Dams, Development, and Indigenous Communities

A Case Study of Arunachal Pradesh, India

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Abstract

This research revisits one of the abiding concerns in development studies - the relationship between indigenous peoples – one of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups within nation-states - and large-scale infrastructure projects such as large dams. Large dams promoted by post-colonial nation-states and the international development apparatus were one of the definitive concerns of development studies in the 20th century. The transnational social movements triggered in the wake of the conflicts transformed the ways of 'doing Development'. Although for a few short years, it looked like large dams would be abandoned for good, in the 21st century, they are well and back as a strategy for combating climate change through energy transition. In the wake of this resurgence, there has been a renewed academic interest in large dams. In general, the new social science research continues to view the issue through the lens of resistance.

The Government of India launched a massive programme for hydropower development called the 50,000MW Initiative in the mid-2000s. Arunachal Pradesh, a small state in northeastern India, was to be the epicentre of this programme, with an initial proposal of 40-plus projects that later swelled to a 150-plus list. The years following the launch of the hydropower programme were remarkable in the relative absence of resistance among the indigenous communities who live in the state.

This research sought to investigate this phenomenon of 'absence of resistance'. In particular, I wanted to understand if the absence of resistance was acquiescence or something else. Relying on the ethnographic methods of participant observation, interviews and document reviews, I conducted fieldwork at two sites in the catchment of the River Siang, inhabited by tribes belonging to the Adi group, a part of the larger Tani cultural group. The first site was that of the Lower Siang Hydroelectric Project, which had gained national and international attention due to a sustained grassroots campaign against the project. The LSHEP was one of the handful of instances of resistance against a proposed project, and it served as a deviant case. The other site was a three-project cascade located in Shi Valley, on a sub-tributary of the Siang River. This site was representative of the experience of a majority of the small communities of Arunachal encountering hydropower development. Thus, it came to represent the typical case. The fieldwork data was analysed using a framework amalgamated from the work on environmental justice and Conde and Billon's variables of resistance to extractives.

My research found that there was heterogeneity both among and within the communities in their response to the proposed hydropower projects. In general, the indigenous communities in Arunachal were cautiously receptive to the hydropower projects on their territories, or in other words, the projects enjoyed social acceptance. These findings contribute to a small but growing

pool of evidence that in a significant departure from the indigenous experiences with large development projects in the 20th century, communities today assess such projects to be less harmful, and even potentially beneficial. There are two main factors for this. The first factor is the institutionalisation of harm mitigation practices within the development industry and international development finance. The spread of practices such as environmental and social impact assessments and monetary compensation meant that distributional justice issues had been greatly minimised. The second factor is the changing nature of indigenous lives and livelihoods themselves, in response to the preceding decades of state-led development interventions. Thus, the conditions that had previously made indigenous communities vulnerable to poverty and dispossession due to the ingress of large infrastructure projects on their territories had changed.

Another important finding was that despite the general high social acceptance of hydropower projects, conflicts between local communities and hydropower companies were commonplace. These conflicts could be traced back to issues of recognition justice and procedural justice. These issues, in turn, stemmed from indigenous ideas of territoriality and active sovereignty. Conflicts stemming from territoriality could play out both between the communities and the other stakeholders, as well as between members of the same community. Intra-community conflicts would then manifest themselves again as community-company conflicts.

Climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation, two of the most pressing concerns for international development practice, hinge upon the participation of indigenous communities whose territories hold forests that are carbon sinks, hotspots of biodiversity, and reservoirs of minerals and hydropower necessary for the energy transition. Considering this, my research has two-fold implications. First, in popular and development discourses, the nuanced co-production of indigeneity and development must be taken into account. Second, the global development community and their counterpart nation-states must acknowledge the territorial sovereignty of indigenous communities and find ways to accommodate their desire for active sovereignty regarding decisions over the use of resources on and under their lands.

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List of Abbreviations

AAYYAA	All Ato Yorko Yornyi Ao Association
ADC	Additional District Commissioner
APSPCB	Arunachal Pradesh State Pollution Control Board
ASM	Anchal Samiti Member
BFCC	Brahmaputra Flood Control Commission
BPL	Below Poverty Line
BRO	Border Roads Organisation
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CEA	Central Electricity Authority
CM	Chief Minister
CRPF	Central Reserve Police Force
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CWPC	Central Water & Power Commission
DA	District Administration
DHPD	Department of Hydropower Development
DPR	Detailed Project Report
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
FPIC	Free, Prior and Informed Consent
FRL	Full Reservoir Level
GoAP	Government of Arunachal Pradesh
GOI	Government of India
HEP	Hydroelectric Plant
INC	Indian National Congress
IPP	Independent Power Producer
LOU	Land Owners' Union
LPC	Land Possession Certificate
LSDPAACPV	Lower Siang Dam Project Affected Action Committee of Pongging Village
LSDPAYA	Lower Siang Dam Project Affected Youth Association
LSHEP	Lower Siang Hydroelectric Project
LSPAPAC	Lower Siang Project Affected People's Action Committee
LSPCC	Lower Siang Project Coordination Committee
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
MP	Member of Parliament
MW	Megawatt
NEEPCO	North Eastern Electrical Power Corporation
NEFA	North East Frontier Agency
NEFT	North East Frontier Tracts
NHPC	National Hydroelectric Power Corporation
PAA(LSP)	Project Affected Area (Lower Siang Project)
PALOC	Project Affected Land Owner Committee
PAPWCRA	Project Affected People's Welfare Committee of Ramo Area
PDS	Public Distribution System
PFR	Prefeasibility Report

