

Damned by Development: Hydropower Projects Induced Dispossession and Displacement in Valleys of Chenab and Kashmir.

1. Introduction

“Water is renewable, yet the dams are not” McCully (1996) notes in *Silenced Rivers: The Ecology and Politics of Large Dams*. Dams and hydro-power projects came to become part of India’s nation building exercise after independence of India in 1947. As India embarked on the journey of nation building, planned development was integral part of it (Mohanty, 2005). The planned development was conceptualised and executed through five year plans, which essentially focussed on the economic development for which factories, dams, mining etc all became necessary interim goals (Kaviraj, 1996, p.116).

While dams were referred to as ‘temples of modern India’ (Mohanty, 2005), they at the same time became the cause for forced dispossession and displacement of millions of people from their ancestral lands and regions (Gupta, 2012; Ramanathan, 1996). The temples, hence, brought doom to the people instead of faith and liberation.

What is true of doom brought by dams in India, at large, reveals itself in same ways in the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir. The dispossession and displacement caused due to acquisition of land for hydropower projects in the state has led to disempowerment of a large section of the society who hold land very dear to their existence and identity. Because the land that is taken away from them has come to them after long struggle against the despotic exploitative rule and land regimes prevalent in the region before land reforms took place and people got what was rightfully theirs.

Apart from the material impacts such as dispossession and displacement that accompany the processes of development, there are long lasting social, cultural and environmental impacts of those projects which are all invisibilised to serve the ‘public interest’. Although over a period of time, with a lot of efforts from social and environment activists, the principles of sustainability have been recognised, reluctantly though, into the development planning (Washington et al, 2017). And yet, the tools of sustainability do not find enough space within the development practice, while the principles of sustainability might find lip service within development projects (Washington et al, 2017).

In this paper, I analyse how laws and policies are inadequate to address the pertinent issues of disproportionate costs, social and environmental, that are imposed on the community and their ecosystem by the development projects. And how in context of disputed territory of Jammu and

Kashmir, those impacts of development projects are inherently political which reinforce the state's control and power over the territory.

For the purposes of this study, I analyse two hydropower projects, the Kishenganga hydropower project in Gurez valley of Kashmir division and another, Bursar hydropower project in Kishtwar, which falls in the Chenab valley.

2. Research Questions

1. Under what laws is the land acquired for the hydro power projects?
2. Who are the decision makers for planning and building of such large scale infrastructures?
3. What role does affected community have in planning and building of such projects?
4. What economic benefits accrue out of such projects for affected community and the community at large?
5. What compensation and rehabilitation plans are in place for the affected community?
6. How do communities cope up with the forced migration and loss of ownership of land?
7. What plans and policies do state agencies take recourse to for mitigating environmental implications arising out of building dams and other infrastructure?

3. Literature Review

Scarce literature is available on socio-environmental and political aspects of hydropower projects of Jammu and Kashmir. And what ever literature is available, it engages with the questions of socio-environmental and political significance very superficially. Serious questions such as of land acquisition, planning and decision making, rehabilitation and compensation have not been seriously dealt with in the available literature. Nor have the issues of internal displacement and migration been subject of critical inquiry.

The academic literature that is available on this subject matter primarily and typically deals with the Indus water treaty and the disputes between India and Pakistan over the water sharing from the western rivers (Akhtar, 2013; Tabassum, 2012; Ahmad, 2011; Tajuddin & Ali, 2006;).

However, some literature in the form of opinion pieces and informative reports do try to deal with the questions of dispossession and disempowerment, displacement and migration (Hussain, 2018; Naik, 2018; Aslam, 2015; Talib, 2013; Chaudhry, 2012; Umar, 2011; Parvaiz, 2011). But those lack in-depth analysis and theoretical formulations which are essential for deconstruction and understanding of the workings of the state and the scrutiny of development discourse.

