking (Mitra 1995).

¹¹ Interview SP, Calcutta.

¹² Although the gazetted forest officers also have their own union, it did not play a role in vocalizing opposition.

forests—in the words of one interviewee foresters were the last, “*zamindars*.”¹³ Such reluctance was especially prominent when control was to be given to villagers who in their eyes were the cause of the problem of deforestation. Forest officers had no confidence in the ability of villagers to protect the forests or manage them. Villagers, they thought, held short-term perspectives and would not be able to wait for the forests to regenerate. Nor, they thought, would villagers assign much weight to benefits that would accrue only after ten years.¹⁴ Another source of resistance was the feeling that JFM would open the door to political interference in forestry operations, interference that the Forest Department had till then been somewhat insulated from. One interviewee also suggested that the transparency in operations that JFM called for would test the technical competence of foresters that had so far never been questioned. For example, prior to JFM, foresters if foresters efforts at raising nurseries or plantations failed due to incompetence, they could hide such mistakes from senior officers. With villagers keeping an eye on the activities of foresters, front-line foresters were vulnerable to such mistakes coming out into the open. It is also likely an unspoken fear existed, that greater transparency under JFM would reduce potential sources of corruption. The opposing foresters feared that JFM was the thin end of the wedge in the gradual attrition of their power.¹⁵

These fears were not entirely unfounded. Although the senior levels of the Forest Department in West Bengal have had a relatively good relationship with the Left Front Government, the Left Front has been simultaneously slowly eroding its powers. On the one hand, the Left Front

¹³ Interview, DD, Calcutta.

¹⁴ I did not find much evidence to support this position. See Chapter III for villagers views on felling and profit sharing.

¹⁵ To a significant extent such skepticism about JFM still exists within the senior levels of the forest service. In a small survey of 24 senior forest officials I conducted, many felt that JFM was the “latest fashion” and would not last.

Government had increased the core budget of the Forest Department. In West Bengal, where the potential of revenue through corruption is lower than that of other states (for example, U.P. due to the sheer volume of timber felled each year), the core budget is an important part of the power of the Forest Department. Further, the Forest Ministers in the Left Front have supported forestry as a professional service. Thus as an observer noted, in 1988 the Forest Department had a high opinion of the political party (Stewart 1987). On the other hand, the CPI (M) was slowly eroding the FD's power by increasing the influence of the local *panchayats* in all aspects of development work, including forestry. For example, whereas earlier the Forest Department had autonomy in the selection of beneficiaries of various programs (for example, the hiring of local labor) now foresters have to consult with the *gram panchayats* and use a list of potential beneficiaries that it provides. Or whereas earlier the Forest Department planned forestry and related developmental activities independently from the local *panchayats* (even the Block Development Office), the CPI (M) in 1985 included forestry to the list of issues over which *panchayats* had control. Thus the Bhoomi Sanskar Sthayee-Samiti was converted into the Ban-o-Bhoomi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti giving the *Panchayat* some say over local planning in the forestry sector. Given this slow erosion of power by the political party, bureaucrats opposed to JFM were caught in the middle—between the pressures for policy change from the Left Front government and from the subordinate front-line foresters. They could not openly voice their fears and challenge the participatory policy proposed by the reformist foresters and supported by the political party. Indeed, the general concern about the future of the Forest Department in face of increased degradation, made the senior levels of the bureaucracy remain silent about their opposition and reluctantly agree to try out the proposed new alternative.

Instead, the challenge to JFM came from another quarter. The Secretary of Finance objected to passing the JFM order on the grounds that sharing of revenues at source was unprecedented and that the sharing arrangements would result in a huge loss of revenue to an already cash-strapped state.¹⁶ In response, reformists within the Forest Department argued that instead of losing twenty five percent of the revenues, the state would gain seventy five percent, since at the time there were no revenues generated by the degraded forests. Further, they warned that if the rate of forest degradation continued, in any case there would soon be no revenue from the forests for the state. JFM also did not entail much additional spending, they pointed out. The Forest Department could also use funding from the extended World Bank Social Forestry Program to mitigate the initial costs of JFM.¹⁷ Finally, progressive elements argued that the World Bank funded social forestry program had already set a precedent of sharing of revenue from the strip plantations, and the JFM order would simply be extending this practice to degraded state forest lands.¹⁸ In the end, these arguments won.

The policy reform could have easily stalled on petty issues. For example, one question was— why give FPCs a twenty five percent share? Why not a fifty percent share or some other proportion? Some of my interviewees suggested that policy makers chose twenty-five percent because villagers would find it easy to understand; after all share-cropping uses a similar division (twenty five percent to the land-owner and seventy five percent to the sharecropper) of the harvest. In any case, twenty five percent had been promised in part of the existing World Bank's social forestry program, so using the same proportion would create less controversy. The state

¹⁶ Interview SP, 1995.

¹⁷ Roy, personal interview. Recall also that Dr. Banerjee was working at the World Bank at this point in a position to influence programs.

¹⁸ Banerjee, personal interview.

bureaucracy would not have allowed a fifty percent share (they were opposed to any revenue sharing), so the twenty five percent was chosen.

A second question that needed resolution was whether the FPCs had to be separate from the *panchayats*, or a part of their functioning. There were grounds for having FPCs as a part of the *gram panchayats*, as they would then be linked to the information and developmental channels of the three tier system. Further, since the *panchayats* had the responsibility of overseeing the forest related projects (through the Ban-O-Bhoomi Sthayee Sanskar Samiti), FPC oversight could also logically be delegated to them. Yet, both senior and subordinate officials in the Forest Department were keen to maintain a level of political independence in the implementation of JFM and argued for FPCs to be separate organizations from the *panchayats*. If FPCs were made part of the *panchayats*, they argued, in villages where political majorities were slim FPCs members could become pawns in political fights.¹⁹ In the end, FPCs were formalized as village groups independent of the *panchayats* and legitimated only by the Forest Department.

A third and related question was how did policymakers decide to share profits with individual FPC member households. Especially in West Bengal, where the *panchayat* system is strong, one would expect the *panchayats* to be the most logical recipients of the twenty five percent share. These funds could then be earmarked for general village development, a politically favorable outcome. In fact, the initial plan was to share the twenty five percent with the *panchayats* for village development works. In return the *panchayats* were expected to assist the Forest Department in curbing illegal felling. A proposal to this effect was submitted to the State

Panchayat Department.²⁰ However, proponents of JFM in the FD argued that this arrangement was not such a good idea because of potential free rider problems.²¹ If the cash share of profits was given to the *panchayats* and used for general village development works they argued, FPC members would not directly link the investments in protection to the benefits. Besides, village development works were vulnerable to politics and corruption. Villagers, proponents argued, would prefer cash income. This position was supported by evidence from the strip plantation component of the social forestry program as well as the experience with the tribal cooperatives—the LAMPS; both of these collective efforts had been less successful than the private farm forestry components.²² By granting individual cash benefits to FPC members, villagers could directly connect their protection work with the benefits they received and therefore had a higher stake in preventing free-riding problems.²³ The *panchayats* were not kept completely out of the picture either. In the first JFM Order of 1989, only the poorer households, i.e. those who were willing to be part of the FPC from among the list of potential beneficiaries chosen by the *panchayat*, could become members of the Forest Protection Committees and could claim the twenty five percent shares. This retained some control in the hands of the *panchayats* in choosing beneficiaries.²⁴ Thus, the strong support of the political party and the lower levels of the bureaucracy (including key progressive senior foresters) served to pressure the opposition within

¹⁹ Despite this separation, conflicts between the *panchayats* and FPCs are arising in some regions. Moreover, the FD itself is not immune to politics. One researcher noted that there was a pattern of FD support to CPI (M) villages and Ramakrishna Mission support to Congress (I) villages at least in the early 1980s (Stewart 1987).

²⁰ See *Statesman*, December 14, 1985.

²¹ Interview, VP, Calcutta, 1995.

²² Evaluations have not found LAMPS effective in promoting the interests of forest dwellers despite their monopoly control over several NTFPs. While there are many reasons for this failure, an important factor is their inability to translate into direct benefits for individual collectors of NTFPs. For example, LAMPS have been plagued with problems of timely payments to collectors due to bureaucratic reasons. For an overview of the failure of such cooperative ventures in NTFPs see (Saighal, Agarwal et al. 1997).

²³ This concept of individual benefits was also implied in the philosophy of the CPI (M) slogan of land to the tiller and forest to the dweller.

²⁴ Later, in the amended JFM Order of 1991, membership of FPCs was opened to two members from all village households.

the bureaucracy from two directions much in the manner of the “sandwich” strategy that Fox found in reforms within the Mexican Food Program (Fox 1989).

D. Other actors

1. International Agencies.

Broadly speaking, international agencies did not play a central role in the process of JFM adoption. Two international agencies have been active in JFM in the state—the World Bank and the Ford Foundation. The Ford Foundation has been involved in promoting JFM through research and training programs after its adoption in the state. In 1987, Program Officer William Stewart visited West Bengal to look at the social forestry program.²⁵ Consequently, the Ford Foundation lent full support to JFM in West Bengal and identified three potential foci for its work: a) research on the functioning of FPCs; b) research on alternative sources of income such as NTFPs and c) training for Forest Department officials, local political leaders and FPC members.

In addition, the Ford Foundation supported the formation of multi-disciplinary Working Groups at the state and district levels to increase dialogue among researchers, foresters and villagers about potential problems and possible policy approaches. The Working Groups met once a month for program formulation, monitoring and policy analysis. In West Bengal, the first working group was instrumental in getting the initial JFM Order revised on two key issues, (a) the inclusion of women as joint members (along with their husbands), and (b) the inclusion of

²⁵ Dr. Banerjee who was then at the World Bank persuaded the Program Officer to visit Arabari, where there was to be a function to mark the granting of twenty-five percent of the profits after felling.

all villagers as FPC members not just those who were poor or dependant on forests for subsistence.

The World Bank, as mentioned earlier, has been involved in supporting the JFM component of their social forestry program.²⁶ In particular, the social forestry funds have been key for initiating village development projects that sustain villagers in the difficult early days of protection. Besides this direct support, the social forestry project has also improved the research and monitoring capacities of the Forest Department, enabling it to systematically track the changes in forest cover and the diffusion of JFM.

2. NGOs.

In West Bengal, NGOs have played a limited role in the diffusion and implementation of JFM for two reasons. One is that in general, NGO activity in West Bengal is limited because of the strong presence of the political party cadres in the rural areas who feel that developmental work should be channeled through them. The other reason is that the Forest Department views the NGOs with suspicion as it feels that JFM is their program and they do not need NGOs for implementation. Foresters fear that when NGOs participate in implementation, they take credit for the success of the program. It is also likely that foresters fear the increased monitoring of their activities by NGOs. Two examples from NGOs working in the state will help to illustrate these issues.

The first illustration of the limited role of NGOs in community forestry comes from the experience of the School for Fundamental Research (SFR) a small NGO that represents a school of non-formal scientific thinking to promote science at the grassroots level. Since 1981, SFR has been working in the Ayodhya Hills region of Purulia. While initially their work primarily involved organizing ecodevelopment awareness training camps, SFR later began directly implementing wasteland development programs. A key difference between SFR and other NGOs in the state is SFR's firm belief in scientific solutions to environmental problems and the need to disseminate awareness of such solutions to the grassroots. Forestry has been a significant area of concern for SFR, and not surprisingly, SFR has felt that the involvement of rural people is critical for the regeneration of forests and conservation of biodiversity. Since 1987-88 the School has been conducting regular conventions with forest dwellers to establish a common understanding of problems and potential solutions that would protect their ethnic and traditional interests.

Although most of SFR's work has been focussed on non-Forest Department wastelands, it has taken a keen interest in the protection and management of state forest lands in the areas it works in. It has held several awareness camps and marches to increase the awareness of the villagers about the negative consequences of felling trees (Chakraborty 1988). SFR claims partial credit for starting self-initiated informal protection groups in Purulia with the help of the then local

²⁶ Bank involvement in forestry has only recently become significant. Although started in 1955, it was stepped up only in the late 1970s with a series of social forestry projects. From 1980 to 1992, the total Bank lending in the South Asian region was US \$ 1.9 billion of which approximately half was for social forestry (Guhathakurta 1993). The West Bengal Social Forestry project was one of the ten Bank-funded forestry projects in India over a period of fifteen years.

foresters of the Forest Department (Basu 1997).²⁷ In 1985, when there were rumors about the possibility of the FD formalizing the informal protection groups in the region, it immediately organized petitions to the DFO, demanding recognition. Some Range Officers acknowledged the efforts of these groups by signing and stamping their membership lists. Such pro-active solicitation of recognition has made it possible for FPCs to gain a head start once JFM was official. The work of mobilizing villagers and organizing them around environmental issues has however been difficult due to politics that colors all developmental activity in the state. In particular, the CPI (M) has always seen its local organization as the appropriate channel through which villager needs should be addressed. The work of NGOs (even if they profess themselves as being politically neutral) such as SFR offers an alternative to the state, that is threatening to the CPI (M) especially in regions where its hold is tenuous. SFR's work in the villages relies on village volunteers who help implement various eco-development programs. Political interests sought to mobilize these volunteers and set up a trade-union with a charter of demands to regularize the condition of these volunteers.²⁸ SFR did not approve of this trend and its work in the district was temporarily disrupted, and its staff disillusioned.

The NGOs do not fare much better in dealing with the Forest Department that is not particularly forthcoming in cooperating with NGOs. My second example illustrating this issue comes from Nari Bikas Sangh a small NGO that has been working in Bankura district with rural women's groups. Nari Bikas Sangh has started several *arjun* plantations (host trees to the *tassar* silk worm) managed by women's groups (ILO 1988). The silk harvesting and processing has

²⁷ Like Mr. Palit (see Chapter 3), Basu maintains that the SFR approach was different from the Arabari model—in Purulia there was total social fencing with complete ban on all intrusions into the forest (including firewood) till the forest regeneration. In addition, the groups were started with no expectation of a share in the forest produce.

²⁸ This situation was also mentioned in SFR's Annual Report 1995-96.

increased the income of women in the program and has significantly reduced seasonal migration. As it is involved with *arjun* plantations on village wastelands, it is keen to extend the program to degraded state forest lands. The Forest Department however is reluctant to extend support for this idea.²⁹ Ostensibly, the reason is because agriculture is not allowed in forest areas, and tassar cultivation can be viewed as agriculture. At the root of this reluctance however, is likely a suspicion of the NGOs and their work.

Since the passing of the JFM order in 1989 the Ford Foundation has sought ways of institutionalizing NGOs in the implementation of JFM. Two main NGOs were selected to work with the Forest Department—(a) the Ramakrishna Mission was to be responsible for training of FPCs in NTFP related income generation activities such as bee-keeping, tassar (silk) cultivation and the processing and marketing of medicinal plants and herbs; and (b) the Institute for Bio-Social Research and Development (IBRAD) for training of foresters in the new approach and research into various aspects of JFM. Both these NGOs have accomplished a great deal and have spread the message of JFM in the state. Unlike other states however, besides these two, hardly any other state-level NGOs are involved and there are few efforts to link the work of small, local NGOs that do exist.

As seems clear from the various glimpses into the role of various actors in the adoption of JFM offered above, the policy adoption process was part of the normal politics in the state.

International institutions played a limited role in catalyzing the process and reducing the financial burden of implementing JFM. Particularly after adoption they have been instrumental in diffusing information and bringing NGOs, researchers and the Forest Department together in

²⁹ Interview, KB, Ranibandh, 1997.

effective working groups. By contrast, NGOs have played a limited role in the emergence, diffusion and adoption of JFM. As we shall see in the next section, this cast of characters is quite different from those that have been operational at the national level.