R&R	Rehabilitation and Resettlement
RALOC	Ramo Area Land Owners' Committee
RTI	Right to Information
S&I	Survey and Investigation
ST	Scheduled Tribe
WCD	World Commission on Dams
WRC	Wet Rice Cultivation
ZPM	Zilla Parishad Member

1. Introduction

The relationship between large dams and indigenous peoples has been one of the important pivots in the Development[1] debate in the 20th century. As large dams see a resurgence in the Development sector in the 21st century, this study revisits the topic. Using the instance of large hydropower dam building in Arunachal Pradesh, an Indian frontier state, I explore the heterogeneity of responses to dams between and within local communities and investigate how intra-community differences are negotiated within the affected groups as well as in relation to the state and the concerned private companies.

In the 20th century, large dams came to be associated with massive dispossession and impoverishment of vast numbers of people. Those affected tended to belong disproportionately to indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities, on whose traditional lands the large dams were frequently sited, whether in the global North or the South. They were rendered doubly vulnerable to the negative impacts of the Dam-and-Development nexus due to their lack of political voice in decision-making. The international social and environmental movements that arose against large dams put these indigenous groups at the centre of their critique and resistance. In the face of the concerted global criticism and condemnation, it seemed all but inevitable that large dams would be consigned to the pile of failed Development projects.

However, large dams, despite their contentious past, continue to be built today. As per the industry predictions, their number is only set to grow with the support of the mainly Chinese dam builders and the increasing demand for non-fossil fuel energy (Zarfl et al., 2015). The energy transition required to combat climate change puts hydropower back squarely in the centre of the repertoire of global response. The large proportion of the world's hydropower potential and projected demand is in the global South, i.e. Africa, South America and Asia (Bartle, 2002). At the same time, many hydropower projects will continue to be located at remote sites which are inhabited by small indigenous peoples. International norms regarding social and environmental concerns have evolved vastly and percolated down to national arenas, yet the respect for and adherence to these norms continue to vary widely. In some corners of the world, the historical pattern of exploitation and marginalisation of indigenous peoples continues; in others, the changing social and

[1]By Development with a capital D, I refer to the discourse and practice of interventions undertaken for the purpose of improving the lives of poor people mainly in the 'Third World'/ 'Developing countries'/ 'global South'. While it has been convincingly argued that Development has ideological roots in the 18th century ideas of trusteeship (Cowen & Shenton, 1996), I limit myself to the specific configuration that took shape in the 20th century after World War II. I make this distinction to avoid confusion with 'development' with small 'd', which also appears frequently. This usage is in the general sense of 'advancement' or 'of a project being developed'.

environmental governance of large dams is creating opportunities for indigenous peoples to engage with large dams in new ways.

In popular media narratives as well as in activist discourses, large dams continue to be framed as an existential threat to small communities, especially those belonging to indigenous groups. Similarly, in the social sciences, resistance continues to be the favoured scholarly lens of looking at the millennial large dams. However, the context of large dam development has changed greatly since the 1980s and 1990s, when the contestations against large dams were at their peak. New studies have investigated the changing norms of the industry and critiqued the new rationale for justifying large dams, but there have been too few interrogations into the local arena of large dams.

Contrary to commonly held assumptions and arguments, indigenous peoples do not always oppose large dams. As this study shows, in some instances there might be strong support in favour of such projects within the local community. To understand the micro-politics of hydropower development, I argue, one must apply a more fine-grained analysis unpacking the community and identifying the different actors and interests within it. The dominance of scholarship that stresses indigenous resistance against hydropower projects has largely missed this nuanced dimension of local politics on the ground. The alternative research framework suggested in this dissertation builds on the more fine-grained scholarship in resource extraction literature.

1.1. Setting the Scene

On a grey morning in July 2012, I was sitting in a Sumo[2] with 10 other people, starting on an 8-hour long journey to the border town of Mechukha, located in the Siang region in the middle of Arunachal Pradesh. Arunachal Pradesh is a mountainous state in the northeast of India, at the tail-end of the Himalayas, sharing a long border with Tibet, China. Mechukha was to be my base for the first case study, a 3-plant cascade hydropower project developed on the Shi River by a French company. This cascade was one of more than 150 large hydropower projects allotted to private companies and government parastatals by the Government of Arunachal. My research was an investigation of the local responses to this ambitious programme. Specifically, I wanted to know why in general local communities across the state had not responded with resistance.

Mechukha lies at two days' journey by road from Itanagar, the state capital, and 30km away from the international border with China. It is the last urban settlement on the Shi River. The river itself is just about 100km long, but in that length, it traverses, under different names, through two

[2] A Sumo is a Sports Utility Vehicle (SUV) of Indian make, which became the de-facto mode of public transport for long-distance travel in Arunachal. It seats 10 passengers, and although the cost of tickets is usually twice that of tickets for buses run by the State Transport Corporation, it is more reliable and faster. Now, even though SUVs of other brands are used, Sumo is a shorthand for long-distance shared taxi service.

different cultural zones. Its upper half of it flows as the Yargyapchu through the traditional lands of the Membas, an indigenous community[3] culturally affiliated with the Tibetans. In its lower reaches, it takes on the name of Shi and drops sharply through the deep valley inhabited by the Ramo people[4].