In a relatively related research, Bhan (2014) in her work on dams and the corporate responsibility in Jammu and Kashmir has illustrated as to how dams in Kashmir are not merely about neo-liberal developmental ambitions, but more so about the power and control over the territory, land and waters.

“The Indian state's obsessive construction of dams in the Himalayas cannot, however, be attributed solely to a "techno-economic" need or to the unfulfilled demands of a growing population with limited access to electricity. Especially in Kashmir, whose rivers were partitioned in 1947 and have since remained a major source of contention between India and Pakistan, dams are key "strategic" investments to maintain India's national and energy security and retain critical control over disputed waters of the Indus River basin (Bhan, 2014, p. 191).”

Bhan's (2014) work on dams in Kashmir deals primarily with NHPC and HCC as corporate bodies enabling/contributing to Indian rule in Kashmir and how ideological corporate bodies are part of larger ideological state apparatus. Apart from Bhan's work, no more theoretical or empirical studies are available on hydropower projects or any developmental work in Kashmir that does an intersectional and interdisciplinary analysis of development discourse within the larger conflict politics in the region.

This study hence focuses on the contextual and structural factors which influence the decision-making and planning of the development plans such as hydropower projects in Jammu and Kashmir. By examining the outcomes such as dispossession, displacement, loss of livelihood, migration and environmental effects, this research brings into notice how laws and policies governing development are utilitarian in nature, how development is political and how affected people are deprived their share in decision-making over their resources; which helps us reflect how through developmental policies control over territories and people is produced, performed and reproduced.

4. Analysing Development

Critical Development literature argues that developmentalism typically works on and around the principle of utilitarianism (Escobar, 2010; Goldman, 2001; Thompson & Barton, 1996; Scott, 1998; Ramanathan, 1996). Utilitarian approach embodies the principle that advocates the greatest happiness to the greatest number in the society (Mill, 1901). And this greatest good implicitly provides for the sacrifice of rights and entitlements of some towards a larger collective benefit of the society, and of nation in extension.

This utilitarianism forms basis of, what in modern times is known as, public purpose or public interest (Ramanathan, 1996). And within Indian development story, public purpose has become the engine of technocratic development model that seeks to tame and subject nature and society to administrative order and planning. And this public purpose has found legal sanction in the form of laws right from British rule of India and continued to be part of the post-independent Indian jurisprudence, embodied in land acquisition law.

However, the much invoked public purpose has no delimited definition, instead it is left to the relevant authority, legislative and executive, to declare what amounts to be a public purpose. And state often acquires land for different development projects in the name of economic progress exploiting the broad and vague idea of public purpose (Chakravorty, 2013). Hence the category of 'public purpose' essentially confers a legal and moral legitimacy to the acquisition of land by the state, which more often happens to be involuntary acquisition (Roy, 2019, p. 25).

This authority to acquire the land, for public purpose, falls under the eminent domain powers of the state, which the state has given to itself in order to supposedly advance the interests of the people. That is to say, towards the greater good of the society, and of nation.

This idea of utilitarianism or in the more well known term, public purpose, has faced criticism on the grounds of being inattentive to the costs which more often surpasses the benefits that the affected community enjoys (Ramanathan, 1996; Mohanty, 2005). This paper analyses these costs and the forms in which these costs are born by the people who do not share the benefits and the gains of the development projects for which they are made to suffer in the name of greater good. These development plans come with doom for the people who inhabit the land which is acquired for development projects, and dispossession and displacement are intertwined to the process. And so are the environmental impacts that hardly garner the attention of the development planners. Environment, too, is seen as a collateral damage in the pursuit of greater good that development is expected to deliver.

This paper builds on the data regarding the two hydropower projects to establish the utilitarian nature of hydropower projects in Jammu and Kashmir and argues that the high modernist (Scott, 1998) approach pursued is a threat to the survival of the local indigenous population and violates their rights to dignified life and alters the environment irreversibly, exposing the inhabitants of the region to natural disasters.