III. ADOPTION AT THE CENTER

The national resolution on JFM in 1990 was highly influenced by the West Bengal JFM Order. However, the West Bengal Order was not the sole inspiration behind the national resolution. Much like the role of the pilot project at Arabari in the passing of the JFM Order in West Bengal, the JFM Order of West Bengal appeared at an opportune time at the Center to provide a precedence for the national resolution. By the late 1980s, the Central government was under increasing pressure from NGOs, environmental activists and international aid agencies to operationalize the 1988 Forest Policy.

Several factors enabled the national JFM Resolution of 1990. First, broadly, the Center has enjoyed greater autonomy from production oriented interests with respect to forest policy. States face several constraints in making forest policy. Since forestry is an important source of revenue, and forest revenues accrue solely to the states, states are reluctant to adopt policies that will reduce revenues. States are also faced with the need to convert forests for developmental purposes such as hydroelectric projects or dams that are supported by powerful political interests (Vira 1995). Keeping key political constituencies happy is a key factor guiding forest policy. Consequently, bureaucrats are subservient to the politics in the states. Most of these political interests favor production oriented forestry at the expense of conservation, or meeting the subsistence needs of rural people. At the Center, the situation is somewhat different, for the

Center does not control the revenues gained from production forestry. And while political interests at the center might lead to some large projects taking precedence over conservation concerns, for example large dam projects, by and large, the Center tends to support conservationist measures that cast it in a positive light.

Second, the influence of NGOs at the Center is much more prevalent than in the states. At the Center, a “revolving door” has been operational between the state and NGOs. Many environmental NGOs at the Center draw on high-ranking ex-bureaucrats to staff their programs. Several secretaries in the ministry of Environment and Forests have since moved to the non-profit sector or international agencies.³⁰ Such cycling between the private and public sectors is becoming increasingly common in forestry as the number of environmental NGOs increase. With the emphasis on community forestry and the use of alternatives to the state for implementation of projects, NGOs are growing and becoming attractive places for experienced personnel, particularly at the national level. Further, international organizations are keen to recruit the best personnel from the public sector in order to gain from their understanding of the system, their institutional memories, as well as their present and past contacts within government. These personnel are respected for their experience by current public sector staff and are relied upon for advice and suggestions in the framing of policy.

Such interactions and informal collaboration between NGOs, activists and public policy-makers is not unusual. Potter (1988) in an attempt to examine this issue suggests that in the current policy-making arena both at the state and central level, some individuals and groups have greater

access to the policy-making process than others. He labels those NGOs who have access to the policy-making process as 'insiders' and those excluded from it as 'outsiders'. In his examination of the ability of environmental groups to influence policy at the state level in Karnataka he shows that although "insiders" might have access to decision-making, they have little influence on the final policy product. Instead of influence in policymaking, he argues that in the states, NGOs have greater influence over the implementation of policy because they tend to be "thicker" on the ground in the areas they work in compared to overburdened government officials (Potter 1988).

As a result, environmental NGOs and social activists involve themselves more at the national level in attempting to influence policy.³¹ They retain a high profile in the capital and have been consistent critics of forest policy. Some have been instrumental in bringing the excesses of states to light (for example see Kanwalli 1993) others have focussed on carrying out and publicizing independent assessments of various forestry programs (see Shiva, Sharatchandra et al. 1983). Such NGOs have been often successful in generating pressure and preventing inappropriate policy, for instance, in the case of the 1980 Draft Forest Bill (Fernandes 1983). NGO and activist research has resulted in revision of JFM orders in many states to be more responsive to issues of gender (see Narain 1994; Sarin 1995; Agarwal 1997).

Third, this inter-twining of the state and NGO community has been institutionalized through several initiatives that bridge the boundary between the state, NGO, activist and academic

³⁰ Samar Singh to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Syed Rizvi to the Society for the Promotion of Wastelands Development (SPWD), the late V. Ishwaran to the SPWD, Anil Shah to the Aga Khan Rural Support Program (AKRSP), and Irshad Khan to the World Bank, O.N. Kaul to Tata Energy Research Institute (TERI).

³¹ Most NGOs that are active in their states in lobbying against heavy handed forest policies are also active at the central level. Thus the central state faces cumulative pressures that are difficult to ignore. For example, see the activist work of Samaj Parivartan Samudaya in Karnataka, the Society for Tribal Conscientization in Maharashtra or the Chipko movement in U.P.

sectors at the national and state level. One of the most important examples is the JFM National Support Network. The National Support Network for JFM funded by the Ford Foundation, was started informally around 1991. From an informal network of researchers, foresters, NGO activists and policymakers, the network has expanded and institutionalized research on JFM, especially the flow of research findings into policy change and implementation.³² Network members claim that their early work documenting experiences with JFM in Gujarat, Haryana and especially West Bengal were key influencing the June 1990 Government Notification on JFM (Campbell, Palit et al. 1994). Moreover, Network supported research has influenced international donor agencies to channel funds to projects in which JFM plays a dominant role. Consequently, several aid agencies including the World Bank, Overseas Development Agency, U.K. the European Economic Community have funded several JFM projects, as well as several research studies. The findings emerging from such research have influenced the language of new JFM Orders.

In the states, parallel to the National Support Group Network, donors have supported the formation of JFM “working groups” consisting of government officials, NGO activists and elected officials in order to learn from the processes of implementing JFM (Campbell, Palit et al. 1994). In some states, working groups have been successful in bringing together groups for discussion, in others they have failed to do so. However, vibrant and active working groups do not seem to be necessarily related to the success of JFM in the state. West Bengal is a case in point. Although widely hailed as a success story of JFM, the working group in the state has not met frequently, nor is it active in making proposals for changing policy, or bringing issues to the attention of the government.

³² For a flavor of the discussions within this network, see JFM Support Network Annual Meeting Report, 1995.

Fourth, international organizations have been consistently funding community oriented approaches to sustainable forestry. Since the seventies, international thinking had emphasized the importance of people's participation in forestry that largely took the form of social forestry programs. With the acknowledged limitations of social forestry, international support has turned to Joint Forest Management as a promising alternative. Consequently, all of the donor funded programs in India operational in 1996, had a community forestry component similar to JFM. This translated into 32 percent of the total donor funds. Simultaneously, these donor-funded programs encourage NGOs to get involved in community forestry projects, either for motivating and organizing village level groups or directly implementing programs. This emphasis on NGOs reflects the general trend of looking to organizations in civil society as viable alternatives to state, while overlooking ways in which the state has been successful in implementing community forestry.

Finally, in many ways, potential opposition to JFM was overcome in a prior phase during the battle to get the 1988 forest policy through. As I elaborated in Chapter 2, the 1988 Forest Policy was radical in its rejection of industry's first claim to forest produce. In the Policy, forest conservation and people's needs were identified as priorities for guiding forest management. Under the Policy, industry is expected to meet its needs for raw materials from private lands. The dominance of timber contractors had already waned since the formation of the Forest Development Corporations in the mid-seventies. With the passing of the 1988 forest policy, industry was further driven out of policy implementation. The JFM resolution instead solidified the role of grassroots groups in forest management while excluding commercial interests.

Partly, industry did not immediately react to these measures (the 1988 Policy or the 1991 JFM resolution) because of the negative publicity it would attract as there was widespread public support for the policies. Further, some observers feel that industry does not need to engage in such pressure group politics as the “the back door” has always been open.³³ One important development since 1995, in response to the new Policy has been the proposal to lease degraded forest lands to industry for captive plantations. Curiously, this proposal originated from the Ministry of Environment and Forests at the Center (CSE 1995). After the proposal met with serious opposition from NGOs who argued that the proposal went against the Forest Policy of 1988, the MEF dropped it temporarily.³⁴ The states however, began demanding that the MEF implement its own proposal and clear their schemes (Roychowdhury 1995). The prevalent climate in the MEF has favored industrial claims on the forests and the future role of industry in forestry is unclear.

IV. POST JFM

The JFM battle is not yet over. As JFM gets implemented, policy issues continue to arise that could influence the outcome of the program. How these policy issues are handled will decide the future of JFM and its sustainability. As we shall see, these issues are already raising questions in West Bengal that has one of the oldest JFM programs in the country as well as in other states

³³ Interview, JC, Delhi, 1995.

³⁴ NGOs argued against the proposal on several grounds. They did not believe that industry would be willing to lease degraded land since they had refused such lands when offered them in the past because they were not economically viable. Further, industry would not contribute financially to the regeneration initiatives, the efforts would be funded through low cost loans from development finance institutions like NABARD. Further, why could industry not strike partnerships with small farmers (or even Forest Protection Committees) to grow trees on low productivity lands, rather than lease productive forest lands? It is not even clear that there is a serious raw material shortage that could not be covered through existing production. In fact, leasing of captive plantations to industry would cause the price of timber to fall and consequently affecting Forest Protection Committees.

where the program has been implemented more recently. I close this chapter by highlighting some of these issues here.

A. Issues of principle

1. Instrumental vs. empowerment views. One of the important differences in various perspectives on JFM is between the instrumental and empowerment views. The Forest Department views the involvement of people largely as instrumental, having realized that protection of dispersed forests with limited staff is impossible without the help of local people. NGOs and grassroots groups view JFM as a step towards increasing the rights of people over the natural resources they depend upon. They acknowledge that although JFM as implemented today is in most areas limited to involvement in protection activities, in the long run through improving the capacities of FPCs to prepare management plans and include indigenous knowledge, it will move towards truly “Joint” Forest Management. In fact, one of the main critiques they offer of Joint Forest Management is that people are not being adequately involved in planning and management activities. Thus from the NGO and aid perspective, JFM has inched open a door that will lead to the legitimation of indigenous knowledge, decentralization and community control over natural resources and increased control of rural people over their own livelihoods.

This tension between instrumental and empowerment views of JFM is reflected in the controversy about naming these arrangements. Many in the Ministry as well as the State Forest Departments are against calling the new collaborations “Joint” Forest Management, preferring instead “Participatory” Forest Management. Despite many clarifications to the contrary, NGOs

and international donors continue to use Joint as the preferred term.³⁵ It seems clear that NGOs, and international agencies continue to consistently use the word Joint as opposed to participatory, whereas government documents vacillate between the two, using one or the other, somewhat at random. With the naming of the national network as the JFM support network the trend seems to favor the use of “Joint”, however, the issue is far from resolved.

Table 5.2 Modes of Forest Management

	Forest Department Involvement	
Community Involvement	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>Low</i>	Traditional Forest Management	Participatory Forest Management
<i>High</i>	Community Forest Management	Joint Forest Management

What is at issue here is a vision of the direction that JFM should move towards. JFM at present therefore represents an uneasy equilibrium of the point upto which FDs are willing to go in their conservation goals, and a minimum starting point for community involvement from the perspective of NGOs.

2. Subsistence vs. Development. The instrumental and empowerment views of JFM are also reflected in another issue—whether forest fringe villagers have economic, as opposed to subsistence, rights to forest produce. That communities have rights to subsistence is not disputed by any of the stakeholders, including state Forest Departments. However, whether villagers can

³⁵ In an appeal to try and get a directive issued ordering the consistent use of Participatory Forest Management, a senior forest officer offers several reasons for preferring participatory. He feels that participatory indicates an open ended growing dynamic concept whereas Joint resonates with Joint stock companies and suggests a restricted group of people, excluding others. Moreover, in the original circular, the Government of India used the term participatory rather than joint which is indicative of the spirit of involving people without conferring proprietary rights. Joint, he argues is a “mischievous term with potential dynamite to weaken the state ownership and a back door concept for privatization of a common pool resource like forests” (circular 1994). More seriously, participatory does not imply a change in the ownership of the concept whereas joint might be taken to mean a joint property rights.

base their economic development on forest resources is a key question, especially if they are equal partners to the protection and regeneration of the forests. This issue has increasingly come to the fore, especially as FPCs and NGOs representing them are demanding that a larger share of the profits go to the villagers (Agarwal and Saigal 1996).

3. Do villagers degrade? One of the issues of contention is whether to implement JFM on non-degraded forest lands as well. At the heart of the issue is whether one believes that people are capable of managing forest resources without incentives such as profit sharing. Foresters who believe that the non-degraded forests are in good condition today despite villagers and due to good policing by the Forest Department, consider that they have been successful in preventing the degradation of those areas, so there is no need to involve communities in protection activities. Those foresters (and most NGOs) who believe that people are capable of managing resources prudently on their own without monetary incentives, feel that non-degraded areas should be included in JFM so that community efforts are recognized. Some would even argue that the non-degraded forests are there because of community protection. In many states, unlike West Bengal, where non-degraded forests cannot be brought under JFM, communities have the perverse incentive of degrading their forests in order to participate in the program. A related issue concerns the question of implementing JFM on reserve forest lands and wildlife sanctuaries. Since trees from these designated forest are not managed for production, fringe villages will have to be offered other incentives in lieu of a share of the profits for their support of the program (Kothari, Pande et al. 1989; Agarwal and Saigal 1996). The institutional structures for such areas are still being worked out.

B. Issues of practice

1. Community Related Issues. First, and foremost, there is the issue of conflict management in JFM. Some studies suggest that while JFM seems to have reduced the conflicts between the foresters and the villagers, inter-villager conflicts have increased (Kant and Cooke 1999). Some of these conflicts have to do with the administrative boundaries of forest areas allocated to FPCs. For example, villagers in the village of Bara were protecting the forest area near their village. However, when JFM was formalized, the neighboring village of Sarbera was assigned the same area to protect since it fell in the forest beat in which Sarbera was located. Bara villagers are upset because Sarbera villagers will benefit from their protection of the forest patch. Moreover, villagers who now have a stake in seeing their forests preserved, are not above extracting timber etc. from the forests of neighboring FPCs. And as the trees mature, these stakes get higher and infringements that might have previously been ignored now become sources of conflict. The resolution of such conflicts has become a time consuming activity for front-line workers.³⁶

Second, there is the question of the date of registration. This date is important because FPCs can gain their profit share only after five years of protection (and after the trees are at least ten years of age) once they have been registered. Villages that have been protecting forests for a longer time are dissatisfied because their earlier protection work does not count towards the five years. Even Karandih, one of the early informal protection groups that has documented evidence of protection since 1973 was registered only in 1991. In such cases the informal protection work of the FPCs goes unrecognized. Again, there have been instances where groups, upon learning that they could only profit from felling five years after official registration, have felled the trees illegally prior to registration in order to increase their benefits.

2. Forest Department Related issues. For the Forest Department, one of the major issues that is emerging from the experience of implementing JFM is the need for a reorganization of the Forest Departments. Currently in most states, the territorial divisions are loaded with multiple responsibilities (including protection) whereas the function divisions like soil conservation are single task focussed. Furthermore, often territorial divisions overlap with functional ones, and responsibilities could be reassigned in ways more suited to Joint Forest Management. Similarly there is a need to reorganize beats so that each Beat Officer has a manageable number of FPCs under him. The number of FPCs in one beat varies from one to thirty. Given that weekly contact is essential for the smooth functioning of FPCs, some foresters suggest an average of six FPCs per beat. Such reorganization is already underway in West Bengal. In 1995, for the first time in its history, the Forest Department was fundamentally reorganized and the differentiation between functional beats and territorial beats was partially eliminated. Further the number of ranges was increased in order to facilitate extension work. While the reorganization has improved the implementation of JFM to some extent, some problems remain. There are other reasons for reorganization as well. As the focus on timber has receded, and the focus on NTFPs has increased, traditional structures of forest management and forestry research need reexamination.³⁷

A related issue is the need to organize the timber felling in the areas under JFM. The desires of communities are often at odds with the planned felling under the Working Plans, and neither of them take into account the capacity of the Forest Department to organize the felling and market

³⁶ See Kant, (1999).

the produce. This latter problem of marketing produce is looming large, especially as FPCs that started protection in the early 1990s have forest areas that are now ready for felling. Meanwhile, in the intervening years when the supply of timber was declining and prices were rising, many industries switched to alternative materials—for example, railways switched to concrete sleepers and the mines switched to metal scaffolding. With the trees under JFM maturing, the market might face a glut that could cause timber prices to drop considerably, thereby changing the incentive structures under which JFM operates. Moreover, even if the market was strong, the Forest Department's capacity to classify and transport the timber for auction to the local markets is limited. For JFM to be sustainable in the long run, these issues need to be satisfactorily resolved.