The start of my fieldwork had been delayed twice. First, I had a false start when I arrived in Tato town, on the advice of district-level officials, to set up base for my fieldwork. Tato is another settlement on the Shi, downstream of Mechukha, at the tail-end of the project cascade. However, on my arrival in Tato, it became clear that almost everyone who played a role in the 3-plant cascade development was based in Mechukha, and not Tato. The district-level officials in Aalo, the headquarters of the West Siang district, had not realised that the theatre of local hydropower politics had shifted away from Tato to Mechukha. I abandoned my plan to be based in Tato and came back to Itanagar to begin planning again. In this process, it occurred to me that aside from four or five projects against which anti-dam struggles were being waged, almost nothing was known in the capital about the other 100-odd projects under exploration and development in the state. What little resistance one read about in the media, was focused on a few projects, not the entire hydropower programme of the state. The government officials only dealt with the project developers or the MLAs[5], not the local community representatives. State-and national-level journalists only wrote about sites where there were vocal protests and from where the protest-leaders sent press releases.

The second delay was caused by a near-fatal shooting of a close friend in Itanagar. My friend was an activist-journalist who had written, among many other things, against the hydropower programme of the state since 2005. There were rumours in activist circles that the hydropower lobby could have had something to do with the attack. I stayed back in Itanagar for a few days, to be with her in the hospital.

So, on this grey day, as I travelled to Mechukha, I faced some uncertainty about my research. The gossip about the relationship of the hydropower lobby to the attempt on my friend's life was unsettling. On top of that, I was heading for Mechukha without having gained any concrete leads or contacts in Itanagar.

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[3] Tribe or Scheduled Tribe is the analogous term used in Indian discourse for "Indigenous People". I will discuss this further in Chapter 2.

[4] The Ramos are part of a triumvirate of Adi tribes who inhabit the forked valley of Shi and Yomi. In Chapters 5 and 6, I will discuss further who the Adis are. Below Tato, an important administrative settlement inhabited by the Libo people, the Shi joins the Yomi which in turn has flown through the Bokar lands before arriving at Tato. After the confluence, they form the Siyom River, an important tributary of the Siang River.

[5] MLAs or Members of Legislative Assembly are the highest elected political leaders from a group of administrative units. Their influence will be discussed in some detail in chapter 6.

For the first five hours or so of our journey, my ten co-passengers and I had mostly ridden in silence broken with some polite chit-chat. Towards the last leg of our journey, once we entered the Shi Valley inhabited by the Ramos, one person launched into an entertaining monologue. This is what I wrote in my field notes:

> "After crossing Tato, the man in seat 5 started talking to the entire vehicle. The driver and the (seat) no.5 guy talked about how they have to pay (money) to get land in Mechukha, land that used to belong to them[6]. "Our ancestors must have been monkeys. Or else why should they have left a place like Mechukha and moved to these harsh mountains (the landscape that we were passing through)." … As we crossed Hiri and the steep sides of the left bank came into view, he started again, "After the company has arrived, owners have begun appearing for those places. Some claim that their ancestors touched those steep slopes using magic. (Derisively) Has anyone ever gone there (pointing to the slope) till today? Forget humans, even monkeys could barely reach those places. Things have gotten worse with the arrival of the company people. Brothers fight amongst themselves. Court cases are going on."
>
> (A short while later, on the road down towards the bend before Rego) "Some guy from Gensi[7] blew away his entire compensation amount. Now he is a renter at a Nepali guy's building in Likabali." I interject "He shouldn't have done that. If he had put the money in the bank, he would have gotten interest off of that". No. 5 guy says, "We tribal folks don't think like that. Everyone just thinks of buying a car, or drinking it away. What good can come of money? It will run out some day. If one doesn't have land anymore, what would happen to the children?"
>
> He then tells of people in Tato who were expecting crores[8] in compensation. One man, who had hoped for 7 crores, wanted to know the cost of a helicopter as he wanted to buy one. Another said, 'When I get money, I will stand for MLA elections. He told an older person… 'older brother, after I receive the compensation money you will have to call me older brother.' Yet someone else, 'When I get my money, I will have three wives – one each in Itanagar, Aalo and Mechukha.'
>
> (He) tells of people who have taken huge loans in anticipation of the windfall. Some had borrowed money to the tune of 10 lakhs[9] to buy land in Tato but the compensation money never came and the interest on the money kept rising. One person decided to sell off the land he had purchased in speculation. He said, "it feels much better without that piece of land." Koje also tells of married women who visited their brothers' place in Tato. (Dukne-innam is a tradition in which married women visit their natal homes with gifts such as opo and adin (grain wine and meat), and in return their father and brothers pledge to take care of them when in need.) One brother pledged to give his sister in Heo 10 lakh when he would receive the compensation amount. But since that

[6] According to the migration lore of the Ramos, Ato Yorko, the titular ancestor, had camped for some years on the right bank of Yargyapchu where the modern urban settlement of Mechuka is located. It is said that he left the settlement because it was water-logged and inhospitable for swidden agriculture.