While provisions of payment of compensation to the affected families for dispossession of land is part of the legal mechanism, the critical development scholars have questioned the reasonableness and fairness of such payments made to serve any justice to the families (Mathur, 2009; Mohanty,

2005; Ramanathan, 1996) and argued that the money paid at best serve as a facade of equity and fairness and performs the task of cover up to the inherently exploitative processes of development. Nonetheless, contrary to this critique, there are arguments which assert that these procedural issues can be identified and addressed and the alleged discriminatory nature of the development planning can be minimised.

However, despite changes in law where processes of development planning has been made more democratic and participatory in principle, their implementation remains far fetched because of the deep-rooted differential power dynamics that operate during those processes (Roy, 2019). Gupta (2012) poses a fundamental question on the appropriateness of the very power of 'eminent domain' 'as an institution in democratic society' that facilitates land acquisition and asks,

Can an institution crafted specifically to take resources and land from subjects for the benefit of the Crown and its corporate associates ever be modified to serve a public purpose? I argue that, given the historical development of eminent domain in India, the answer is "no." (2012, p. 451)

And it is important to note that there are structural factors at play, such as pro-project bias of the people in positions of power, lack of sense of responsibility towards the affected community and expectations of certain outcomes and results irrespective of any consideration towards the detrimental consequences it may have, which dominate the development planning.

In order to go beyond the question of social justice that utilitarianism is in direct conflict with, this analysis further goes into analysing how those development projects are not merely violative of rights of people, but also have larger political purposes to fulfil. And in order to illustrate this, this study uses the concept of 'instrument effects' by Ferguson (1994) which helps us to ask questions beyond the failure and adverse impacts of development projects. The concept of instrument effects helps us ask and analyse the non-economic functions that development projects serve.

Hydropower projects represent not merely the technocratic pursuit of economic growth (Khagram, 2004, p.4), but also serve symbolic function of conquest of nature and becoming of a modern state (Klingensmith, 2007,p.2). Hydro power projects right from the independence of India have been promoted as act towards nation-building (Roy, 2019) and it is this political function that dominates the planning processes at places such as disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir. It is not inconsequential a fact that National Hydropower Corporation has an iron control over water resources in Jammu and Kashmir (Bhan, 2014).

Hence it is important to note that development projects in Jammu and Kashmir are not merely profit making ventures or embodiments of utilitarian development, but perform and reproduce political control over the region. Power is exercised by maintaining hegemony over the water resources while the hydropower projects are promoted as being representative of merely economic pursuits of the state with no political effects, whatsoever. This depoliticisation of development plays significant role in producing control over water, land and people while not having to account for such control.

The planning of those hydropower projects essentially defines who is in command of the resources, who is a decision maker, who dominates, who gains and who loses. The Indus Water Treaty is a glaring example of how water resources of Jammu and Kashmir have become prohibited waters for the people of Jammu and Kashmir and how the local government, supposed representative of the people, has had no role to play in the decision making and conflict resolution with regard to rivers of Jammu and Kashmir.

In this paper, I argue that development in Jammu and Kashmir is a contested discourse, and a site of politics of domination and power.

5. Methods

In the following sections, I discuss two hydropower-projects located at two valleys of Jammu and Kashmir. The Kishenganga hydropower project in Gurez, Kashmir and Bursar hydropower project in Chenab Valley, in Kishtwar.

These two projects were selected in order to have equal representation from two places where most of the power projects of Jammu and Kashmir are located. At the time of study, Kishenganga hydropower project was commissioned in 2018 but soon halted for renovation and Bursar hydropower project is in its initial phase of construction.

Since this research is an analytical inquiry into the social, political and environmental impacts of the hydro power projects in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, now a Union Territory, I use qualitative research methods for the purposes of this study. Qualitative research is an investigation in order to help understanding and exploring various phenomenon, events and institutions (Blackstone, 2014).