The training of foresters is another issue that needs to be examined carefully. Traditionally the FD has instead tried to maintain a distance from villagers. JFM requires the Forest Department to work with the FPCs in protection a task that requires some training in extension work. While some NGOs are offering training for foresters in JFM and extension, such training has not become part of the accepted curriculum at the Forestry Training Schools. Such training moreover will have limited effect until a belief in JFM takes deep roots in the Forest Departments. In other states that have not experienced the political crisis and violence that West Bengal went through, front line workers are not enthusiastic about JFM (Saxena undated). Field-staff are concerned that JFM might have counterproductive outcomes for forest conservation. For example field staff argue that JFM might increase encroachments on state forest lands because of the increased powers in management being given to the people. Finally, field staff

³⁷ In one recent JFM national network meeting, one observer commented on the absence of any discussion about timber management.

are aware that taking a participatory approach to forest management involves more than passing JFM orders, the Forest Department needs to be restructured to provide an enabling environment. JFM needs the creation of new posts and longer tenures, as well as recognition that it is a time consuming activity. Not surprisingly, field staff feel that JFM, as it is currently being implemented, will thrust more responsibilities on them without adequate support thus worsening their work situation rather than improving it. The increased transparency that JFM implies might reduce the potential for rent seeking. The importance accorded to community participation and indigenous knowledge threatens to erode the legitimacy of front-line workers position.³⁸

V. Conclusions

In this chapter I showed how the adoption of JFM in the state was in part a process of normal state politics. A favorable political climate combined with support from front-line workers and reformist foresters provided an opportunity to institutionalize JFM. Lack of opposition from the timber interests also contributed to the outcomes. The main potential source of opposition from the senior levels of the bureaucracy was overcome through a combination of innovative arguments and program design. This process of policy change at the state level was quite different from that at the Center. The activism at the Center around policy making might give the mistaken impression that NGOs were active in the state as well. I showed how this was not the case. Indeed, politics at the Center is quite different from politics in the states partly because the coalition of interests that operate at the Center is different, and partly because West Bengal is different from other states. Finally the story of how normal politics in the state led to the policy change being adopted, is in contrast to the two narratives about the origins of JFM that tend to

³⁸ Already, villagers question the fact that foresters are paid for protection while actually communities are doing the protection work without pay.

downplay the politics that surrounds policy change. Both presented idealized accounts that focussed on the appropriateness of the policy to the problem at hand, and neglect the way in which the political context enabled policy change.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSIONS

I. Introduction

Under what condition can participatory approaches be institutionalized in forest bureaucracies that have traditionally taken an antagonistic position vis-à-vis forest communities? The adoption of Joint Forest Management (JFM) in West Bengal was radical, and curious given that the change of policy was initiated by the forest bureaucracy in the absence of strong demands from social movements. The dynamics of the origins and success of this case are of particular interest in light of the current international emphasis on community forestry. Promoting the adoption of community forestry presents a challenge for reformists. How can participatory approaches be institutionalized in forest bureaucracies that have traditionally taken an antagonistic position vis-à-vis communities? An understanding of this case, where bureaucrats took a proactive stance, might help understand the opportunities and constraints to community forestry from within forest departments.

JFM represents a significant shift from the previous approach to forest management, that focussed on policing. In contrast, JFM involves formal partnerships between forest villagers and state Forest Departments through the formation of Forest Protection Committees (FPCs). This approach has led to significant progress in establishing joint management arrangements between communities and the Forest Department at the local level, and to actual forest regeneration. In south-west Bengal, the region where JFM originated, forest cover has increased, the yields of timber and of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) have increased, and the number of conflicts

between villagers and foresters have decreased. Sixteen other states in India have adopted JFM. Other countries in the region are implementing similar programs.

In this concluding chapter, I first recount the main findings of the research. In the section that follows I contrast the findings with expectations derived from relevant recent literature social science. This contrast helps us understand the broader relevance of my case. I conclude with some questions that the research raises.

II. THE MAIN FINDINGS

A. From one account to three

The main research question at the start of the research was to explain the uncharacteristically innovative actions of forest bureaucrats that led to the emergence of JFM. To my surprise, in the course of searching for one explanation of the origins of JFM, I found three. Two accounts—the official and the subaltern—emerged from the prevailing literature on JFM. I derived the third account from my fieldwork, especially my interviews with front-line foresters and office-holders of their trades union. Individually, each account emphasizes different actors and processes; taken together, they offer a relatively complete account of the reform process.

The first, official, account locates the genesis of JFM in the efforts of some innovative mid-level forest officers to promote the formation of Forest Protection Committees. At the heart of this explanation lies the experience of the Socio-Economic Project (SEP) at Arabari, initiated by Dr. Banerjee. When this pilot project was successful, the official account suggests, other foresters adopted the approach. This led to the rapid spread of JFM in West Bengal. The second,

subaltern, account locates the roots of JFM in the spontaneous reemergence of community forest management and in the appearance of tribal autonomy movements in the region. The Forest Department simply formalized what was already occurring on the ground. I found these two accounts firmly rooted in their respective constituents—the official account within official circles, and the subaltern account in the community of NGOs and environmental activists. Upon closer examination however, these stories alone could not explain the trajectory of JFM in West Bengal. The official account, for example, did not explain why it took more than ten years after the original Aribari experiment for JFM to spread. Nor does it explain how growing cooperation was possible in a climate of conflict and mistrust between villagers and foresters. The subaltern account similarly does not have a good explanation for bureaucratic behavior. Why did Forest Department staff support an approach that reduced their power? Why did they agree to give up a share of the profits from felling the protected forests? Further, the question of how local level collective action problems were overcome remained unaddressed in this account.

It is not uncommon to come across such contrasting explanations for the origins or success of programs. Explanations are often organized around dichotomies such as top down vs. bottom up; state vs. community; or elite vs. subaltern. However, my detailed examination of these accounts revealed that they failed to explain some elements of the case, were not entirely consistent with my field observations, and raised important questions about our understandings of state and community action. These new field observations that challenge some of the assumptions of the two prevailing - and polarized - interpretations of JFM have important implications for development policy. My construction of a third account of the origins of JFM, that emphasizes the role of front-line workers and their union suggests that the polarized

conventional accounts of events might hide more interesting dynamics.

B. Of pilots and diffusion

The official account of the origins of JFM in West Bengal emphasizes a narrative common to development programs—that of a successful pilot project that is subsequently diffused. I found however that the pilot Socio-Economic Project (SEP) at Arabari was only one of several roots of JFM, and furthermore, it played a somewhat different role than the linear one of innovation and diffusion suggested by the conventional story of the pilot project. While the SEP was important in demonstrating to the senior forest officers that a partnership between villagers and foresters could be forged, it had a more limited role in the spread of informal forest protection groups. In fact, in some key respects informal protection groups were quite different in structure from the SEP. Rather than being the model for the formation of numerous informal protection groups, I found the SEP at Arabari was more important in getting JFM adopted. Two dimensions of the SEP - the agreement for sharing 25% of the profits from timber felling, that was originally made only for Arabari; and the success of the regeneration efforts - provided a focus for the efforts to get JFM adopted. Further the SEP at Arabari offered the foresters an interpretation that was attractive because it implied a favorable view of foresters and their Department. I suggested that the reason why the official story of the pilot project and diffusion was so entrenched in the Forest Department and the broader forester community was that it offered a simple sense making structure for the emergence of JFM. Further, it provided the Forest Department with “ownership” of the idea, and portrayed foresters as innovators. This was important in the prevailing climate of criticism against the Forest Department.

The subaltern account of the diffusion of JFM is also incomplete. The subaltern account implies that the pattern of diffusion of informal protection groups would be random or shaped largely by such factors as the level of degradation of forests in a particular area, the proportion of tribal villages, the degree of villagers' dependence on forests, and the existence of a conservationist tradition. The dominant pattern of FPC formation that I found was different. When one village began protecting a particular patch of forest, it would prevent neighboring villagers from extracting timber or NTFPs. Following the conflicts that resulted from such protection, the first village would attempt to convince the neighboring villages to protect their own forest areas. As an increasing number of villages started protection groups in an area, there was pressure on the remaining villages to also start their own group. The problem of degradation and its solution became the drivers of diffusion. Thus the diffusion process was akin to that of ripples in a pond, catalyzed by the ways in which villages dealt with inter-village conflict.

C. JFM's roots in prior programs

Among the various roots of JFM, one that was surprising was the importance of the Social Forestry Program. This was especially surprising since social forestry has often been considered a failure because of its inability to meet the fuelwood needs of the rural population. While social forestry is considered to have been more successful in West Bengal than in other states, it has largely been targeted to commercial timber production rather than fuelwood. Thus it has not resulted in a significant easing of the pressure on state forests.

In contrast to this dismal view of social forestry in general, I found that social forestry in West Bengal laid the foundations for JFM's success. Unlike some other states, where new forest staff

were hired to implement the extension component of social forestry, in West Bengal, front-line foresters were trained for extension work. Thus, social forestry turned front-line workers into extension agents and helped improve the relationship between foresters and villagers. The World Bank-funded Social Forestry Project also brought with it various developmental funds (for wells, dams etc.) that provided employment and helped ease the initial hardship caused to villagers by the introduction of forest protection. After an initial period, front-line staff began to like social forestry because it cast them in roles of public servants, repositories of knowledge and controllers of development funds.

D. The problem of collective action

In contrast to the assumptions of the subaltern account, I found that the state played an essential role in the formation of informal forest protection groups. Those proponents of the subaltern account assume away the problem of collective action or point to indigenous community factors such as homogeneity, small group size and high dependence on forests as spurs for collective action. However, I found that, because of the tenure status of the forest lands and the relatively valuable nature of the resource, the state was an indispensable actor in getting informal protection groups to work. Because individual villages had no legal and exclusive tenure to the state forests they protected, they could not prevent villagers from nearby villages from attempting to exploit the resources they were trying to guard. The support of local Forest Department staff in enforcing their efforts was essential in sustaining forest protection groups. In addition, when the forests regenerated through protection, the relatively high value of the trees attracted powerful illegal interests that villagers were not equipped to confront. In such situations, only the resources and legal authority of the state could guard against illegal logging. Informal groups

needed to have the backing of front-line foresters. A generalized awareness that the protection efforts of particular villages were supported by the Forest Department could act as a deterrent to illegal timber felling.

E. The union and front-line workers

The most significant finding of the research was the role of the front-line workers union, the West Bengal Subordinate Forest Service Association (WBSFSA), in advocating policy change. Contrary to expectations about public sector unions, the WBSFSA had been advocating a participatory forest policy since the 1970s. The efforts of the union only came to fruition later, when the Communist Party of India (Marxist) - the CPI(M) - came to power. I found that the WBSFSA took upon this policy advocacy in response to the difficult work situation of front-line workers, that was in turn a product of the general crisis in politics and forestry. The role of the WBSFSA in the JFM story is missing from the two prevailing accounts of JFM and from the voluminous published and unpublished material on JFM in West Bengal. While the official account assumes that front-line workers opposed JFM, or at best were neutral to it, the subaltern account emphasizes the autonomous formation of informal protection groups by villagers.

F. State vs. community in forest policy?

The JFM case highlights the fact that in the field of forest policy and management, the structural divide has not been between the (bad) state and (good) communities as the literature on forest policy in India has tended to suggest. Rather, my examination of the history of forest policy suggested that divisions cross-cut the state-community distinction. At some points in time, the NGO community representing villager interests has sided with states against the central

government, as was the case in the imposition of the Forest Conservation Act of 1980. At other times, the center has sided with community groups against states, for example in the case of the Chipko movement. Similarly, even within the central government, those supporting a conservation focus in forest management have sometimes clashed with those supporting a production focus. These different positions have often been represented by the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture respectively. The existence of different policy positions within the central government has opened opportunities for reformists to find allies outside the state to advance their positions.

This broader argument is echoed in the case of reform of forest management in West Bengal. The adoption of JFM was partly a result of the differences between front-line workers and the rest of the forest bureaucracy about appropriate forest policy. As we saw, front-line workers allied with villagers and demanded a more participatory policy from the state. The frontline workers union, the WBSFSA, directly petitioned the ruling political party, the CPI(M), and forest ministers. Again, differences within the state about forest policy led to reformists building alliances outside the state in order to pressure for policy change.

III THE LITERATURE

These findings stand in contrast to the prevailing accounts on the origins and diffusion of JFM in West Bengal. They also contribute to current debates in the development literature.

A. Diffusion

The rapid diffusion of informal protection groups in West Bengal even prior to the official

institutionalization of the JFM program (842 groups of which 664 were formed in from 1985-89) merits closer attention especially as upscaling of successful programs has been an important issue in development literature. The literature has tended to view the process of upscaling as involving first the development and improvement of a model - often via a pilot project - and then diffusion to a broader area. In this perspective, the process of model formation is distinct from the process of diffusion of the pilot. Energies are devoted to ironing out the flaws of the model in the pilot stage. Smooth replication is then assumed. Inexact replication of the original is viewed as a reason for the failure of subsequent adoptions. For example, the currently popular theories of institutional isomorphism bracket the question of origins and focus on questions of the processes of diffusion—e.g. coercive, mimetic or normative forces (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Yet, processes through which models emerge and are legitimated are key to understanding their later diffusion (Scully and Creed 1999).

The JFM case raises several questions regarding this view of upscaling and diffusion. First, as I stated earlier, the process of diffusion in the case of JFM does not seem to have followed this pilot-project diffusion model even though it is popularly thought of in this way. Rather the two processes of pilot project experimentation at Arabari and the emergence of other informal protection groups elsewhere occurred almost simultaneously in a loosely-coupled fashion. The significance of this development will become clearer later.

Second, the dominance of the pilot project view obscures the other more important dynamic of diffusion in the case of JFM—a demand-driven dynamic in which villages demanded support from Beat and Range Officers for their informal protection groups. In this dynamic, what was

driving the diffusion was a horizontal spread of information about informal protection groups and a related pressure for villages to form their own groups. When one group caught neighboring villagers intruding in the forests under their protection, they did not simply try to bar them. They also encouraged the other villagers to form similar protection groups and promised support. What is interesting about this process is that, unlike other models (e.g. “model-farmer” processes where smaller farmers are expected to adopt technology after seeing the model-farmer’s success), the costs of not adopting were high—villagers could not meet their needs for firewood. Tendler (1997) argues that this process of demand-driven diffusion was key to the successful upscaling and implementation of rural programs in Ceara, Brazil.¹

In this demand-driven dynamic, there is link between the success of a program and the extent to which other groups demand the program. The more successful the original, the greater the demand to diffuse. In the case of JFM, if the original group was not vigilant in protecting its forests from intruders, neighboring villages need not have formed their own protection groups: they could simply raid the original group’s forests. The link was particularly tight because, before 1989, no funds were available to support forest protection efforts. So groups would not invest in group-formation unless they saw real gains from the effort.