[7] Gensi is a village in the southern foothills of the then West Siang district. It is now part of a newly carved out district called Lepa Rada. It was one of the many villages impacted by the 2000MW Lower Subansiri project.

[8] A crore is 10 million INR. For a sense of its value in this area, the monthly salary of a person working as unskilled labourer at the road construction site was 7000 INR in 2012-13. A person would have to work 119 years to earn a crore.

[9] 10 lakhs are one million INR.

> hasn't happened, it has been a sunk investment for the woman. Koje's own wife wanted to pay a visit to her brother. Koje scolded her, *"tum sharam nahin hain. Paisa ka lalach main apna bhaiya ko milne jayege bolta hain"* (Have you no shame saying you will visit your brother out of greed?) and refused to let her go. At some point I asked him what other people in the villages thought of the compensation money etc. Koje answered, "Well, some good things have also come out of the company's presence. It would be good if everyone gets money. But some people think that they alone should receive all the compensation money. That's where fights start. Money drives people crazy. That's why I think that it were better if the companies had not been allowed into the Ramo areas."

In hindsight, the story told by my co-passenger outlined almost every theme that would come up in my research. However, on that day, I did not know this. In the literature on hydropower and local communities, issues about indigenous peoples fighting about compensation flows hardly appear. Instead, I was certain that I would encounter anti-dam protests, something I also had been told about in the state capital Itanagar. In the coming weeks and months, I would come to learn about the cautious optimism with which many communities greeted hydropower development in the region.

There was indeed strong resistance against a few proposed projects, and one such project, the Lower Siang Hydroelectric Project was the second site where I studied the resistance of the local community. However, there were several more projects where the local responses veered away from resistance and could only be described as cautiously positive. Even if there were contestations and controversies, these contestations did not imply community resistance to hydropower.

1.2. Indigenous People and Large dams in the 21st Century – the literature

In general, socio-economic impacts of large dams - displacement in particular - continue to be at the heart of social research on large dams (recent instances being Nguyen et al., 2016; Okuku et al., 2016; Owusu et al., 2017). In fact, a review and meta-synthesis of the literature on social impacts of large dams by Kirchherr and colleagues found that the number of studies on social impacts is only growing (2016). They found at least 178 peer-reviewed academic articles on the impacts of large dams have been published since 1990, and almost 60% of these have been produced since 2005.

However, there is a problem with the literature. Kirchherr et al (2016) point out that a bias exists towards examining resettlement impacts of extremely large dams, particularly an over-studied few, in a 5-10-year period after project completion. They argue that this bias distorts our understanding of social impacts in a few significant ways. First, the average dam studied by researchers is much larger than the average dam that exists today. In their sample, they found the height and power capacity of the average dam studies to be 145m and 5143MW respectively, while other studies have found the averages to be between 25-77m and 100MW-487MW. Secondly, a focus on resettlement

impacts on livelihoods excludes other impacts occurring at different points in time and space. For instance, the reviewers found few instances of studies conducted during the planning and design phase. Similarly, the downstream impacts of large dams have been ignored by the academic community. Not only that, but positive impacts are also very rarely reported.

The bulk of social research on large dams has continued to cleave closely to an activist-researcher line, with a focus on local resistance against large dams. In Latin America especially, social movements are central to large-dam studies (Athayde, 2014; Duarte-Abadía et al., 2015; Hommes et al., 2016; Martínez & Castillo, 2016). The widespread human rights abuse of anti-dam activists is part of a larger pattern of marginalisation and neglect of the indigenous people of these countries; as Duarte Abadia et al observed in the case of Colombian indigenes, "they are [that] part of the population that is never recognized by the Colombian state because they have no papers, land title, or registered capital" (2015, p. 251).

In other parts of the world too, be it in Africa, or Asia, scholars have highlighted anti-dam resistance and movements (Aiken & Leigh, 2015; Chan & Zhou, 2014; Matsuzawa, 2011; Simpson, 2013) and examined the international and national political economy of large dams that keep them on the agenda to the detriment of local populations (Hall & Branford, 2012; Hommes et al., 2016; Simpson, 2013). This holds true for research in India too, where researchers have written extensively about the anti-dam struggle among the Lepchas, a small ethnic minority in Sikkim (Arora, 2007, 2008; A. Huber & Joshi, 2015; Little, 2010; Wangchuk, 2007), as well as resistance against large dams in Assam and Mizoram (Arora & Kipgen, 2012; Baruah, 2012a; Chowdhury & Kipgen, 2013; Mahanta, 2010).

Only a small segment of social science research has engaged with the 'absence of resistance' (Butler, 2016; Karlsson, 2016; McDuie-Ra, 2011; Rai, 2005; Rest, 2012). In instances where there is a diversity in the positions of the local stakeholders, researchers have tended to ignore those who support large dams and focus on resistance actors. Karlsson speculates that the reluctance to engage with 'absence of resistance' could be due to the scholarly unease with 'victimhood' which is automatically assigned to the subaltern subjects who do not resist. Karlsson's own study of the Mapithel hydropower project in Manipur, north-eastern India, examines the 'absence of resistance' among communities who did not support the project. He argues that 'absence of resistance' is not necessarily passivity and victimhood, but that in the case of the Mapithel project which had been in the pipeline for three decades, the local communities or the subaltern exercise their agency by choosing to endure, in the hope of a benevolent state or for a less intimidating situation to emerge that would allow for dissent to be voiced (2016).