In order to make this research empirically grounded, I use data from primary as well as secondary sources. Data with regard to acquisition of land, displacement, and cost of the projects is sourced from government records as well as research reports. These hydropower projects have been widely covered by the newspapers too, and hence, I have used archival research as well for the purpose of

this study. Data sourced from secondary sources is derived from analytical stories and opinion pieces carried by various newspapers and news-portals.

6. Building Hydropower Projects: Damming the Rivers and Damning the People

Building of dams for the two hydropower projects has caused dispossession as well as displacement of the people who have been living in the vicinity of the two rivers. Kishenganga hydropower project is built on Kishenganga river, a tributary of Jehlum river that flows through district Bandipora of the North Kashmir into Neelum valley in Pakistan Administered Kashmir. In Gurez, which hosts the 330 MW Kishenganga hydropower project, 379 hectares of land were acquired which included private land from six villages that include Badwan, Wanpora, Khopri, Nayal, Check and Kralpora (Hussain, 2018). Two villages of Gurez, Khopri and Badwan are completely submerged and more villages in the vicinity of the dams continue to be water-logged due to engineering faults in the tunnel. The Kishenganga project has affected 801 families, according to NHPC (Subramanian, 2018). That is an official record. However, there is no record on how many more families are impacted by the project directly as well as indirectly.

In 2015, the families feeling exploited by NHPC filed a petition in the High Court of Jammu and Kashmir to seek order from the court for fair and full compensation as per the promises made to the affected families, for the loss of land, houses and the livelihood. The petition is pending for final disposal by the court. While NHPC claims to have paid the compensation as per the prescribed norms and rate for the land and the houses, the struggle of the people to get their due compensation was a long drawn bureaucratic hassle.

In Kishtwar, 880 MW Bursar hydropower project is planned to be built on Marusudar river which is the main tributary of the Chenab river basin. The project is expected to submerge seven villages and displace inhabitants of those villages namely Yourdu, Nawapahi, Qadernath, Chinjer, Deharna, Lopara and Janakpora (Sagotra, 2018). These villages host 1052 families, which comprises of a population of 6332 persons (Farhat, 2019). The announcement of the project came in 2016, and since then the project has seen active resistance from the people of the region. As government initiated the process of land demarcation, residents of these villages held a protest for one and a half month in April, 2018 against the construction of dam and the power project (Naik, 2018).

Bursar reservoir will involve submergence of 1442 hectares of land which includes agricultural as well as forest land (EIA, 2017, p. 403)

The villagers have formed a PakalBursar Dam Committee to negotiate their demands with the state and persuade the government to give up on the construction of the project (Naik, 2018). However, the only change in government's position on the dam has been to increase the compensation package for the losses that the people of the region are going to suffer (Sagotra, 2018).

6.1 Force of Law to Utilitarianism and Incremental Disenfranchisement

The planning of hydropower projects and the execution of such plans happens through appropriate legal procedures in place. However the legality of these projects does not necessarily mean that the public legitimacy to build them exists too. And the events of public challenge to hydropower projects have at various points of time transformed into public movements and struggles, such as Narmada, Tehri and silent valley (Arora, 2009; Ramanathan, 1996).

The contentions of those opposing the construction of dams and building of hydropower projects are multi-layered. As those projects are planned and executed, they are accompanied by the dispossession of land and displacement of the communities. Researches have shown how the uprooting of communities from their ancestral land results in impoverishment and destitution, all done in the name of public and national interest (Roy, 2019; Ramanathan, 1996).

The way Kishenganga hydropower project unfolded itself, it has turned lives of the people of Gurez into doom. The Kishenganga project did not only come at the cost of their loss of houses, land and livelihood but has also brought an end to their collective identity of being Dard-Shin tribe (Bhan, 2014). Dard-Shin tribe is the Kashmir's original inhabitants, who have a very distinct, sui generis, language, culture and ancestry. And with the displacement that has come knocking at their doors with the power project, and without any relocation within the region of Gurez, the Dard-Shin tribe is at the verge of loss of the collective identity. The people of Gurez feel that no amount of money can compensate their loss, which they express in terms of their belonging to their ancestral homeland.