Third, and linked to the previous point, front-line foresters were supported and actively encouraged the formation of protection groups. As I elaborate later, they wanted villagers to be involved in the protection of forests in the hope that their own work situation would be

¹ In her cases, widespread publicity about the program by the state government was key to the “demand-driven” approach. In the JFM case, in the absence of such widespread publicity, villages became aware of informal

improved. To this end, they not only encouraged group formation, but also promised villagers informally that they would try and get them additional benefits at the time the timber was felled. Front-line foresters viewed this as an opportunity to reduce their workload of patrolling so that they could focus more on forestry operations. Because of the informal beginnings of JFM, front-line workers were free to shape their activities in JFM as they saw fit. The literature on diffusion rarely emphasizes the importance of preferences of front-line workers. Often programs are formulated without consulting front-line workers, although they are in the best position to know what works and be committed to it. Moreover, we need to pay attention to such preferences, because “worker-liking” is a factor that is more under the control of project designers than other more contextual factors.

Fourth, because of the somewhat overlapping time-frame of the pilot project and informal protection groups, the latter were not modeled on the former. They differed in significant ways from the pilot SEP. Some observers would see this inexact replication as a failure. But rather than see it as a failure, one could view this process as adaptation of an original idea to suit different contexts. Because villages adopting the protection strategy were part of the process of informal group formation and diffusion, their potential for success in protection was much higher. Agarwal (1983) has made a similar point in explaining the failure of the adoption of woodfuel stoves in India. Two implications follow. One is that pilot projects can play a different role in many situations than being (simply) a model for subsequent adopters. They can be more important in the formalization of the practice rather than diffusion. Or they can provide post facto sense-making structures for the participants involved. Second, the pilots can continue

protection groups when they came into conflict with them. Although the mechanism of gaining information was

adapting and learning from the latecomers, as happened when, following the experience of other FPCs, it was decided to break down the size of the Arabari project into smaller FPCs.

B. Collective action

The literature on collective action around common property resources has tended to chastise the state for inappropriate policies that break down traditional systems of common property management. The state, either directly or indirectly through inappropriate policies, strains traditional systems of collective action and causes over-use of resources both by indigenous people as well as outsiders. That results in degradation of the resource. In the case of JFM by contrast, the state played an active role in the conversion of a de facto open access resource into a collectively managed resource. Two features of the case are significant when cast against the literature on collective action: the dynamics of the process through which collective action was initiated; and the details of the institutional arrangements through which they are sustained. To understand how the JFM case relates to, and can help extend the literature on, common property resource management, it is necessary to briefly summarize the key themes in recent debates.

In the early debates on CPRs two views predominated. One set of scholars argued that mismanagement was inherent in the nature of commonly held resources (Olson 1965; Hardin 1968).² Other scholars argued that mismanagement of resources was caused by inefficient state

different in the two cases was different, the process of demand-driven diffusion was similar.

²Hardin argued that it was in the interest of individuals to over-extract benefits from a commonly held resource. Even if a particular individual exercised restraint--others would not, leading to the resource being degraded in any case. In this formulation of the problem, the resource can be sustainably managed only through state regulation or privatization. As noted by many, this formulation of the problem closely parallels the prisoners dilemma game or Olson's collective action problem (Ostrom 1990).

policies (Blakie 1985; Repetto and Gillis 1988; Binswanger 1991).³ More recent research has challenged both views on theoretical as well as empirical grounds.⁴ At the theoretical level, a growing number of scholars argue that collective mismanagement is not inevitable (Runge 1986; Ostrom 1990). In the case of common property management, they show that whether free-riding dominates individual strategies or not is related to other factors such as the ability to cooperate, form acceptable rules, and the levels of monitoring and enforcement. Resource management involves an unknown number of repeated interactions. People learn from past experience of interaction, and change their future actions accordingly (Axelrod 1984; Runge 1986). Moreover, people are aware that their decisions are interdependent; in a small community, people tend to know what other people are doing, and there are mutual expectations of behavior. In fact, in developing countries characterized by poverty, the high transaction costs implicit in private property arrangements can often make common property an efficient institutional arrangement (Runge 1986). Thus collective action problems theoretically can be overcome.

Empirical evidence supports this contention. Numerous studies of efficient common property regimes in a variety of contexts and resources show that common property can be managed successfully in collectivity (Wade 1988, Ostrom 1990, Bromley 1992). And, countering the assertion that state policies result in inefficient management, in some regions that share similar geography and state policies, researchers have found robust common property management

³Their prescriptions to the problem are oriented towards pricing policies that internalize the high social costs of deforestation (Binswanger 1991, Repetto and Gillis 1988). Others have similarly shown that market infiltration has resulted in the breakdown of traditional institutions that were capable of efficient management (Poffenberger 1990).

⁴Those opposed to this explanation of "collective mismanagement" of common resources began questioning whether common property resources get degraded because they are managed by community institutions or, because these institutions break down. They pointed out that Hardin's formulation of the commons' tragedy confused open access resources with commonly managed resources (Bromley 1992)

systems to exist side by side with inefficient ones (Agrawal 1995). The question then is--what conditions support collective action in the management of resources?

One focus of interest has been the issue of trust that is central to the problem of collective action (Runge 1986; Wade 1988). Others have focussed on the institutions that govern collective action--the rules that govern appropriation, monitoring and enforcement and the mechanisms through which they get formulated and changed (Ostrom 1990; Agrawal 1995). In the following paragraphs I focus on the former issue and make a few limited remarks on the latter issue.

First, scholars emphasizing the issue of trust argue that the rules defining appropriation, provision, monitoring and enforcement can be useful only to the extent that people are likely to abide by them, and trust others to abide by them (Wade 1988). They suggest that cooperation can occur and be sustained when an individual is assured that a minimum number other people will also cooperate, leading to higher level of benefits for the group as a whole despite the fact that there may be a few free riders. The key question that is raised by this stream of the literature is under what circumstances will this core group of people cooperate? What are the factors that trigger cooperation and overcome the assurance problem? It is primarily in light of this latter question that the case of JFM is significant.⁵ How did trust develop between the foresters and the villagers, especially in a situation characterized by high conflict? Why did a core group of villagers find it beneficial to participate in the joint management of forests? These questions are key to understanding how successful new CPRs might be catalyzed.

⁵The rules that govern the Forest Protection Committees are common to all the FPCs. More importantly, the degree to which members perceive the rules as being fair does not seem to determine their willingness to protect. They do not have powers to change these rules.

I showed in Chapter 3 that there were three kinds of problems that the villagers faced: the problem of intra-village cooperation; the problem of inter-village cooperation; and the problem of trust between the Forest Department and the villagers. These three problems were linked because of the fact that the legal property rights to the forest lay in the hands of the state. Intra-village cooperation was difficult because, even if they cooperated, there was nothing to stop other communities (who had not agreed to cooperate) to over-extract the resource. Some villages did succeed in cooperation among themselves, but when they attempted to stop outsiders from extracting from the protected areas, their authority to do so was challenged. Thus an intra-village cooperation strategy could be undermined by external threats. Inter-village cooperation was made difficult partly because of geographical distance, and partly because of the generic problems of collective action in large groups. Finally, cooperation between forest officials and villagers was precluded by the atmosphere of fear and mistrust that prevailed at the time; a mistrust that was a product of villagers' past relations with the state.

This impasse was overcome through the gradual increasing cooperation with frontline forest officers. Such cooperation gave villagers the authority to exclude other communities from their forests. In turn, this helped alleviate the intra-village collective action problem by providing assurance that collective protection efforts would not be wasted. The social forestry program started in 1980 contributed significantly to this increasing cooperation, by creating a receptive environment within the communities (Shingi, Patel et al. 1986; Poffenberger 1991). Just as the social forestry program changed the attitude of the foresters towards villagers, it also changed the attitude of the villagers to the foresters. I suggest that this happened through two separate

mechanisms. Earlier, villagers had been reluctant to plant trees on their own land under the social forestry program because they were afraid that the government would subsequently appropriate their land as forest land (the way the zamindari forests had been taken over by the government two decades earlier). However, they realized that social forestry was not a trick to appropriate land and came to trust the forest department a little. Simultaneously the social forestry programme made villagers realize the monetary value of trees (Shah 1989). Second, the social forestry program formally involved panchayats in implementation. Villagers in general had greater confidence and trust in panchayats than in the Forest Department and, moreover, the panchayats could resolve disputes in cases of inter or intra village conflicts. By involving local institutions in the implementation of the program, the Forest Department gained some legitimacy for their programs, including JFM.

At the same time, as mentioned earlier, forest officers and front line workers, at some risk to themselves, demonstrated their commitment by using their official powers and resources in a discretionary fashion to help villagers overcome difficulties created by initial forest protection. They promised the villagers some ultimate benefit from the protection activities and were willing to provide it at their own risk. Furthermore, they tried to create trust incrementally through talking, creating of shared understandings of problems - much as the new literature on trust in relation to firms has argued (Sabel 1985). For example, one common argument front-line workers used was that they had no personal interest in the regeneration of the forests--they would get their salaries even if there was no forest. When they got transferred, they were not going to be able to take the regenerated forests with them. Rather it was in the interests of the villagers to regenerate these forests. These words resonated with the communities and contributed to the

creation of trust and overcoming the problems of collective action.

Second, the actual institutional structure of JFM provides FPCs with the incentives to protect the forest while allowing the Forest Department to generate revenue. An important element of the arrangements is that, although the actual protection efforts are collectively agreed upon, the benefits accrue to individual households. Households individually extract NTFPs from the forests for their own use and for sale. The share of profits from the sale of felled timber is given in the form of cash to individual households. The individual allocation of profit shares is particularly important as, in most such projects, benefits are collectively allocated - for example in the form of community development funds. Such collective benefits often lead to free-riding by villagers. The promise of individual benefits however made villagers more alert to illegal extraction as they could see their own share of profits getting depleted.

The other important element of the JFM relates to the state-owned nature of the forests. By virtue of their location, villagers had the power in this situation to collaborate in protection, but also sabotage protection if the collaboration was not in their interest. I found villagers were often willing to protect state forests and limit their extraction to NTFPs without demanding a share of the profits, providing the Forest Department did not fell the forests either. In order to get villagers to not resist the felling of the trees on maturation, the Forest Department had to offer some incentive - in this case the twenty-five percent share. Fortunately, the incentive was intrinsically linked to the success of the protection efforts. This structure of mutual benefit and

mutual dependence has been key to the success of the program.⁶

C. Pathways to Reform

The successful reform of forest policy in West Bengal took a path that merits closer attention for several reasons. First, in passing the JFM Order of 1989, the government of West Bengal formalized a set of arrangements that were already partially in place in the southwestern districts of West Bengal. In the SEP at Arabari, JFM arrangements had been in place since 1973 and had already been through one cycle of felling and sharing of revenue. Since the early 1980s, approximately eight hundred forest protection groups had been operational in informal partnerships with front-line foresters. These arrangements were the product of reactions to forest degradation and the previous forest policy, whether it was mid-level foresters creating pilot projects, communities spontaneously protecting patches of forest or front-line foresters supporting informal protection groups and lobbying for a change in forest policy. In all versions of the policy change, experimentation during implementation led to the new arrangements that were subsequently institutionalized in policy change⁷

In contrast to this process of policy change, the literature on reform assumes that the reform process begins from the top down—a process in which policy decisions are made at the center and then implemented by the bureaucracy. Implicit in this perspective is a Weberian view of the

⁶Understanding the structure of this arrangement is important. If the Forest Department was not interested in revenue, they could have simply formalized the informal protection groups and offered them unrestricted extraction of NTFPs. Yet without a concrete stake in the survival of the forests, villagers would not be as vigilant in catching offenders and protecting against illegal extraction.

⁷ In a parallel argument regarding trade agreements between countries, Gutner suggests that in some cases rather than states negotiating with each other and subsequently trading across borders, informal trade talks across borders by business can pull the states in to negotiate a formal trade agreement.

state as hierarchical, neutral and efficient in which implementation is not problematic. Although most scholars would reject a strictly rational view of the policy making process, such assumptions are widely prevalent in the literature. Although this description of policy reform may sometimes be realistic, in the JFM case it obscures an alternative process of policy change, in which the state formalizes what has been occurring for a while on the ground.

This raises a second related, but analytically separate point—the focus of the literature on policy elites as a means of understanding reform. For example, distinguishing between crisis and non-crisis situations, Grindle and Thomas (1991) examine the “room for maneuver” that policy elites have in the process of policy reform. Varshney (1995) argues that the major shift in Indian agricultural policy in the seventies was a result of the independent vision of the then agricultural minister. Similarly, Kohli (1987) argues that redistributive reform that benefits the poor can be advanced by committed left of center political parties that have a strong organizational base. Common to these studies is a focus on the policy elite—those in positions of power that can autonomously pursue reform.

This focus on policy elite diverts attention away from other groups that might contribute to policy formulation. In the JFM case, all the three accounts of the emergence of JFM emphasize the agency of the lower levels, whether the mid-level foresters in the official account, the spontaneous protection groups of the subaltern account or the front-line officers of the alternative account. Experimentation on the ground provoked by the previous forest policy led the actors in the various accounts to construct an alternative approach. In my examination of the JFM case, I argued that the seeds of reform can be found in the everyday interactions between the state and

citizens, in what some have called the “micropolitics” of development (Sivaramakrishnan 1998). Because of the general crisis in forestry that occurred in the late 1970s, front-line foresters found it difficult to continue implementing forest policy. The atmosphere of confrontation, violence and mistrust that prevailed pushed front-line foresters into the view that the only realistic alternative was a participatory forest policy. This dissatisfaction of front-line workers with their work situation impacted on policy through their union, the WBSFSA, that, because of its organizational strength and close relationship with the political party, was able to lobby for its policy preferences. Without the pressure for change from within the lower levels of the forest bureaucracy, and their informal support of informal protection groups, the forest policy reform might never have happened.

Contrasting with such an innovative stance, the literature on reform in developing countries suggests that bureaucrats in the public sector oppose change, especially change that attempts to reform the way in which public bureaucracies work (Grindle and Thomas 1991). Moreover, scholars argue that this resistance is likely to surface during implementation when the bureaucracy has more discretion over resources (Montgomery 1988; Goetz 1996). Bureaucratic resistance is also more prevalent in countries with a strong formal civil service such as ex-colonies (Montgomery 1988; Grindle and Thomas 1991).⁸ In fact, in his examination of the politics of land reform in West Bengal, Kohli claims that the main opposition to the land reform came from the lower level administration, especially the front-line workers (Kohli 1987). He suggests that land reforms have been successful in West Bengal because the political party largely circumvented the bureaucracy in implementation. In areas where reforms have been less

successful, he argues, they have been subverted precisely by the lower level administrative officers linked to landed interests in the villages. Similar findings have emerged in other geographical regions as well (Montgomery 1988).

Finally and as a consequence of the previous two points, the literature has tended to miss unexpected sources of support, such as the front-line workers union and political parties. Politics in the implementation of reforms is consistently viewed as bad, distorting policy outcomes by skewing benefits towards supporters. Simultaneously, public sector unions have been demonized in the literature as being the main opponents to reform efforts. Put together, a close connection between political parties and public sector unions is a reformer's nightmare, leaving them unable to push through any but the weakest reforms.⁹ Curiously though, in the case of JFM the WBSFSA has spearheaded the reform efforts, an issue that I discuss further in Section 3. In sum, through the JFM case, I suggest that pressures for change can "trickle-up" through the machinery of the state and bring particular policy alternatives to the attention of policy makers. Consequently, rather than focus on the policy elite, this interpretation calls for a focus on the "trenches" - in this case the front-line workers in the Forest Department. Positing a "trickle-up" process of policy reform also draws attention to the institutional channels through which policy options are transmitted to the top.