McDuie-Ra's study of the Panan dam in Sikkim, also from north-eastern India, veers further from the 'absence of resistance' to pro-hydropower development actors in the local communities (2011). He finds that the support for the Panan dam among the Lepchas of Dzongu, a small indigenous community, "is based on choices and manoeuvres in response to opportunities provided by the dam" (2011, p. 93) in the context of the economic stagnation and absence of livelihood opportunities. In this, they used their collective bargaining power to negotiate for a desirable deal with the state. Not only that, but the supporters also consider the anti-dam activists from within their tribe to lack legitimacy, as the activists live elsewhere in the urban areas and not in the region, and resent the fact that they expect "Dzongu Lepchas to remain faithful to traditions while they lived comfortable lives elsewhere" (2011, p. 95). Thus, his report presents a much more diverse picture of the local politics of hydropower development than what one might surmise from the larger body of work focusing on the anti-dam resistance.

Overall, one senses a scholarly discomfort in the academy with 'absence of resistance', underpinning questions such as "why resistance to the dam seemed muted or non-existent" (Butler, 2016, p. 183), or in arguing whether the 'desire for Development' and hence the acceptance of large dams is not in fact engendered through processes of governmentality which creates a self-perception of backwardness among people (Rest, 2012). McDuie-Ra (2011) has also noted the tendency of researchers to dismiss those supporting the Panan dam in Sikkim 'as minions of the state who are bought-off or naïve', and therefore not worthy of academic consideration. He reflects on his dilemmas and speculates if this tendency to cleave to "familiar narrative… (of) a 'numerically small ethnic minority… fighting against the development desires of the modern state to protect ancestral lands, the environment, sacred sites, and retain remnants of a 'vanishing' culture" is in response to the dilemma of otherwise 'giving a voice to proponents of potentially hazardous and environmentally destructive project' (p. 98).

In considering the phenomenon of erasure of pro-Development actors in scholarship, McDuie-Ra posits that researchers diminish the presence of pro-Development actors within ethnic minorities because they are seen to lack 'authenticity' as legitimate representatives of the minorities because as elites, they stand to profit disproportionately from Development projects; and they are often considered to be 'co-opted', manipulated or bought off by the State or its agents. But most of all, pro-Development or pro-dam actors present a moral dilemma to researchers, in that amplifying their voices could assist the outside proponents of "potentially hazardous and environmentally destructive projects" to undermine local opposition to such projects (McDuie-Ra, 2011).

There are only a few more studies that explore the phenomenon of local communities' support for large dams. Interestingly, all are from Nepal. Nepal, a poor mountainous landlocked nation, has

embraced both large and small hydropower as central to its economic strategy. It was the first country in South Asia to liberalise its hydropower sector, and was one of the early adopters of Environmental Impact Assessment protocols and public consultations. Besides, it was a pioneer in adopting social protective nets for negatively affected population segments (Shrestha et al., 2016). At the same time, the social impacts of large dams in Nepal have been relatively less severe in scale and intensity, than say, in India, which could be due to the mitigating impact of topography of mountainous hydropower sites (as discussed earlier in this section). It is telling that one of the best-known instances of anti-dam resistance in Nepal was built primarily by urban activists based in Kathmandu on the economic argument of bad investment for a poor country, rather than on the socio-political impacts on the local populations (Dixit & Gyawali, 2010).

Rest (2012), an anthropologist, conducted an ethnographic study at the site of Arun 3 in Nepal, a large project that was cancelled in 1995 due to the protests of activists mentioned above, and started again in 2008. He notes, "On the basis of some hundred interviews from the Upper Arun Valley…, my impression is that the vast majority of the people are still in favour of the project. They expect to profit primarily from the access road in a valley that is remote and poorly connected to the industrial centres of Dharan and Biratnagar to the south, though many are also ambivalent about the unalloyed benefits of the new road infrastructure. On top of that, many hope for wage labour during construction and the electrification of their villages" (2012, p. 108).

Similarly, Butler undertook doctoral research on the local community members affected by the proposed 900MW Upper Karnali Project in Nepal. He writes about "expecting to find many people in the area supportive of the attack" by Maoists on the offices of an Indian hydropower company contracted to build the Upper Karnali project, "and generally opposed to GMR", the Indian company. Instead, he found that the opposite was true not only in the immediate vicinity of the dam site, where community members could be expected to have financial interests in the continuing presence of construction activity, but also farther away from the dam site, which could be considered to have no distortions of financial interests (2016, pp. 159–161). Indeed, even though the communities downstream of the dam location had anxieties of dam breach and flooding due to seismic activities, "there was also an abiding sense of welcoming the dam" (2016, p. 182).