The inhabitants of the villages of Gurez were promised land for rehabilitation and resettlement, in Mirgund, outskirts of the city of Srinagar with other benefits (Aslam, 2015). But neither did they receive the compensation they were promised nor the resettlement. The demands of the families for jobs with NHPC as a compensation for loss of livelihood were also not met (Hussain, 2018). The non-performance of promises that were made at the time of acquisition of land finally forced the families to take recourse to judicial remedy and hence a petition in the Jammu and Kashmir High Court was filed to seek orders for appropriate compensation from the NHPC.

While the law for the acquisition of land for public purpose, the Jammu and Kashmir land acquisition act, 1934 provided for appropriate payment to be made to the owner of the land, it lacks a proper approach towards the issues that arise out of involuntary acquisition of land. The law did not attend to the adverse impacts that involuntary dispossession of land has on the affected families and the community.

The displacement caused by the Kishenganga project has led to the migration of the families outside of their ancestral land to the new places such as Srinagar city where they have taken up menial jobs, such as wazwan chefs, cab drivers, unskilled labor, etc. to support their families (Hussain, 2018). Many of the displaced families live as tenants in the city of Srinagar. This has exposed the families to various vulnerabilities which they would not have to undergo if the dispossession had not taken place. From being land-owners, these families have been reduced to landless unskilled refugees in their own land.

Migration of Gurezis from the ancestral place, not one done out of free will but an imposed one, has brought uncertainties with it. Unlike what planners presume about the social mobility of the affected community, displacement and migration to new places, among new people come with deep sense of insecurities in absence of previously existing community support system. It results in the breakup of the communities, identity crisis and the shattering of the community support system (Roy, 2019). The law and the development policies see the adverse impacts on individual level and try to manage through the compensation scheme, instead of acknowledging impacts at a collective level, which reflects in the inequitable and inadequate approach.

It is impacts such as these, which neither the policy makers, nor the law attends to. The costs that the Dard-Shin tribe has to pay for the larger public interest is not only disproportionate but also unjust. The development projects which are imposed on the people, without their participation in decision-making, by the technocratic state reductively define the lives of the people in the utilitarian cost benefit terms. It is the laws of the land, which facilitate the utilitarian development projects and justify the enormous social, economic and cultural consequences on the affected communities in the name of greater good of the society.

From the monarchic times in Jammu and Kashmir to the supposed democratic set up nothing has changed about the power of the state/authority to declare a project one of public interest. And the experiences from all the hydropower projects point to the fact that dispossession and displacement is inherently integral part of those projects. In fact, the planning of the development projects work with the presumption of dispossession and displacement (Ramanatha, 1996; Mathur, 2009). But

those presumptions have been unable to translate into more just and equitable approach towards compensation, rehabilitation and resettlement.

For the development projects, the deprivation of the affected families is used as a vantage point to assert it as an opportunity for them to become a part of the development process. For example, the officials of NHPC have repeatedly referred to the migration of the affected people from the Gurez to other places as an opportunity for them and their younger generations in the long run as they get exposed to the modernity and its benefits outside of Gurez (Bhan, 2014, p. 202). The development planners assume the right as well as authority to decide the future for people who they do not know, neither do they know what these people want in their lives, nor do they care about the wishes of the people who are the obvious victims of their planning and the development.

The involuntary dispossession and the resultant displacement and migration with limited commitments of compensation by the state towards the affected people leads to the cruel and regressive road to poverty. This impoverishment of the people is caused in the name of public purpose through legal processes where the displaced become the necessary cost of the development story. Laws which grant sanctity and legitimacy to such disenfranchisement should not remain above the scrutiny of the idea of justice that laws are supposed to deliver.