Advocates of the currently popular neoliberal reforms have not looked to cases of indigenous

⁸Their study however, focuses on the policy elite--the politicians and senior bureaucrats involved in formulating policies.

⁹ Literature on the reform of public sector enterprises is a case in point. In India, although the reform of public sector enterprises is a policy priority, in practice scholars argue it has been impossible because of the strength of the unions and their connections to the political parties. See for example Nayar (1992) and Candland (1995).

policy initiatives for lessons on when reforms are likely to be adopted and internalized.¹⁰ In general, the recent neoliberal reforms stand out from other kinds of reforms in two respects—a) the state (that is the object of reform) is expected to implement the reforms and b) the reforms pay less attention to issues of poor and marginal groups. Because of these characteristics a serious problem of “ownership” emerges. Policies are partially implemented, skewed during implementation and are sometimes derailed by serious opposition of organized groups. To deal with such problems the literature has focussed on practical issues. For example, should the implementation of neoliberal reforms be gradual or sudden? Is there a need to supplement reforms with programs that mitigate their social costs?

As a consequence, this literature has paid substantially less attention to cases such as JFM in West Bengal in which reformists within the state are significant drivers of change. This is unfortunate because the resultant JFM policy in many respects resembles what supporters of a neoliberal approach might have advocated: decentralization of decision making to local levels of administration; building of public private partnerships in the management of natural resources; and improving the participation of local groups in forest protection and management. Consequently, lessons from such cases that might be relevant for advocates of neoliberal reform have been missed.

One important lesson for reformists relates to dealing with opposition. The WBSFSA adopted a “sandwich” strategy by creating pressure for change both at the grassroots (of front-line workers

¹⁰ There is a vast literature on the politics of redistributive reforms. Among others see Hirschman (1963), Ascher (1983), Fox (1993), and Herring (1983). The main concern in this literature is the sources of support and opposition to reform measures.

and mobilized informal protection groups) and at the top (by getting the forest ministers, ruling political party and the State Coordination Committee on its side) so that reluctant bureaucrats were caught in the middle.¹¹ Particularly because the policy reform involved formalizing already existing informal practices, opposition or potential opposition to the proposed policy had already been partially overcome.¹² The case also points to the importance of paying attention to experimentation at the local level and identifying the conditions under which it might upscale as an alternative strategy to focusing exclusively on changing policy on the ground. Specifically institutional channels that connect across the local and the central are key to translating action at the bottom to policy making fora at the top. In the case of JFM in West Bengal, the WBSFSA fulfilled both these functions—by increasing awareness of the possible solutions to the problems as well as advocating the solution to the relevant policy makers.

D. The work situation

The actions of front-line workers and their progressive stance in the JFM case do not confirm the image of rent-seeking, self-interested, risk-averse, conservative bureaucrats portrayed in the literature. Contrary to expectations, front-line workers introduced innovations in program implementation and promoted policy change. They used the resources under their control (for example, discretion over the allocation of employment in activities such as timber harvesting) to bring the villagers to their side. Between 1977 and 1989, many front-line foresters (with the

¹¹ In his examination of the politics of food programs in Mexico, Fox (1983) shows how reformists within the state allied with groups outside the state (that they had helped create) to squeeze the opposition within the state.

¹² This is an important point as opposition to reforms in developing countries often surfaces only in implementation. As the proposed changes were already informally being implemented, potential opponents would have had time to register their protest. In the case of JFM fortunately, the possible opponents at the local level, the illegal timber traders were small, scattered and not organized to protest. Moreover, to the extent that resources in the region were degraded, they had nothing to protest against.

support of their union) encouraged villagers to form informal forest protection groups by promising benefits when the regenerated forests were finally felled. These informal promises were made without the approval of their senior officers and in contravention of the established policy of maintaining a social distance from forest villagers. Front-line foresters promised that they would try to obtain a share of the harvest proceeds for the villagers, and also encouraged the villagers to demand such shares. These actions created a constituency for profit-sharing that became a constituency for policy change. Simultaneously, front-line foresters worked through their union to pressure the administration to change the approach to forest management. These actions add up to a picture of public officials that is quite different from that prevalent in the literature.

The portrayal of public officials in recent social science literature has been heavily influenced by ideas that broadly may be labelled 'public choice'.¹³ Rooted in studies of bureaucratic and state failures, the public choice literature seeks to explain the poor performance in terms of self-interest of public officials, corruption and rent seeking. Such bureaucracy-skeptical arguments are of two main types. One focuses on the issue of corruption. The narrow assumption is that the behavior of rational self-interested bureaucrats is basically motivated by the quest for money. The other approach focuses selectively on behavioral motivations that exist within a non-corrupt, formally functioning bureaucracy—such as promotion and budget maximization—and argues that perverse outcomes such as bloated bureaucracies and inefficient provision of public services are a result of structural incentives (Tullock 1965; Niskanen 1971).

The public choice literature does not offer good explanations of why bureaucrats might support and promote 'power-reducing' policies such as JFM. Several lines of "external" critiques follow from this observation.¹⁴ One is that, while public choice elegantly explains irrational policies in developing countries, it tends to treat politics as just a "spanner in the economic works" (Grindle and Thomas 1991). Why do policymakers choose these irrational policies at particular times and not at others? It also does not seek to explain the variation between countries or regions regarding political outcomes. This shortcoming is symptomatic of a second deeper problem: public choice takes interests as static and given. It ignores the question of the basis of the interests of individuals or how these interests change over time, or even what governs when specific interests will come into play. Many have argued that institutions shape interests as well as represent them in political life - an issue I deal with in the next section (Schmitter 1981). Public choice offers no compelling explanations for instances of large scale institutional or policy changes. Neither can it explain instances of good performance by public agencies.

At first sight, the adoption of JFM by bureaucrats in West Bengal seems totally inconsistent with the image of bureaucrats embedded in public choice. But a closer examination of the case suggests a rather different interpretation: in promoting JFM, the front-line forest workers were to a large degree pursuing rational self interest. Their objectives were however something even more basic than money. The reason that the front-line workers adopted a progressive policy position was that their work situation had become difficult due to the general political crisis and the crisis in forestry prevalent since the early seventies. The political crisis was accompanied by

¹³ For an overview of the literature on public choice see Bates (1988), Lal (1983) and Colander (1984).

¹⁴ For example see Moore (1989), Streeten (1983) and Grindle (1991).

violence during the decade from the mid sixties to the mid seventies. Front-line workers became the targets of confrontation and violence. Some of this violence was instigated by the villagers that front-line foresters policed and lived with. Simultaneously, the increasing degradation of forests and the consequent loss of future revenue led senior forest officers to chastise frontline workers for their inability to protect forests. Thus, on the one hand, they faced potential violence from villagers, making their work increasingly dangerous. On the other hand, front-line foresters were often held responsible for rapid forest degradation by senior officials. In addition, they were expected to live in the forested areas with their families among the very people that they policed. Because of these conditions of work and the difficulties they posed, front-line workers were looking for a solution that would make their work safer and less conflictual. From past experience, it was clear that increased policing was unlikely to work. A participatory forest policy in which villagers were involved in the protection and management of the forests in return for some incentives was the only solution that appeared likely to improve the conflict-ridden work situation. Further, front-line workers hoped that devolving some of the responsibilities of protection to villagers would leave them, the officers, more time to focus on their professional tasks of forestry. These dynamics bring us partially back to public choice—with the nuanced understanding that bureaucratic interests may be shaped by their work situation rather than the more direct pursuit of material self interest.¹⁵

¹⁵ In a brilliant internal critique of public choice Dunleavy (1991) arrives at a similar point of emphasizing the work situation. In particular by disaggregating simplistic models of bureau enlarging provided by Niskanen, Dunleavy argues that motivations of bureaucrats vary by rank, (the more senior bureaucrats are the more they can influence bureau size but the less they personally gain from doing this), by type of budget and the type of agency. He concludes that bureau-maximization is an implausible dominant motivation for bureaucrats, and focuses on the work situation as the dominant interest. Although Dunleavy's work is based on industrialised countries and focuses on senior staff, it can be applied to other situations and locations.

Several streams of research are converging to emphasise the importance of the work situation in determining worker performance and behavior. The recent literature on worker performance in industry stresses various dimensions of the work situation, including flexibility and autonomy, multi-tasking, discretion, work pride and trust between workers and clients. This more recent work follows an earlier tradition of understanding worker behavior in organizations (Gouldner 1954; Kaufman 1967). There has been a transfer of ideas developed along these lines to thinking about the public sector in industrialized countries. Some researchers are extending such analysis to understand the performance of the public sector in developing countries (Tendler 1997).

In addition to understanding public sector worker performance, the emphasis on the work situation offers clues to understanding why workers support certain policies or proposals at some times and not others. In the JFM case, frontline foresters were not motivated to agitate for changing policy till their work situation became very difficult. Since their success in having JFM accepted as official policy, they have become less concerned about forest policy issues, and have again focused attention on 'traditional' union issues like wages and benefits. A similar focus on the work situation was used by Sabel (1989) to explain the pattern of industrial strikes in Europe. Reformists concerned with bureaucratic opposition to reform should pay closer attention to dimensions of the work situation.

One of the lessons emerging from a focus on the work situation in the JFM story is the importance of sustaining the cooperation of proximate communities for front-line workers. The point that front-line workers need the cooperation of local communities is not new. Especially in cases where front-line workers seek to change the behavior of clients, such as in the introduction

of new technologies, often there is a form of exchange that takes place—front-line workers offer desired services (e.g. curative medicines, agricultural inputs) in return for desired changes (e.g. preventative hygiene, choice of crops).¹⁶ In a variation on this theme, the JFM case shows that the need for cooperation between service providers and people is not limited to service provision only, but is necessary for service providers to manage their work and life. Front-line forestry workers in West Bengal needed to maintain an amicable relationship with local villagers in order to be able to carry out their tasks and avoid violence, even when the villagers were not direct clients of their services. They allocated development projects to the villages closest to their field offices in order to keep the nearby villagers happy. While this case may not be typical, it suggests that similar imperatives may also be working in other public services.

This need for front-line workers to cooperate with communities to make their work easier and improve performance is also evident from some other recent research. Tandler (1999) reports that private firms implementing Social Funds projects in Latin America in effect divided up the project area among themselves, effectively limiting the choice for communities in an attempt to make their own work easier. Such strategies, that undermine project goals, are important ways in which front-line workers (or firms) attempt to manage the difficulties of working in rural areas. In order to design projects better, we need to be more aware of such imperatives.

The recent literature on co-production goes further along the interdependence argument, by suggesting that the actual production of the service depends on inputs from both service provider and client in order to achieve efficient service, for example in relation to health and education

¹⁶ For examples see Heginbotham (1975), Tandler (1997).

(e.g. Leonard 1993; Ostrom 1996). The co-production literature suggests that, when both service provider and the client have a stake in the outcomes of the program, good performance will likely follow. In the JFM case, by giving Forest Protection Committees a share of the proceeds from the felling of timber, the program ensured that it was in the interest of both front-line foresters and FPC members to conserve the resource.

In sum, I am arguing that the policy positions taken by front-line workers may arise out of the concrete conditions of their work—their relationships with client communities, their ability to carry out tasks, the demands for their services and the pressures under which they operate. This is not a new argument. Indeed, Lipsky (1980) has suggested that it is the cumulative actions of these “street-level” bureaucrats that constitutes public policy. It is not clear however, how such informal “policy-in-practice” can be institutionalized into “policy-on-paper.” In the JFM case, the strong union of front-line workers served as the institutional mechanism through which the policy preferences were transmitted to policy elite. I turn to the question of the union next.

E. The missing trades union

The successful change in policy in the JFM case rests partly on the role of the front-line workers union in promoting the change. Without the union’s active role, the dissatisfaction of workers with their work situation probably would have not have generated in a policy change: it would have remained at the level of dissatisfaction on the ground. Further, union leaders played a role in forging consensus among their members that a participatory approach was the only viable alternative to the present forest policy—and that it was in the interest of front-line workers. Why has this proactive role been missed? The JFM case raises this question particularly sharply

because the role of the union has been missed despite the fact that JFM has been in the limelight and spawned numerous studies of its origins and workings.

The literature on public sector unions generally portrays unions as blocking reforms (Chubb and Moe 1990; Pencavel 1995). Consequently, there is a widespread belief that reforms can be implemented only if the unions are circumvented or their power broken. Public sector unions are thought to put producer interests ahead of consumer interest. Unions fear that reforms will mean retrenchment, reduction in benefits, job insecurity and a change in job definitions. Some recent research has tried to draw lessons from the cases in which public sector unions have cooperated with state and local governments.¹⁷ In the few cases when public sector unions have been progressive, they have been forced to be so by being subject to competition.¹⁸ For example, in Phoenix, Arizona, when garbage collection was privatized, the union initially protested. When that did not work, it decided to bid for the collection contracts itself. After some restructuring to streamline its operations, it was able to successfully compete for the garbage collection contracts with the private sector (Osborne and Gaebler 1992). In Xerox Corporation, when the employee union learnt that management was planning to outsource its harness operations and downsize, it offered to work with management in retaining the operations in house while at the same time achieving cost savings (Ancona, Kochan et al. 1996). In other cases, unions can take a progressive stance if they are included in the reform process (Baccaro and Locke 1996). In sectors where they accept reforms, public sector unions, much like the industrial unions, are

¹⁷ See Ginsburg (1994). For cases of constructive roles of unions in the private sector adoption of high-performance practices see Locke (1994), Piore (1994) and Wever et. Al (1996).

faced with a choice. They could resist reforms and watch their jobs disappear, or they could work with the administration and restructure to improve service and regain the trust of the public. In general, they are not interested in change if it means lower wages or giving up collective bargaining. Otherwise, they are eager for opportunities to improve their work and retain their jobs (Osborne and Gaebler 1992).

Curiously, the role of such unions does not seem to have received much attention in the literature on reform in developing countries, even though they represent a large part of the workforce in the public sector. The World Bank, for example, in its 1995 World Development Report on labor confines the discussion of public sector unions to a section on “opposition to reform” in which public sector unions in India are criticized for preventing reforms in parts of the economy most in need of it (World Bank 1995). Similar arguments about the negative role of unions are prevalent in Lustig (1995) and Burki and Edwards (1996). With a few exceptions, the general assumption is that unions block reform. The neglect of these public sector unions is serious given that they can play a major role in shaping reforms undertaken by developing country government's.¹⁹ Public service unions in developing countries are frequently older and stronger than they are in the public sector of some industrialized countries.²⁰ They often have strong links with political parties that can give them direct access to policy makers in government. Especially in the current climate where neoliberal reforms - privatization, decentralization and competition - directly

¹⁸ In the case of forests however, competition is not possible for a variety of reasons--there has not been an adequate supply of forestry experts in the private sector; till recently, parts that could be contracted out such as felling and marketing were already in the hands of the private sector and finally in many areas national security reasons have prevented privatization. Thus forest management is likely to continue as a monopoly.

¹⁹For an excellent discussion of this gap and the research questions it points to see Tendler (1995).

affect public sector workers, there is a case for paying greater attention to the activities and policy positions of unions.