The third study by Rai (2005) is also doctoral research. As such, this study is also an examination of social impacts; it explores how the dam intervention affected social inequalities based on caste, class, ethnicity and patron-client relationship. Rai visited the 144 MW Kali Gandaki project a decade after construction started. Even then, she manages to provide a short sketch of what transpired during the planning and construction phase. The Kali Gandaki had serious livelihood impacts on 263 households, and additional impacts on 1205 households. It became the first project

in Nepal where affected families were given compensation for land acquisition. Besides, the implementing agency, the Nepal Electricity Authority, took up rural electrification, and other 'soft Development' activities such training programmes on micro-enterprise generation, literacy classes 'aimed to improve the livelihood of the local people, particularly the affected families' as well as plantations and restoration of schools and temples (Rai, 2005, pp. 82–85). This led to an interesting pattern of behaviour traversing support, negotiations, protests and disappointment. The entry of the project in the local arena was boosted by high investments in Development projects by the hydropower proponent and promises of jobs. During the construction phase of the project, community members took to negotiating with the developers individually or as interest groups to acquire resources for themselves, and to agitations and protests to leverage their position. The protestors would ask for more benefits such as employment, rural electrification, or drinking water. On gaining these concessions, the protests would be called off (Rai, 2000, pp. 99–102). At the end of the boom cycle, when employment contracts were ended, and the local economy cooled down as the project employees were withdrawn, disappointment and shock followed, until fatalistic resignation took over.

The above-mentioned studies by McDuie-Ra, Rest, Butler and Rai problematise the singular narrative of resistance that dominates the study of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities and large dams. They demonstrate that not only can affected populations perceive the impacts of large dams to be positive, but may also actively negotiate to mitigate the negative impacts, without resorting to demands for outright cancellation of projects. Also, there may be a diversity of perceptions within the communities, and actors with differing positions must then contend among themselves to constitute a collective agency when facing other stakeholders.

1.3. The Study area: Arunachal, India - Dams, Development and Indigenous peoples redux

The Indian federal state of Arunachal Pradesh presents a valuable site for exploring the knowledge gaps outlined in the previous section and for examining questions regarding the agency of indigenous peoples in relation to large dam development.

A mountainous tract, Arunachal is a small frontier state situated at India's north-eastern edge bordering Bhutan, Tibet, China, and Myanmar. It is one of the poorest states in India as per standard indicators. The case of Arunachal is interesting for a host of reasons – it is one of the most significant enclaves of indigenous peoples in India, in terms of diversity and political and economic marginality; its governance can be said to be almost entirely indigenous; it is the epicentre of the post-World Commission of Dams era of dam building in India; and the private sector is an

important actor in its hydropower development plans. Finally, the responses of affected local communities have been extremely heterogeneous both within the communities as well as between communities, with a majority of host communities tending initially to support the proposed hydropower projects in their areas. This is an under-reported phenomenon in the large dams literature. I elaborate these points one by one below.

Firstly, the indigenous population represents two-thirds of the state's peoples: of 1,384,000 residents, 951,000 are tribal[10] (as per Census 2011). Officially, there are 26 major tribes (the use of the term 'tribe' in India and its relationship to the internationally recognised term 'indigenous peoples' will be discussed in Chapter 2), the largest group with about 300,000 people and many smaller ones with less than 10,000. The state's population is a mix of many ethnic groups distinguished by languages, food and religious practices. Five main cultural groups can be discerned, starting from the west – A couple of western districts populated by Buddhist tribes, then a wide swath of land occupied by tribes belonging to the Tani group[11], then the Dibang and Lohit valleys inhabited by the Mishmi tribes, followed by another strip in the east occupied by Buddhist tribes, and then at the end where the state southwards into the Patkai hill ranges, a couple of districts inhabited by other Naga tribes. In addition, there are small groups such as Milangs, Puroiks, Lisus and so on, embedded among larger cultural groups but with their distinct identities. The various tribes have clearly defined territories, and apart from the urbanised administrative settlements where individuals of various tribes may live together, the rural areas tend to be inhabited by a single tribe. Many groups claim to have migrated to Arunachal from somewhere in southern Tibet in the distant past. Other groups such as the Singphos (Jingphaw) and the Khamptis (Tai-Khampti) migrated from erstwhile Burma. As late as 1940s, the Lisus or Yobins migrated from China to the border areas of the eastern district of Changlang. Due to intersecting geographical and historical reasons, different tribes of the state have had differing encounters with Development and the State.

Related to this is the second characteristic that makes it an interesting case study – not only is the state inhabited predominantly by tribal communities, but the governance of the state can also be said to be entirely in the hands of the indigenous population. Arunachal came into existence on the

[10]It is important to note that the population of the state comprises so-called 'APSTs', i.e. Arunachal Pradesh Scheduled Tribes who are indigenous to the state, and non-APSTs, people from other parts of India who have migrated to Arunachal for economic opportunities. The proportion of the non-APSTs in the population has risen steadily, by almost 10% every census decade since the 1960s. Currently, the non-tribal population is at about 40% of the state's population. However, they are concentrated mainly in the urban settlements, far away from where hydropower development is staged. Secondly, non-APSTs cannot purchase or own land in Arunachal. Thirdly, due to the reservation of the legislative assemblies for APSTs, non-APSTs participate in state politics only as voters. Because of these reasons, the non-APST residents are absent from my dissertation.

[11]The Tani group comprises many tribes who claim descent from Abo Tani, the mythical first man on earth for these groups.

ideal that the tribals should be allowed to 'develop according to their own genius' (Guha, 1999). At Independence, Arunachal, then the North-East Frontier Tracts, was constituted under part B of the Schedule as the tribal areas of Assam. When it attained statehood in 1987, Arunachal became one of the few states in India to have a legislative assembly composed entirely of representatives of these tribal communities. The Government of Arunachal Pradesh (GoAP) can be said to be as close as possible to tribal self-government within Indian federalism as possible. Thus, Arunachal provides a valuable case study to examine if and how participation of indigenous groups in decision-making affects the process and outcomes of large dam development.

