

Abstract

Damned by Development: Hydropower projects and the human and environmental costs in Jammu Kashmir

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This paper seeks to study the human and environmental costs of two hydropower projects, Kishanganga and Bursar, situated in Gurez valley of Kashmir division and Chenab valley of Jammu division respectively. Hydropower projects in Jammu and Kashmir have led to dispossession of land, loss of livelihood, displacement of people and forced migration of the people from their respective secure ancestral regions to the obscure and unknown future.

The acquisition of forest land, cutting down of trees, changing the course of river water all become part of the process of construction of dams and making of successful hydropower projects. And those accompanying measures have short as well as long term impacts on the environment of the region, particularly a mountainous ecology such as Jammu and Kashmir. Despite the provisions of law which ought to safeguard the interests of the people, such as Environment Impact Assessment and the Land Acquisition laws, hydropower projects are prioritised and justified on the principles of utilitarianism.

Jammu and Kashmir with its unique ecology and political context makes for a more than ordinary case of development conundrum. Here the logic of development operates beyond the superficiality of private profiteering of companies. Development discourse, as we will explore through this study, facilitates a reinforcement of the control and domination by the state apparatus over the territory. And this comes at the cost of the environment as well as dignified life and livelihood of the people of the affected places.

In order to understand the larger picture of the hydropower projects in the region, this study will delve into the provisions of Indus Water Treaty 1960 and demonstrate how the legal and political arrangements of the water resources in Jammu and Kashmir are inherently disadvantageous towards the people of the region and deprives the people of their agency and control over their resources.

And in the pursuit of deconstructing the dialectic of development in the region, this paper shall evaluate the merits and demerits of the laws which are in place that govern various aspects of the relationship between the building of power projects and compensation and rehabilitation of the affected persons and the environmental protection.