Only recently, some research focussing on the good performance of the public sector in developing countries has found that unions can be key actors in promoting and implementing reforms (Frankenhoff 1996; Murillo 1996; Tandler 1997). For example, Tandler (1997a) argues that the improved performance of health sector workers was a result of greater consultation between labor and management. In a similar vein, Frankenhoff (1996), argues that the teachers union in three districts of Ceara, Brazil has been at the forefront of improving performance of the school system by proposing reforms in hiring practices, viewing merit-based criteria as a way of keeping politics out of the hiring process. Murillo (1996), in her examination of eighteen unions, shows how union response to proposed reforms is not uniformly negative. It varies from downright opposition to wholehearted support. She argues that union response depends upon the extent to which decision-making and authority is centralized within the union's organizational structure. To see whether unions will be included in negotiations with the government regarding the reforms however, she suggests focusing on the extent to which there is competition in the political as well as the organizational arenas.²¹

The case of the WBSFSA presented here adds to this literature. What is striking about the role of the WBSFSA is that not only did the union support reform, but it was at the forefront in

²⁰ Many such unions in developing countries have their roots in opposition to colonial rule and have had links with freedom struggles. For a discussion of the impact such a history has on unions and their relations to political parties and policy see Chatterji (1980).

²¹ By political arena, she means the number of political parties that are wooing the union; by organizational arena she means the extent to which union members can become members of other unions (Murillo 1996).

advocating it. Long before the concept of community forestry gained ground in the international development community, the WBSFSA had been demanding that forest fringe villagers be involved in the conservation of state forests. It repeatedly petitioned the state forest ministers and the administration to adopt its suggestions regarding forest protection. When the literature has acknowledged a supportive role for unions, that has generally been a reaction to reforms proposed by management. WBSFSA's actions suggest that unions can be pro-active and take the initiative in proposing radical changes.

Unusual for most unions, including other public sector unions in West Bengal, WBSFSA took a policy position. Public sector unions have usually restricted their activities to traditional demands such as wages, promotions and benefits, and take positions on proposed reforms to the extent they affect these more basic concerns. In contrast, the WBSFSA's policy position was additional to these traditional concerns. Further, its policy position was striking as the proposed participatory forest management meant that union members—front-line foresters—would have to give up some of their own power and authority. The WBSFSA was successful in advocating its policy position because of its close links with the political party in power, the CPI (M). The WBSFSA lobbied the forest ministers and worked through the State Coordination Committee. Note that the prevalent thinking sees such close relationships between unions and political parties as bad, and obstacles to reform.

To understand the exceptional nature of the activities of the WBSFSA in promoting participatory forest policy, it is instructive to contrast this case with the approach of the police unions to community policing in the United States. Structurally, the problem of policing dangerous

neighborhoods is similar to that of forest protection in conflict ridden areas. Without the cooperation of communities in providing information about crimes, a police force cannot expect to operate effectively. By training communities to patrol their neighborhoods and report crimes, community policing is expected to provide protection in a more locally specific way. To support this new approach, the practice of frequently transferring police officers between beats has been replaced with "beat integrity"—in which police officers are expected to be identified with a particular beat—as a way of making officers familiar with the problems of the communities they police (Goldstein 1987).

However, community policing in the US has been promoted by NGO-groups and higher officials, not by front-line workers or their unions (Kelling and Kliesmet 199?). Rather, police unions have resisted it. Police personnel do not like community policing because it requires them to go out on more foot patrols, and engage more with the communities where they work, which increases the danger they face in contrast to patrolling in patrol cars. Police also don't like community policing because they view it as the “social science approach”—as distinct from their more professional role of catching criminals. By contrast, front-line workers hoped that JFM would improve their conditions of work by making it easier and safer. Additionally, front-line forest workers expected that once the task of protection was taken over by communities they would have more time to focus on professional activities such as plantation, thinning and other silviculture activities.

The absence of the role of unions from the literature on reform (or their brief appearance as villains) makes one wonder whether unions have been passive rather than obstreperous

opponents, or whether we have simply overlooked their activities because of our stereotypes of them. While the case of JFM cannot answer this question--it can only be answered through more detailed empirical studies that explicitly examine the role of public sector unions--it raises some interesting possibilities as to why the role of the union has been missed. One possible reason, that I have already alluded to, is that, because of the existing stereotypes of unions, we simply do not expect them to perform such a pro-active role, and miss it when it happens. A second possibility is that, as in the case of JFM, interpretations of programs often take the form of two competing narratives - the dominant and the subaltern (or top down and bottom up). Such competing narratives tend to dominate the space for interpreting data and attributing cause. Interpretations that do not fit these narratives - such as those about front-line workers and their union - tend to be overlooked. Moreover, as Roe points out, contradictory evidence that does not lead to a narrative with policy prescriptions is consistently ignored (Roe 1991). Stories of progressive unions do not tell aid donors what they should do. It is not clear how unions can be supported in taking on a progressive role. Neither can this role easily be replicated in other states. By contrast, the official and the subaltern narratives each have clear implications for donor support. Another reason for the silence around the WBSFSA story might be is that, like many such public sector unions, the WBSFSA is constrained in publicizing its own role. It is bound by public service regulations, that discourage the disclosing of departmental affairs to outsiders. Neither does the WBSFSA have the resources or connections to publicize its own role. The officials operate primarily in the Bengali language, and are not well connected to national or international NGOs.²² The other narratives have institutional sponsors to spread their stories, while the WBSFSA does not. Finally, the activities of WBSFSA break down the

²² The FD is generally not well disposed to NGOs seeing them as lacking in both legitimacy and expertise.

cherished myth of unity in the public sector - the notion that the administration is united in supporting official policy. Publicizing such a contrary story might have adverse repercussions on the current officials and members of the WBSFSA. The subordinate status of front-line workers within the Forest Department gives them less power to tell their own story than other actors - such as reformist forests or even community groups, who have powerful NGO advocates.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agarwal, B. (1983). "Diffusion of rural innovations: Some analytical issues and the case of woodburning stoves." *World Development* **1** (4): 359-76.
- Agarwal, B. (1986). Cold hearths and barren slopes: The woodfuel crisis in the third world. New Delhi, Allied Press
- Agarwal, B. (1997). "Environmental action, gender equity and women's participation." *Development and Change* **28**: 1-44.
- Agarwal, C. and S. Saigal (1996). *Joint Forest Management in India: A brief review*. New Delhi, SPWD.
- Agrawal, A. (1995). "Population pressure=forest degradation: An oversimplistic equation." *Unasylva* **181**(46).
- Allison, G. (1971). Essence of decision: Explaining the Cuban missile crisis. Boston, Little Brown.
- Ancona, D., T. Kochan, et al. (1996). Managing change in organizations. Cincinnati, Ohio, South-western College Publishing.
- Anon. (1988). A withered Board. *DH*.
- Arnold, M. and A. Bergman (1988). *Forestry for the poor? An evaluation of the SIDA supported Social Forestry Project*. New Delhi, SIDA.
- Arora, D. (1994). "From state regulation to people's participation." *Economic and Political Weekly* March 19,: 691-698.
- Arora, H. and A. Khare (1994). Experience with the recent Joint Forest Management approach. International Workshop on India's Forest Management and Ecological Revival, New Delhi, Tata Energy Research Institute.
- Ascher, W. (1983). Scheming for the poor: The politics of redistribution in Latin America. Cambridge, Ma., Harvard University Press.
- Axelrod, R. (1984). The evolution of cooperation. New York, Basic Books.
- Baccaro, L. and R. Locke (1996). *Public sector reform and union participation: The case of the Italian pension reform*. Cambridge, Sloan School of Management.
- Bag, R. K. and R. N. Bag (1989). Service laws of government employees of West Bengal. Calcutta, Eastern Law House.
- Bahuguna, S. (1988). *Forest policy full of holes*. *TH*. New Delhi.
- Bahuguna, V. K. and V. Luthra (1991). *Forest administration in India: Policy, institutional and organizational issues*. Bhopal, Indian Institute of Forest Management.
- Banerjee, A. K. (1998). Status of and proposal for devolution of forest management in Asia Pacific countries. International Seminar on Decentralization and devolution of forest management in Asia and the Pacific, Davao City, Phillipines, FAO.
- Banerjee, U. (1989). Participatory forest management in West Bengal. Working group meeting on Forest Protection Committees, Calcutta, West Bengal Forest Department
- Basu, B. (1997). *Empowering people on natural resource management: West Bengal Experience*. Calcutta, School for Fundamental Research.
- Basu, N. G. (1987). Forests and tribals. Calcutta, Manisha.
- Basu, P. K. (1990). *A note on the Socio-Economic forest managed at Arabari, Midnapore by the Silvicultural (South) Division, West Bengal*. Midnapore, West Bengal Forest Department.
- Bates, R., Ed. (1988). Toward a political economy of development: A rational choice perspective. Berkeley, University of California Press.

- Bhumilokhi (1981). Unprotected workers in protected forests. Bhumilokhi. Calcutta.
- Binswanger, H. (1991). "Brazilian policies that encourage deforestation." World Development **19**(7).
- Biswas, S. K. (1987). Forest administration in India. Allahabad, India, Chugh Publications Allahabad.
- Blair, H. and P. D. Olphadwala (1988). Forestry in development planning. Boulder, Westview Press.
- Blakie, P. (1985). The political economy of soil degradation in developing countries. London, Longman.
- Brandis, D. (1897). Indian forestry. Working, Oriental Institute.
- Bromley, D. (1992). Making the commons work. California, ICS Press.
- Burki, S. J. and S. Edwards (1996). Dismantling the populist state: The unfinished revolution in Latin America and the Caribbean. Washington, D.C., The World Bank.
- Calcutta Gazette (1974). Report of the Sarma Sarkar Inquiry Commission. Calcutta Gazette. Calcutta.
- Campbell, J. (1992). "Joint Forest Management in India." Social Change **22**(1): 36-54.
- Campbell, J., S. Palit, et al. (1994). Putting research partnerships to work: The Joint Forest Management Research Network in India. Symposium on Society and Resource Management, Fort Collins, Colorado.
- Candland, C. (1995). "Trade unionism and industrial restructuring in India and Pakistan." Bulletin of concerned Asian scholars **27**(4).
- Carter, J., S. Connelly, et al. (1994). Participatory forestry in Sri Lanka: Why so limited? London, ODI.
- Chakraborty, T. (1988). Save trees to save man. The Telegraph. Calcutta.
- Chakravarty, S. (1982). "In the mirror of the Diamond Jubilee: Our organization from the past to the present." Sangati, Diamond Jubilee Issue.
- Chambers, R. (1989). To the hands of the poor: Water and trees. New Delhi, Oxford and IBH.
- Chandra, N. S. and M. Poffenberger (1989). Community forest management in West Bengal: FPC case studies. Working group meeting on Forest Protection Committees, Calcutta, West Bengal Forest Department
- Chatterji, A. (1996). Community forest management in Arabari: Understanding sociocultural and subsistence issues. New Delhi, Society for the Promotion of Wastelands Development.
- Chatterji, A. (1998). Toward an ecology of hope. San Francisco, Asia Forestry Network/SIDA report.
- Chatterji, R. (1980). Unions, politics an the state. New Delhi, South Asian Publishers.
- Chaturvedi, A. N. (1992). "Management of secondary forests." Wastelands News **7**(1).
- Chhatre, A. (1996). Joint Forest Management: Beyond the rhetoric. Drafting a people's Forest Bill. W. Fernandes. New Delhi, Indian Social Institute.
- Chubb, J. E. and T. M. Moe (1990). Politics, markets and America's schools. Washington, D.C., The Brookings Institution.
- Colander, D. C. (1984). Neoclassical political economy: the analysis of rent-seeking and DUP activities. Cambridge, Ma., Ballinger.
- Commander, S. (1986). Managing Indian Forests: A case for the reform of property rights. London, Overseas Development Institute.
- Cook, M. L. (1996). Organizing dissent: Unions, the state and the democratic teachers' movement in Mexico. University Park, Pa., Pennsylvania State University Press.

- Corbridge, S. and S. Jewitt (1997). "From forest struggles to forest citizens? Joint Forest Management in the unquiet woods of India's Jharkhand." Environment and Planning A **29**(2): 2145-2164.
- CSE (1982). The state of India's environment 1982, A citizens' report. New Delhi, Center for Science and Environment.
- CSE (1995). Should paper and pulp industry get state forest lands for captive plantation? New Delhi, Centre for Science and Environment.
- Das, V. (1992). Jharkhand: Castle over the graves. New Delhi, Inter-India Publications.
- Dasgupta, S. (1985). Adivasi politics in Midnapur, c1760-1924. Subaltern Studies IV. R. Guha. New Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Deb, D. (1993). "Evolution of Joint Forest Management in South West Bengal: A subaltern detail." Social Action **43**(July-September): 368-374.
- Deb, D. and K. C. Malhotra (1993). People's participation: The evolution of Joint Forest Management in South-West Bengal. People of India: Biocultural dimensions. S. B. Roy and A. Ghosh. New Delhi, Inter-India Publications: 329-341.
- Degnbol, T. (1996). "The interactive approach to the study of state and society relations." Forum for Development Studies **2**: 327-351.
- DiMaggio, P. and W. Powell (1983). "The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields." American Sociological Review **48**: 147-160.
- DiMaggio, P. and W. Powell, Eds. (1991). The new institutionalism in organizational analysis. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Dunleavy, P. (1991). Democracy, bureaucracy and public choice. New York, Harvester/Wheatsheaf.
- Dutta, M. and M. Adhikari (1991). Sal leaf plate making in West Bengal: A case study of cottage industry in Sabalpara, West Midnapore District. Calcutta, Indian Institute of Biosocial Research and Development.
- Duyker, E. (1987). Tribal Guerrillas: The Santhals of West Bengal and the Naxalite movement. New Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Eckstein, H. (1975). Case study and theory in political science. Handbook of Political Science, Vol. 7. F. Greenstein, I. and N. W. Polsby. Reading, Ma., Addison-Wesley.
- Evans, P. (1995). Embedded autonomy: States and industrial transformation. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Fairhead, J. (1996). Misreading the African landscape: society and ecology in a forest-savanna mosaic. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- FAO (1993). Forest resources assessment 1990: Tropical countries. Rome, FAO.
- Farooque, M. (n.d.). "Making public forests "public": West Bengal experience.": 3.
- Fernandes, W. (1983). Towards a new Forest Policy: An introduction. Towards a new forest policy. W. Fernandes and S. Kulkarni. New Delhi, Indian Social Institute.
- Fernandes, W., Ed. (1996). Drafting a people's Forest Bill: The forest dweller-social activist alternative. New Delhi, Indian Social Institute.
- Fernandes, W., G. Menon, et al. (1988). Forests, environment, and tribal economy. New Delhi, Indian Social Institute.
- Fox, J. (1993). The politics of food in Mexico: State power and social mobilization. Ithaca, Cornell University Press.