Thirdly, an ambitious programme for developing about 50,000MW of hydropower potential is under way in Arunachal. The state houses about one-third of India's entire hydropower potential. Since 2006, the Government of Arunachal Pradesh (GoAP) has signed Memoranda of Agreement (MoA) with Independent Power Producers (IPPs) for more than 150 projects[12]. Not only is the scale of the programme massive, so are many of the individual projects – about 100 of these projects are large dams.[13] About 25 of them have an installed capacity of more than 350MW[14] each which earns them the designation of mega-project. At the time of my fieldwork in 2012-13, of these 100-plus projects, three large projects were in various stages of construction, environmental clearances have been granted to two more, and public hearings for at least ten projects have been successfully conducted so far (Arunachal Pradesh State Pollution Control Board website, now defunct).[15]

Fourthly, Arunachal's hydropower programme has created an influx of private players. Although privatisation of hydropower projects in India started in the 1990s with the Maheshwar dam in Madhya Pradesh (Palit, 2011), the scale of interest from private players in Arunachal is unprecedented. This gains significance against the fact that Arunachal is one of the poorest states of India, per conventional indices of Development such as Gross Domestic Product and per Capita Income. The proliferation of private actors in turn has made the resource a potential source of rent for the state of Arunachal, its politicians, as well as at the local level. The discourse on hydropower development by the State is constructed to echo the financial windfall of the oil states. For example,

[12]Figure valid till 2014.

[13] The list of projects for which MoAs were signed during 2006-10, classified according to size, is placed at Appendix I.

[14]There is no objective definition of a mega-hydropower project. As per the Mega Power Policy of Government of India, a project over 500MW is eligible for custom duties relaxation and income tax holiday. This benchmark has been trimmed to 350MW for the North-eastern States.

[15] Astoundingly, almost a decade later at the time of submission of this dissertation, these statistics have not changed significantly. Out of the three projects under construction, two projects – 110MW Pare and 600MW Kameng have been commissioned. Both projects were steered by NEEPCO. The 2000MW Subansiri project is expected to be fully commissioned in 2023. No other project went under construction during this period.

a Government of Arunachal Pradesh Cabinet note of April 2005 talks about how, if the hydropower potential of the state could be harnessed and the power sold to the rest of India, "the state would float in hydro dollars like the Arab countries are floating in petro dollars." (in Dharmadhikary, 2008). At the same time, unlike public sector companies, the private sector actors tend to pay greater attention to issues which impact the bottom-line, such as the costs of reputation risks, and the need to gain social license to operate.

Fifth, at the local level, there is diversity in how affected communities have responded to the proposed large hydropower projects. While the state-level political and bureaucratic elite have adopted a united pro-dam stance at least in public, the response from the affected communities ranges from outright rejection to qualified protest or qualified support. If the outcomes of public hearings are to be used as a measure of the acceptance of hydropower development so far, except for two proposed projects, all others that came up for public hearings, have been endorsed by the representatives of the local communities that will be affected by the projects (reports of public hearing from APSPCB website)[16]. This phenomenon of small indigenous peoples responding positively to hydropower projects in their midst veers away from the more well-known response of resistance (M. Ete, 2017). Not only is this poorly understood, but it is also rarely reported in the literature either.

This diversity of community responses can be understood in light of McDuie-Ra's proposition that to understand how ethnic minorities, or in our case the indigenous peoples, respond to contentious Development projects, it is important to understand their longer-term experience of Development and the State (this will be discussed at some length in Chapters 5 and 6). Compared to several other indigenous peoples in other parts of India as well as globally, most tribal communities of Arunachal have had a much shorter span of experiencing Development. Furthermore, they have largely escaped encountering the destruction and disruption of Development. Though some scholars have questioned whether the Developmental path chosen for northeastern India in general and Arunachal in particular is an expression of the will of the people or the manifestation of the nationalisation project of Delhi (Baruah, 2003; McDuie-Ra, 2008), it seems to have been widely accepted on the ground (Chapter 6 on Development in Arunachal). Arunachal's previous significant experience of extraction was through the logging boom of the 1980s and 1990s, which

[16]One acknowledges that a measure of caution must be used in doing so, as anti-hydropower advocates have alleged that the public hearings are just a formality. "In India Public Hearings are stage managed by the Corporates. In a simple example, out of 100 persons, if 90 people oppose the Project and 10 peoples only accept the project, still the report to the MoEF goes the vice-versa like 90 percent were in favour while 10 percent had opposed it. It's a hard fact in India." (Comment on an anti-dam page on Facebook, accessed 2014).

mainly impacted the foothill communities. It came to a sudden halt through a Supreme Court moratorium due to extreme deforestation.