6.2 The Environment Dilemma of Ambitious Development Projects

Jammu and Kashmir is located in the lap of western Himalayas. It is ecologically fragile, and seismically an active zone. Jammu and Kashmir has been notified to fall under zone IV and V of the seismic belt (Ministry of Earth Science, 2020).

The mountain ecology of Jammu and Kashmir is susceptible to the natural as well as man-made disasters (Romshoo et al, 2017). This region is prone to varied kinds of natural disasters and catastrophes which include earthquakes, avalanches, landslides and floods, the intensity of which increases due to anthropogenic activities (Zaz et al, 2018; Romshoo et al, 2017). Despite the peculiar ecological and environmental vulnerabilities, the governments have chosen to implement the hydropower projects in Jammu and Kashmir without paying much attention to the possible and probable adverse impacts of such projects.

The important environment protection and disaster mitigation tools such as Environment Impact Assessment and the Carrying Capacity have not been taken seriously by the executing agencies for the construction of hydropower projects (Naik, 2018; Aslam, 2015).

The environment impact assessment report, 2012 of the Kishanganga hydropower project found out that the project was endangering the Himalayan habitat of flora and fauna, and in addition to human ecosystem. The report highlighted “the massive deployment of construction machinery and human presence in the region was detrimental, disturbing and fragmenting the ecological habitats (EIA, 2012, Chapter, 13).”

The report discloses that the building of the reservoir and diversion of waters from the river has colossal adverse impact on the air quality and water quality (EIA, 2012). The deforestation for the purposes of building the project is also warned by the report to have short term as well as long term impacts not only on climate change but also on the surrounding areas that are saved from landslides due to presence of thick forests. The deforestation will also add to the soil erosion which in turn will impact the vegetation, crops and horticultural farming activities, notes the report (EIA, 2012).

The EIA of Kishanganga was not taken into consideration by the Ministry of Environment and Forests and the project was given clearance despite the negative impacts which were found out by the Environment Impact Study. And no lessons were learnt for future either, as the Environment Impact Assessment report of the Bursar hydropower Project reveals as the project was given a hasty clearance despite an adverse Environment Impact report.

The environment impact assessment report, 2017 reveals that the Bursar hydropower project will have adverse impacts on soil, air quality, water quality, will impact flora and fauna of the ecosystem and will also have ramifications on the hydrology of the river (EIA, 2017). The report further notes that building of dam and roads that involves cutting down of forests, and clearance of different kinds of vegetation in the area, including generation of muck will have irreversible impact on the life and culture of the region (EIA, 2017, p. 406).

The inundation of agricultural and forest land will lead to extinction of several plant species which are part of the local biodiversity and ecosystem (EIA, 2017, p. 407). The Environment Impact Assessment report also notes that the changes in the regional ecosystem will also result in altered rainfall pattern (EIA, 2017, p. 407). And the report also anticipates soil erosion to arise out of project leading to fungal and bacterial invasion of crop and horticulture plantation (EIA, 2017, p. 407). The alteration in the existing ecosystem will affect the water supply in the region.

On pages 420 and 421, the Environment Impact assessment report notes “the project has more negative impacts as compared to positive impacts” (EIA, 2017). Out of the total count during construction phase, EIA gives 12 positive impacts and 37 negative impacts of the project. And for the operational phase, the positive impacts are numbered at 13 as compared to 25 negative impact count.

The clearance for the construction of the power project was given without giving due consideration to Environment Impact Assessment report, which was commissioned by the Ministry of Environment and Forests itself. The Expert Appraisal Committee cleared the project and allowed the land acquisition process for NHPC without even visiting the site (Parvaiz, 2018). It took the decision of such clearance by overriding its own previous decision of consultation with Environment Impact Assessment Report without laying down any reasons for the same (Parvaiz, 2018)

Not only did the government go ahead with the project despite a negative assessment report, but also readjusted the Kishtwar High Altitude National Park to exclude some land from the protected area, in order to accommodate the proposed power project (SRO notification, 212).