- Frankenhoff, J. (1996). A few good apples: Lessons from successful education systems in Northeast Brazil. Cambridge, Ma, Department of Urban Studies and Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Freeman, R. (1998). Folk-models of the forest environment in Highland Malabar. The social construction of Indian forests. R. Jeffery. New Delhi, Manohar Publishers and Distributors.
- Gadgil, M. and R. Guha (1988). The law and our forests--Two steps forward, one step back? The Statesman. Calcutta.
- Gadgil, M. and R. Guha (1989). Forest policy: Missing the woods for the trees. Times? Check.
- Gadgil, M. and R. Guha (1992). This fissured land: An ecological history of India. New Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Gadgil, M. and R. Guha (1994). "Ecological conflicts and the environmental movement in India." Development and Change 25(1): 101-136.
- Ganashakti (1980). Some events. Ganashakti. Calcutta.
- Agarwal, B. (1983). "Diffusion of rural innovations: Some analytical issues and the case of woodburning stoves." World Development 1(4): 359-376.
- George, A. (1979). Case studies and theory development: the method of structured focused comparison. Diplomacy: New approaches in history, theory and policy. P. Lauren. New York, Free Press.
- Gerth, C. W. and H. H. Mills, Eds. (1946). From Max Weber. New York, Oxford University Press.
- Ghate, R. (1992). Forest policy and tribal development. New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company.
- Gilmour, D. A. and R. J. Fisher (1997). Evolution in community forestry: Contesting forest resources. Community Forestry at a crossroads: Reflections and future directions in the development of community forestry, Bangkok, Thailand, RECOFTC.
- Ginsburg, L. (1994). Excellence in public service: Case studies of Labor-Management innovation. Washington, DC, Public Employee Department, AFL-CIO.
- Goetz, A. M. (1996). Local heroes: Patterns of field-worker discretion in implementing GAD policy in Bangladesh. Brighton, Sussex, Institute of Development Studies.
- GOI (1952). Indian Forest Policy. New Delhi.
- GOI (1955). India's forests. New Delhi, Government of India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.
- GOI (1974). Estimates Committee, Sixty Fifth Report --Forestry. New Delhi, Ministry of Agriculture.
- GOI (1976). National Commission on Agriculture, abridged report. New Delhi, Government of India.
- GOI (1988). National Forest Policy Resolution. New Delhi, Government of India, Ministry of Forests and Environment.
- GOI, (1985). National Forest Policy. New Delhi, Lok Sabha Secretariat.
- Gouldner, A. (1954). Patterns of industrial bureaucracy. New York, The Free Press of Glencoe.
- GOWB (1980). Report of the second pay commission 1977-1980. Calcutta, Government of West Bengal.
- Gregerson, H., S. Draper, et al. (1989). People and trees: The role of social forestry in sustainable development. Washington, D.C., The World Bank.
- Grindle, M. S. and J. Thomas (1991). Public choices and policy change: The political economy of reform in developing countries. Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press.

- Guha, R. (1983). "Forestry in British and Post-British India: A historical analysis." Economic and Political Weekly October 29, November 5-12.
- Guha, R. (1989). The unquiet woods: Ecological change and peasant resistance in the Himalaya. New Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Guha, R. (1990). "The making of the 1878 Forest Act." The Indian Economic and Social Review 27.
- Guha, R. (1996). Dietrich Brandis and Indian forestry: A vision revisited and reaffirmed. Village voices, forest choices: Joint Forest Management in India. M. Poffenberger and B. McGean. New Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Guhathakurta, P. (1993). "The World Bank in the forest sector: Strategy for forest sector development in Asia." The Indian Forester 119(8): 601-621.
- Gupta, I. (1984). "Problems of the worker's movement in India." World Marxist Review 27(May): 6-61.
- Gupta, T. R. (1978). "Nature of the environment for the forestry sector in India." Indian Forester(12).
- Hardin, G. (1968). "The tragedy of the commons." Science 162: 1243-1248.
- Harvey, N. (1994). Changing colours or maintaining the status quo. School of Agriculture and Forest Sciences. Bangor, U.K., University College of North Wales.
- Hecllo, H. (1978). Issue networks and the executive establishment. The New American Political System. A. King. Washington, D.C., American Enterprise Institute.
- Heginbotham, S. (1975). Cultures in conflict: Four faces of Indian bureaucracy. New York, Columbia University Press.
- Herring, R. (1983). Land to the tiller: The political economy of agrarian reform in South Asia. New Haven, Yale University Press.
- Hiremath, S., S. Kanwalli, et al. (1994). All about draft forest bill and forest lands. Pune, India, Center for Tribal Conscientisation.
- Hirschman, A. O. (1963). The contriving of reform. Journeys toward progress: Studies of economic policymaking in Latin America. New York, The Twentieth Century Fund.
- ILO (1988). The Bankura story. New Delhi, International Labour Organization.
- Jain, P. S. (1996). "Managing credit for the rural poor: Lessons from the Grameen Bank." World Development 24(1): 79-89.
- Jordan, A. G. (1990). "Sub-governments, policy communities and networks: Refilling the old bottles." Journal of Theoretical Politics 2: 319-38.
- Kant, S. and R. Cooke (1999). Conflict resolution: A critical factor in the success of Joint Forest Management in India. Toronto, Faculty of Forestry, University of Toronto.
- Kanwalli, S. (1993). Quest for justice. Dharwad, India, Samaj Parivartana Samudaya.
- Kaufman, H. (1967). The forest ranger. Washington, D.C., Resources for the future.
- Khan, I. (1987). Wastelands afforestation. New Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Khator, R. (1989). Forests, the people and the government. New Delhi, National Book Organization.
- Kohli, A. (1987). The state and poverty in India. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Kohli, A. (1991). Democracy and discontent. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Kolavalli, S. (1995). "Joint Forest Management: Superior property rights?" Economic and Political Weekly July 29: 1933-1938.
- Korten, D. and N. Uphoff (1981). Bureaucratic reorientation for participatory rural development, NASPAA.

- Kothari, A., P. Pande, et al. (1989). Management of national parks and sanctuaries in India. New Delhi, Indian Institute of Public Administration.
- Krishna, S. (1996). Environmental Politics. New Delhi, Sage.
- Kuhn, T. (1970). The structure of scientific revolutions. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Kulkarni, S. (1983). The Forest Policy and Forest Bill: A critique and suggestions for change. Towards a new forest policy. W. Fernandes and S. Kulkarni. New Delhi, Indian Social Institute.
- Lal, D. (1985). The poverty of development economics. Cambridge, Ma., Harvard University Press.
- Lala, N. (1982). "Reminiscence." Bulletin 60th Anniversary Issue, WBSFSA.
- Langley, A. (1999). "Strategies for theorizing from process data." Academy of Management Review 24(4): 691-710.
- Leach, M. and R. Mearns, Eds. (1996). The lie of the land: challenging received wisdom on the African environment. Portsmouth, N.H., International African Institute.
- Leonard, D. K. (1993). "Structural reform of the veterinary profession in Africa and the New Institutional Economics." Development and Change 24: 227-267.
- Lieten, G. K. (1992). Continuity and change in rural West Bengal. New Delhi, Sage Publications.
- Lieten, G. K. (1996). Development, devolution and democracy. New Delhi, Sage.
- Lindsay, J. (1994). Law and community in the management of India's state forests. Cambridge, Ma., Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.
- Lipsky, M. (1980). Street level bureaucracy. New York, Russel Sage Foundation.
- Locke, R. and A. Frost (1994). The paradox of politics: Local unions and workplace change in the US steel industry. Cambridge, Ma, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Lowi, T. (1979). The end of liberalism: The second republic of the United States. New York, Norton.
- Lurie, T. (1991). "Saving the forests: India's experiment in cooperation." The Ford Foundation Letter 22(1): 1-13.
- Lustig, N. (1995). Coping with austerity: Poverty and inequality in Latin America. Washington, D.C., Brookings Institution.
- Madsen, S. T. (1995). Recent changes in India's forest policy. International Association for the study of Common Property Resources, Bodo, Norway.
- Malhotra, K. C., D. Deb, et al. (1991). Role of non timber forest produce in village economy: A household survey in Jamboni Range, Midnapore District, West Bengal. Calcutta, Indian Institute of Biosocial Research and Development.
- Mallick, R. (1993). Development policy of a communist government. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- March, J., L. Sproull, et al. (1991). "Learning from samples of one or fewer." Organization Science 2(1).
- Matthai, D. (1990). Report of the Matthai Committee on forests. New Delhi, Ministry of Environment and Forests.
- Mies, M. and V. Shiva (1993). Ecofeminism. London, Zed Press.
- Migdal, J., A. Kohli, et al., Eds. (1994). State power and social forces. Domination and transformation in the Third World. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Mitra, K. (1995). Dynamics of forest product consumption: The role of economic development and forest policies in West Bengal, India. Gainesville, Fl, University of Florida.

- Mitra, P. (1978). Minutes of speech by Shri Parimal Mitra Minister-in-charge of Forests, given at the 39th State Conference of the WBSFSA.
- Montgomery, J. (1988). Bureaucrats and people: Grassroots participation in the third world. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Moore, M. (1989). "The fruits and fallacies of neoliberalism: The case of irrigation policy." World Development 17(11): 1733-50.
- Murillo, M. V. (1996). Latin American unions and the reform of social service delivery systems: Institutional constraints and policy choice. Washington, D.C., Inter-American Development Bank.
- Nadkarni, M. V. (1989). The political economy of forest use and management. New Delhi, Sage Publications.
- Narain, U. (1994). Women's involvement in Joint Forest Management: Analysing the issues. Berkeley, University of California.
- Nayar, B. R. (1992). "The politics of economic restructuring in India: The paradox of state strength and policy weakness." The Journal of Commonwealth and comparative politics 30(2).
- NCA (1976). Report of the National Commission on Agriculture, Part IX Forestry. New Delhi, Government of India, Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation.
- NCHSE (1987). Documentation on forests and rights--Volume II. New Delhi, National Center for Human Settlements and Environment.
- Nhira, C. (1996). Joint Forest Management and resource sharing: Lessons from India and Zimbabwe. London, IIED.
- Niskansen, W. A. (1971). Bureaucracy and representative government. Chicago, Aldine.
- Nossiter, T. J. (1988). Marxist state governments in India: Politics, economy and society. London, Pinter Publishers.
- Olson, M. (1965). The logic of collective action. Boston: Harvard University Press.
- Osborne, D. and T. Gaebler (1992). Reinventing government: How the entrepreneurial spirit is transforming the public sector. Reading, Ma., Addison-Wesley.
- Ostrom, E. (1990). Governing the commons. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Ostrom, E. (1996). "Crossing the great divide: Coproduction, synergy and development." World Development 24(6): 1073-1087.
- Pal, S. K. and e. al (n.d.). Status of NTFPs collection and marketing at the primary collectors and wholesalers level: A case study of Raigarh FPC in Ranibandh Range South Bankura Forest Division of West Bengal. Narendrapur, Ramakrishna Mission Lokasiksha Parishad.
- Palit, S. (1973). "The problem of forest protection." West Bengal Forests.
- Palit, S. (1989). Present status of Forest Protection Committees. Working group meeting on Forest Protection Committees, Calcutta, West Bengal Forest Department
- Palit, S. (1993). The future of Indian forest management. New Delhi, SPWD
- Pathak, A. (1994). Contested domains: The state, peasants and forests in contemporary India. New Delhi, Sage.
- Peluso, N. (1992). Rich forests, poor people Resource control and resistance in Java. California, University of California Press.
- Peluso, N. and M. Poffenberger (1989). "Social forestry in Java: reorienting management systems." Human Organization 38(4): 333-343.
- Pencavel, J. (1995). The role of labor unions in fostering economic development. Washington, DC, World Bank.

- Piore, M. (1994). Unions: A Reorientation to survive. Labor economics and industrial relations: Markets and Institutions. C. Kerr and P. Staudohar. Cambridge, Ma, Harvard University Press.
- Poffenberger, M. (1991). Joint Forest Management in West Bengal: The process of agency change. New Delhi, The Ford Foundation.
- Poffenberger, M. (1995). The resurgence of community forest management in the Jungle Mahal's of West Bengal. Nature, Culture and Imperialism. D. Arnold and R. Guha. New Delhi, Oxford.
- Poffenberger, M. (1996). Grassroots forest protection: East Indian experiences. Berkeley, Ca., Asia Forestry Network.
- Poffenberger, M. and B. McGean, Eds. (1996). Village voices, forest choices: Joint Forest Management in India. New Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Potter, D. (1998). NGOs and forest management in Karnataka. The social construction of Indian forests. R. Jeffery. New Delhi, Manohar Publishers: 121-144.
- Pyle, D. F. (1980). From pilot project to operational program in India: The problems of transition. Politics and policy implementation in the third world. M. S. Grindle. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Rangan, H. (1997). "Indian environmentalism and the question of the state: problems and prospects for sustainable development." Environment and Planning A 29(2): 2129-2143.
- Rao, R. M. (1985). Some recent Committees and Commissions, A review. Public policy and policy analysis in India. R. S. Ganapathy, S. R. Ganesh, R. Maru, S. Paul and R. M. Rao. New Delhi, Sage.
- Rathore, B. M. S. and J. Campbell (1995). "Evolving forest management systems: Innovating with planning and silviculture." Wastelands News August-October: 4-19.
- RECOFTC (1997). Community Forestry at a crossroads. Reflections and future directions in the development of community forestry, Bangkok, Thailand, RECOFTC.
- Reddy, S. B. (199?). Forest administration: Need for reorganization. National Seminar on Forestry Sector Administrative Development, Dehradun.
- Repetto, R. and M. Gillis, Eds. (1988). Public policies and the misuse of forest resources. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Rhodes, R. A. W. and D. Marsh (1992). "New directions in the study of policy networks." European Journal of Political Research 21: 181-205.
- Roe, E. (1991). "Development narratives, or making the best of blueprint development." World Development 19(4): 287-300.
- Roy, B. K. B. (1989). A model for forest management with people's participation. Calcutta, West Bengal Forest Department.
- Roy, B. K. B. (1990). Wasteland to wealth. Calcutta, Department of Forests, Government of West Bengal.
- Roy, B. K. B. (1991). Arabari Experience: A model for forest management with people's participation. Calcutta, Government of West Bengal.
- Roy, S. B. (1992). "Forest Protection Committees in West Bengal, India: Emerging policy issues." Economic and political weekly 27(July 18).
- Roychowdhury, A. (1995). "The woods are lovely..." Down to Earth(January 31): 25-30.
- Roychowdhury, A. and S. Narain (1992). "National Wastelands Development Board: Doomed to an uncertain future." Down to Earth(August 15): 5-7.

- Rudra, A. (1985). "Agrarian policies of the Left Front Government in West Bengal." Economic and Political Weekly 20(23).
- Runge, C. F. (1986). "Common property and collective action in economic development." World Development 14(5): 623-35.
- Sabel, C. (1985). Learning by monitoring. Handbook of economic sociology.
- Sabel, C. (1992). Studied trust: building new forms of co-operation in a volatile economy. Industrial districts and local economic regeneration. F. Pyke and W. Sengenberger. Geneva, Institute for Labour Studies.
- Saighal, S., C. Agarwal, et al. (1996). Sustaining Joint Forest Management: The role of Non Timber Forest Products. New Delhi, Society for Promotion of Wasteland Development.
- Saighal, S., C. Agarwal, et al. (1997). "Food, Fodder, fuel... NTFP can sustain JFM." Wasteland News 13(1): 46-55.
- Sarin, M. (1995). "Regenerating India's Forests: Reconciling gender equity with Joint Forest Management." IDS Bulletin 26(1): 83-91.
- Sato, J. (1997). The political economy of bufferzone management: A case from western Thailand. Community Forestry at a crossroads, Bangkok, Thailand, RECOFTC.
- Saxena, N. C. (1992). "Joint Forest Management: A new development band-wagon in India?" Rural Development Forestry Network Winter(Network Paper 14d).
- Saxena, N. C. (1994). India's eucalyptus craze: The god that failed. New Delhi, Sage Publications.
- Saxena, N. C. (1995). Forests, people and profit: New equations for sustainability . Dehra Dun, India, Natraj Publishers.
- Saxena, N. C. (1997). The saga of participatory forest management in India. Jakarta, Center for International Forestry Research.
- Saxena, N. C. (undated). The Indian Forest Service. Mussoorie.
- Saxena, N. C. and M. Gulati (n.d.). Forest management and recent policy changes in India.
- Schmitter, P. (1981). Interest-intermediation and regime governability in contemporary West Europe and North America. Organizing interests in West Europe. S. Berger. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Scott, P. (1998). From conflict to collaboration: people and forests at Mount Elgon, Uganda. Nairobi, IUCN.
- Scully, M. and D. W. E. Creed (1999). Switchpersons on the tracks of history: Situated agency and contested legitimacy in the diffusion of domestic partner benefits. Cambridge, Ma, Sloan School, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Sen Gupta, B. (1979). CPI-M: Promises, prospects, problems. New Delhi, Young Asia Publications.
- Sen, N. (1982). A brief synopsis of the history of Indian trade union movement. Calcutta, Indian Institute of Labour.
- Sen, N. (1997). Extension strategy in West Bengal forestry. A manual of forestry extension education. L. K. Jha and P. K. Sen Sarma. New Delhi, APH Publishing Corporation.
- Sengupta, R. K. (1977). Speech at the General Meeting of the WBSFSA, Jorebungalow, Darjeeling.
- Serrano, R. B. (1996). Who know what 's best for the poor? Demand-driven policies and rural poverty in northeast Brazil. Department of Urban Studies and Planning. Cambridge, Ma, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

- Shah, T. (1989). *Gains from social forestry: Lessons from West Bengal*. Brighton, Institute for Development Studies.
- Shingi, P. M., M. S. Patel, et al. (1986). *Development of social forestry in India*. New Delhi, Oxford Press.
- Shiva, V. (1991). *Ecology and the politics of survival*. New Delhi, Sage Publications.
- Shiva, V., H. C. Sharatchandra, et al. (1983). *The challenge of social forestry. Towards a new forest policy*. W. Fernandes and S. Kulkarni. New Delhi, Indian Social Institute.
- Singh, C. (1986). *Common property and common poverty: India's forest dwellers and the law*. New Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Singh, K. (1994). *Managing common pool resources: Principles and case studies*. New Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Singh, P. (1971). "Development of an integrated Indian Forest Policy." *Indian Forester* **97**(2).
- Sinha, S. and R. Herring (1993). "Common property, collective action and ecology." *Economic and Political Weekly* **28**(27 and 28): 1425-32.
- Sivaramakrishnan, K. (1996). "Forests, politics and governance in Bengal, 1794-1994." .
- Sivaramakrishnan, K. (1998). *Modern forestry: Trees and development spaces in South west Bengal, India. The social life of trees*. L. Rival. Oxford, Berg.
- Smith, M. J. (1993). *Pressure, power and policy*. London, Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Someshwar, S. (1993). *People versus the state? Social forestry in Kolar, India. In defense of livelihood--Comparative studies on environmental action*. J. Friedmann and H. Rangan. West Hartford, Kumarian Press.
- SPWD (1998). *Joint Forest Management Update*. New Delhi, Society for Promotion of Wastelands Development.
- Stebbing, E. P. (1919). *Forests of India, Vol. I*. London, John Lane, The Bodley Head Limited.
- Stebbing, E. P. (1923). *Forests of India, Vol. II*. London, John Lane, The Bodley Head Limited.
- Steinmo, S., K. A. Thelen, et al., Eds. (1992). *Structuring politics: Historical institutionalism in comparative analysis*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Stewart, W. (1987). *Opportunities for social forestry in West Bengal*. New Delhi, The Ford Foundation.
- Streeten, P. (1993). "Markets and states: Against minimalism." *World Development* **21**(8): 1281-98.
- Sussman, G. E. (1980). *The Pilot Project and the choice of an implementing strategy: Community development in India. Politics and policy implementation in the third world*. M. S. Grindle. Princeton, Princeton University Press: 103-122.
- Taylor, G. F. (1978). *The evolution of forest policy in India with particular reference to the role of agricultural considerations and the socio-cultural environment*. Ann Arbor, Mi., State University of New York, Syracuse.
- Taylor, G. F. (1982). "The development of forest policy in India--The forgotten policy: Sir Herbert Howard's post-war policy of 1944." *Indian Forester* **108**(3): 196-201.
- Tendler, J. (1982). *Rural projects through urban eyes: An interpretation of the World Bank's new-style rural development projects*. Washington, D.C., The World Bank.
- Tendler, J. (1995). *Social capital and the public sector: The blurring of the private and public*. Conference on social capital, Cambridge, American Academy of Arts and Sciences.
- Tendler, J. (1997). *Good government in the tropics*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Tendler, J. (1997). *Thoughts on upscaling*. Cambridge, Ma, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

- Thompson, J. (1995). "Participatory approaches in government bureaucracies: Facilitating the process of institutional change." World Development 23(9): 1521-1554.
- Truman, D. (1951). The governmental process. New York, Alfred A. Knopf.
- Tullock, G. (1965). The politics of bureaucracy. Washington, D.C., Public Affairs Press.
- Varshney, A. (1995). Democracy, development and the countryside. Cambridge, England, Cambridge University Press.
- Viegas, P. and G. Menon (1991). Forest Protection Committees of West Bengal: Role and participation of women, ILO.
- Vira, B. (1995). Institutional change in India's forest sector, 1976-1994: Reflections on state policy. Oxford, Oxford Center for Environment, Ethics and Society, Mansfield College.
- Vira, B. (1996). India's Draft Forest Bill 1994: Some issues for discussion.
- Wade, R. (1988). "The management of irrigation systems: How to evoke trust and avoid the prisoners dilemma." World Development 16(4): 489-500.
- Wade, R. (1988). Village Republics. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- WBFD (1985). Village level committee for protection of forests. Purulia.
- WBFD (1989). Evaluation: Second Interim Report. Calcutta, West Bengal Forest Department.
- WBFD (1995). State report on West Bengal Forests, 1994-95. Calcutta, West Bengal Forest Department.
- WBFD (1986). Evaluation: Second interim report. Calcutta, Monitoring and Evaluation Cell, West Bengal Forest Department.
- WBSFSA (1983). Protection of forests and security of staff. Calcutta.
- WBSFSA (1984). Minutes of meeting with the representatives of WBSFSA and the CCF on 7-11-84. Calcutta.
- WBSFSA, (1980). Rapid degradation of forest lands and forest wealth has created serious problems. Calcutta, Pamphlet produced for WBSFSA.
- WBSFSA, (1982). Matter to be placed before the press conference on 21-7-82 convened by the WBSFSA at the Press Club, Calcutta.
- WBSFSA, (1982). The environment is degraded due to rapid depletion of forest wealth. An appeal. Calcutta, Pamphlet produced for WBSFSA.
- Weber, T. (1987). Hugging the trees: The story of the Chipko movement. New Delhi, Viking.
- Weiner, M. and J. O. Field (1974). The communist parties of West Bengal. New Delhi, Manohar Book Service.
- Westney, D. E. (1997). The cross-border transfer of organizational patters. Remade in America. P. Adler, M. Fruin and J. Liker. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Wever, K., R. Bat, et al. (1996). "Innovation in isolation: Labor management partnerships in the United States." Economic and Labour Relations Review Summer.
- Wilson, J. Q. (1989). Bureaucracy: What government agencies do and why they do it. New York, Basic Books.
- World Bank (1995). Unions can be bad-good. Washington, D.C., The World Bank.
- World Bank (1995). Unions can be bad-good. Washington, D.C., The World Bank.
- WWF (1994). Participatory Forest Management in West Bengal. New Delhi, World Wildlife Fund and Society for Promotion of Wastelands Development.

Appendix 1.

Resolution No. 4461 –For/D/IS/16/88 (covering South West Bengal) of 12.7.89

Whereas the Forest Department has taken up a massive programme for “Resuscitation of Sal Forest of South-West Bengal” with the objective to re-establish moribund sal and other hardwood forests in the districts of Midnapore, Bankura, Purulia, Burdwan and Birbhum, for converting the areas into productive forests.

Whereas active participation and involvement of local people are vital for regeneration, maintenance and protection of aforesaid forest/plantations and successful implementation of the programme;

Now, therefore, the Governor is pleased to decide that Forest Protection Committees shall be constituted for this purpose and beneficiaries acting as members of such committees shall be allowed as a measure of incentive, 25 percent of the usufructs subject to observance of the conditions provided in the resolution.

The composition, duties and functions, the usufructuary benefits and restrictive measures pertaining to such protection committees shall be as follows:

Composition

- (i) The Divisional Forest Officer in consultation with “Bon-O-Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti” of the concerned Panchayat Samiti shall select beneficiaries for construction of Forest Protection Committee (s), within their jurisdictions, and within the framework of this Resolution;
- (ii) The beneficiaries shall be identified from amongst the economically backward people living in the vicinity of forests concerned;
- (iii) The concerned Gram Panchayat(s) shall extend necessary support and help to such committee(s) to ensure their smooth and proper functioning;
- (iv) Each forest Protection Committee shall have an Executive Committee to carry out the various activities assigned to the Committee;
- (v) The composition of the Executive Committee shall be as follows:
 - (a) Sabhapati or any member of the Bon-O-Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti of the local Panchayat Samiti
 - (b) Gram Pradhan or any member of local Gram Panchayat(s)
 - (c) Elected representatives of the beneficiaries (not exceeding 6)
 - (d) Concerned Beat Officer

The Members of the Executive Committee shall elect the president in each meeting

- (i) Constitution of the Forest Protection Committee including Executive Committee will be approved by the Divisional Forest Officer concerned on recommendation of the “Bon-O-Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti” to the concerned Panchayat Samiti;

- (ii) The “Bon-O-Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti” of the respective Zilla Parishad will monitor, supervise and review functions of the Forest Protection Committee;
- (iii) If any inclusion or change in the Committee/Executive Committee is necessitated, after initial constitution, the Executive Committee shall make suitable recommendation to the Divisional Forest Officer concerned, duly endorsed by the “Bon-O-Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti” of local Panchayat Samiti, for approval;
- (iv) The Beat Officer, as Member-Secretary shall convene the meetings of the Executive Committee as well as Forest Protection, as per scheduled procedure;
- (v) The representatives of the beneficiaries to the Executive Committees shall be elected in each year in annual general meeting of the Committee, where the concerned Range Officer shall be the observer.

Duties

2.

- (i) The Forest Protection Committee shall maintain a register showing necessary particulars of beneficiaries as well as members of the Committee, e.g. name, father’s name, address, age, number of family members, name of nominee, etc. The nomination forms duly filled in and approved by the Executive Committee should be pasted in the register. Such registers are also to be maintained in the concerned Range Offices of the Forest Department for permanent record;
- (ii) The Forest Protection Committee shall maintain a minutes book where the proceedings of the meetings of the Executive Committee held from time to time as well as proceedings of the annual general meeting of the Forest Protection Committee will be recorded under the signature of the president of the Committee and such minutes duly attested shall be sent to the concerned Range Officer for record;
- (iii) The Forest Protection Committee shall hold an annual general meeting once every year where activities of the Committee as well as details of distribution of usufructuary benefits are to be discussed, besides electing representatives of the beneficiaries to the Executive Committee.

Functions

3. (a)

- (i) To ensure protection of forests(s)/plantation(s) through members of the Committee;
 - (ii) To protect the said forests(s)/plantation(s) with the members of the Committee;
 - (iii) To inform forest personnel of any person or persons attempting trespass and willfully or maliciously damaging the said forests(s)/plantation(s) or commit theft thereon;
 - (iv) To prevent such trespass, encroachment, grazing, fire, theft or damage;
 - (v) To apprehend or assist the forest personnel in apprehension of such person or persons committing any of the offences mentioned above.
- (b)
- (i) To ensure smooth and timely execution of all forestry works taken up in the area under protection by the Committee;
 - (ii) To involve every member of the Committee in the matter of protection of forests(s)/plantation(s) as well as other duties assigned to the Committee;

- (iii) To assist the concerned forest official in the matter of selecting/engaging of labourers required for forestry works;
- (c)
 - (i) To ensure smooth harvesting of the forest produce by the Forest Department.
 - (ii) To assist the concerned Forest Official in proper distribution of the earmarked portion (i.e. 25% of net sale proceeds) among the members of the Committee (as per list maintained by "Sthayee Samiti")
 - (iii) To ensure that usufructuary rights allowed by the government are not in any way misused by any of the members and forest/plantation sites are kept free from any encroachments whatsoever
- (d)
 - (i) To prevent any activities in contravention of the provisions of the Indian Forest Act of 1927 and any Acts and Rules made thereunder;
 - (ii) To report about activities of particular member which are found prejudicial and detrimental to the interest of particular plantation and/or forest to the concerned Beat/Range Officer which may result in cancellation of membership of the erring member;
 - (iii) To assist the Forest Officials to take action or proceed under Indian Forest Act of 1927 and any Acts and Rules made thereunder, against the offenders, including any erring member of the Committee found to be violating the Act or damaging the forest/plantation.

Usufructuary Benefits

- (i) The members will have to protect the forest/plantation for at least 5 years to be eligible for sharing of usufructs under this program
- (ii) The Forest Official in consultation with the Executive Committee and with the approval of the Bon-O-Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti of the concerned Panchayat Samiti will distribute to the eligible members his proportionate share of usufructs from the harvesting, not before 10 years, upon satisfactory performance of functions detailed herein before;
- (iii) The members shall be entitled to collect following items free of royalty without causing any damage to forests/plantations:
 - (a) fallen twigs, grass, fruits, flowers, seeds (excluding cashew), etc.
 - (b) one-fourth of the produce obtained as intermediate yield from R.D.F. coppicing, multiple shoot cuttings, thinning, etc. and also 25 percent of the net sale proceeds of cashew where available to be shared proportionately;
 This will not in any manner, extinguish the rights and privileges already granted to the members of the scheduled tribes by the State Government in their Order No. 2001-For dated 20.4.81 and/or may be granted in future.
 - (i) Entire sal seeds and kendu leaves so collected shall have to be deposited with the West Bengal Tribal Development Co-operative Corporation Ltd., through the local LAMPS and LAMPS will pay the members, in approved tariff, against their individual collection.
 - (ii) The concerned Forest Official shall set apart 25 percent of the net sale proceeds at every final harvesting of the concerned plantation/forest (i.e. timber, pole, etc.) and shall pay to

all eligible members or his nominee their proportionate share out of the said earmarked funds, as per para 4 (ii) of the Resolution.

Termination of Membership, Dissolution of Committee, Appeal, etc.

- (i) Failure to comply with any of the conditions laid down herein before as well as contravention of provisions of the Indian Forest Act of 1927, or Acts and/or Rules made thereunder, may entail cancellation of individual membership and/or dissolution of the Executive/Forest Protection Committee, as the case may be, by the Officers of the Forest Department as stated below:
- (ii) The concerned Divisional Forest Officer shall be entitled to take appropriate action, even dissolution of any Executive/Forest Protection Committee, on the grounds stated above, on the recommendation of the “Bon-O-Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti” of the concerned Panchayat Samiti.
- (iii) The concerned Range Officer may be authorized by the Divisional Forest Officer to take proper action, even termination of an individual membership, on the above mentioned grounds, on the recommendation of the Executive Committee of the Forest Protection Committee;
- (iv) Appeal against any such penal action by the Range Officer may be preferred to the concerned Divisional Forest Officer through local Panchayat Samiti;
- (v) Appeal against any such penal action by Divisional Forest Officer may be preferred to the concerned Circle Conservator of Forests, through the concerned Panchayat Samiti and the Zilla Parishad, whose decision shall be final.