Despite Bursar project being located in seismically and tectonically active zone, it has also not undergone any Disaster Impact Assessment which is essential for preparedness of any disaster (Parvaiz, 2018). The EIA report also highlights the need to do Cumulative Impact Assessment of the Chenab, since it hosts more than four existing power projects at different locations and is expected to host another six big hydropower projects.

The approach of the government to give preference to developmental plans as against to other social, environmental and cultural aspects of the people and the societies raises questions on the very foundations and legitimacy of the governments and the state. Performing acts and making plans for people without their involvement, against their wishes, to their detriment, cannot be said to be done in the interest of the people. At least, not in the interest of the people who are adversely impacted by such development projects.

The self-assuring belief of the state that it acts in the interest of the nation, for the greater good, at the cost of some part of its citizens, manifests itself sometimes through use of violence against the people. Multiple times in Gurez as well as Kishtwar, the NHPC has resorted to use of iron hand of the state, that is police and CRPF, to dislodge the protestors (Naik, 2018; Bhan, 2014).

State takes recourse to its deterrent power and authority in order to bring people to come to terms to their fate that is decided for them. The sacrifice that one community is made to incur in order to benefit the people they know nothing off, and don't feel related with, is achieved through recourse to law, disproportionate power capacity and to use of force. What State professes to be doing in the name of public welfare is essentially done to consolidate its own power and exercise that power through making development plans and implementing those plans against the will of the people.

Such exercise of power by the states, which involves not only disregarding the wishes of the people who have to bear the brunt of the projects, but also includes the plan to conquer the nature, essentially believes in the supremacy of the scientific designing and planning.

It is this belief and this superiority complex of the state that Scott (1998) conceptualises in the shape of High Modernism. High Modernist State, Scott (1998) argues,

“believes in the linear progress, the development of scientific and technical knowledge, the expansion of production, the rational design of social order, the growing satisfaction of human needs, and, not least, an increasing control over nature (including human nature) commensurate with scientific understanding of natural laws.” (p, 91).

And this High Modernist State in order to achieve the goals that it has set for itself has to reorganise the societies, even if that involves interventions detrimental to the people. The High Modernist State essentially ends up disregarding the vital aspects of the functioning of the societies, and their subjectivities - social, political and ecological.

The State apparatus in Jammu and Kashmir has adopted the same modus operandi and uses laws and its authority to design a new social and natural order, which, however, comes with risks of disaster for the people who have already been exposed to vulnerabilities and uncertainties of the future as a cost towards the national progress.

7. Production and Performance of Hegemony and Domination through Power Projects

On 19 May, 2018, Mr Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, inaugurated the Kishenganga hydropower project and dedicated the project to nation.

In 2016, the Bursar hydropower project was declared national project (Parvaiz, 2018). The significance of being declared a national project is that the project will be expedited at all levels, and the financial assistance will be provided by Government of India to the extent of 90% of the estimated cost in the form of Central grant (MoWR, 2020). It also means that the project will be implemented at a fast forward speed and removes whatever procedural limitations are otherwise applicable on the implementation of the project (MoWR, 2020).

But apart from these meanings, the declaration of hydropower projects of national importance or being dedicated to nation has implicit political connotations. Be it Kishenganga hydropower project or Bursar project, the value of these projects is beyond economic. These projects are symbolic of control and domination over the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir and its waters. The presence of Indian labour and administrative officers in the remote regions of Jammu Kashmir,

Gurez in extreme North to Kishtwar in extreme South, shows how most difficult of terrains are not immune to bureaucratic and administrative penetration, and the state legibility of those remotest of places is possible.

Those projects are also allusive to India's assertion in the region. And people working in those projects are aware of the political significance of those projects. Amresh Kumar, General Manager of NHPC in Gurez puts it in clear words when he says, "More than its commercial value, this is a project of great strategic value. It is an assertion of India's rights under the Indus Waters Treaty. And Army has constantly been with us to boost the morale and security of workers." (Subramanian, 2018)

Another employee, Sanjay Kumar, a time keeper at the Gurez dam site says, "Watching the dam come up has been a matter of pride. Many times I felt like a soldier myself, performing a national duty. Otherwise you can't last here." (Subramanian, 2018)

The sentiment that is present in these employees of the corporate company with regard to the power project, their understanding of the strategic value of the project, their sense of pride over its completion and their appreciation for the armed forces, all reflect how the territory of Kashmir and its rivers invoke a certain nationalist bravado among workers of a company who don't belong from the region of Jammu and Kashmir.

The nationalist value of hydropower projects in Jammu and Kashmir overbears the cost of displacement, dispossession and migration that those projects bring with themselves. With these projects, the narrative of employment generation and taming of otherwise jobless subversive youth of the region comes along (Bhan, 2014). Hence these projects are seen as serving the national cause of turning the violent youth of the region into productive ideal citizen of India and hence preventing their participation in the armed militancy in Jammu and Kashmir (Bhan, 2014; Rajak, 2011).

Development and employment generation are regularly presented as a solution to the 73 year old conflict of Jammu and Kashmir (Bhan, 2014).

The hydropower projects are also the sites of performance of power, where who makes the decisions and who is impacted by those decisions are important indicators of who holds the power.

Right from the beginning times, when NHPC was given the mandate to build first hydropower project in Jammu and Kashmir, NHPC continues to maintain the monopoly over the water resources of Jammu and Kashmir. All major hydropower projects are granted to NHPC by the Union government of India. And this has also come under criticism by the political parties in Jammu and Kashmir, who have been demanding the return of power projects to the state government or at least sharing of the power generated at an increased percentage than the 12% that it currently does.

While NHPC has earned profits to the extent of 19000 crore from the waters of Jammu and Kashmir in last 14 years, the region continues to be electricity deficit for its domestic consumption leading to serious electricity crisis particularly in the winter months (Geelani, 2017).

Absence of representation in the decision making role in the power generation from the waters of Jammu and Kashmir is an indicator of who yields power in the region. And the control of NHPC over the waters of Jammu and Kashmir is an expression of domination exercised by the Indian state through NHPC. The exclusion of the people of Jammu and Kashmir from the decision making processes of the development projects and disregarding their agency by not making them party to Indus Water Treaty is a strategy of control and appropriation.

The building of hydropower projects in Jammu and Kashmir by NHPC instead of the Jammu Kashmir State Power Development Corporation point towards the exercise of institutional hegemony and reinforcement of Indian state's control over the territory and the waters of Jammu and Kashmir.

8. Conclusion

Commodification of rivers pose huge social, economic, cultural and environmental risks to the local populations whose identity, sense of abode and neighbourhood and livelihood are deeply rooted and entrenched in their mountain and aquatic ecosystems. The prevailing development model disregards the local contexts and specificities of the places and follows a generic template for implementation of development projects. These development projects are conceptualised and planned by technocrats who lack contextual knowledge about regions. Which results in overlooking precariousness and uncertainties that those projects bring into the lives of the affected people. The absence of local representation and their knowledge system, in decision-making, planning, and execution of projects significantly indicates how the development model, high modernist approach, is inherently exclusionary and a site of performance and production of power politics.

And in a conflict zone, where symbolism and representation are essential parts of everyday politics of assertion, these hydropower projects epitomise the control of Indian state over the region through their technological prowess. The hydropower projects are less about development agenda in Jammu and Kashmir, as the planning process, thought process of planners and disregard to adverse impacts reveals, and more about the political outcomes it facilitates for Indian state in Jammu and Kashmir.

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