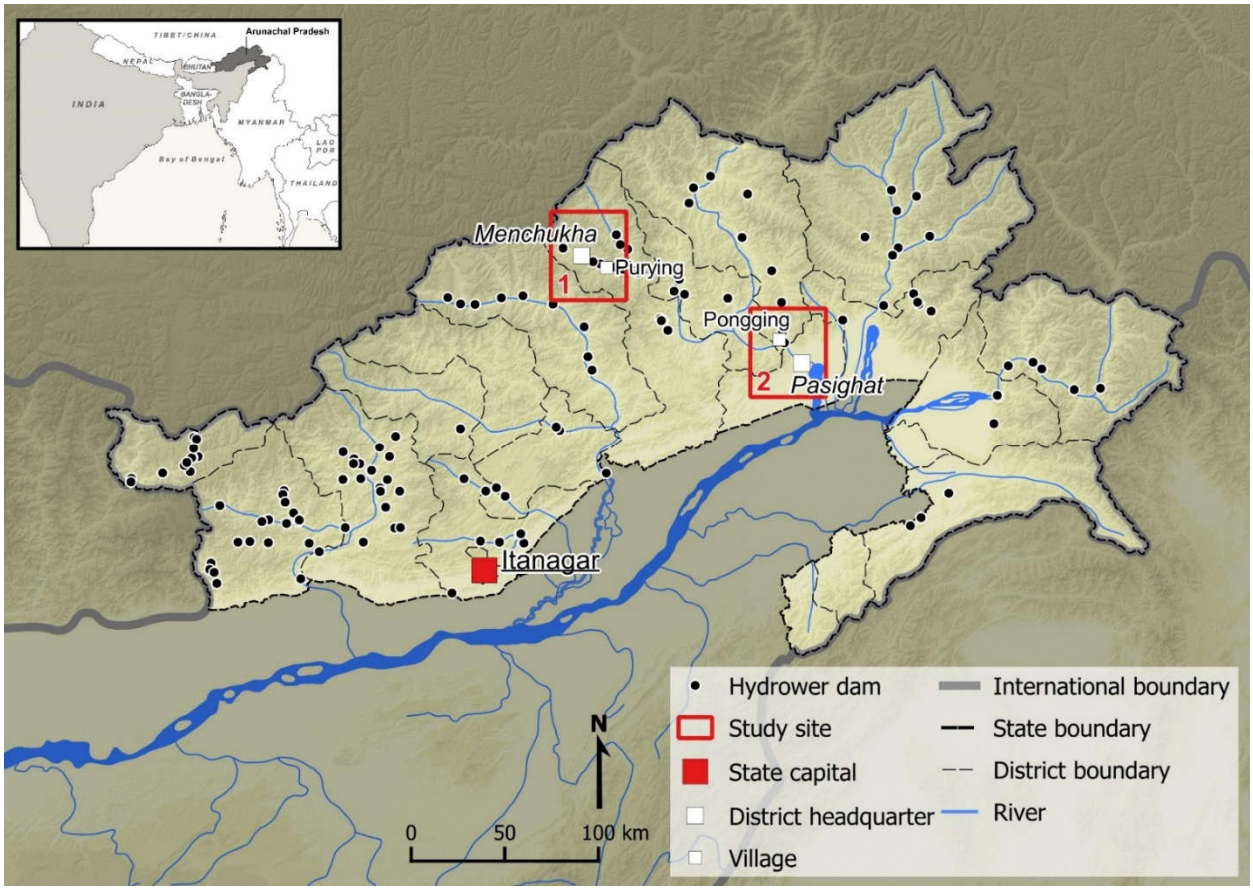

Figure 1.1. Map of Arunachal showing proposed large dams, and the two study sites (Map by Adris Akhtar)

1.4. The research objective and questions

The overarching goal of this study is to understand the apparent diversity of local responses to large dams in Arunachal Pradesh. Further, it seeks to explore the emergent dynamics of local politics in a new socio-economic climate and under a neoliberal environmental governance regime. It does so by asking the following questions:

- What are the ways in which indigenous peoples, and groups and actors within, respond to and interact with proposed hydropower projects in their areas? And why?
- How are the divergent interests within these indigenous peoples negotiated, and how is collective agency shaped?

Whether dams should be built or not is a question far beyond the scope of this thesis[17]. This thesis also does not intend to offer a detailed objective appraisal of the costs and benefits of large dams. Instead, it seeks to understand the perspectives, aspirations, and interests of the different stakeholders that motivate their respective mode of action.

1.5. Structure of thesis

The rest of the dissertation is organised as follows. In Chapter 2, I review the literature on the local politics in extractive industries, particularly in mining. The mining industry shares many parallels to large dams regarding the specific impacts on indigenous peoples, as well as its relationship to Development. The evolution of mining industry norms towards the environmental and social impacts and mitigation has preceded those of large dams industry. A careful sifting of the Andean and Melanesian literature in particular yields a 'socio-environmental justice' framework that is gaining currency in investigations into communities and natural resources. From this discussion, I distil the conceptual framework which undergirds the empirical chapters.

In Chapter 3, I lay out the research design and explain my choices of methods. I further consider the specific issues I faced during fieldwork in light of my own particular characteristics as a 'native', female, educated person from a privileged background. I take up these issues of positionality to further reflect on the concerns of validity and replicability in qualitative research.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 grapple with the lay out the factors that help us understand the different responses of communities to hydropower development. Chapter 4 looks at the evolution of important policies grounding hydropower development in India which altered incentive structures for the federal and state-level governments as well as for the affected local communities. The next two chapters 5 and 6 deal with the Arunachali encounter with Development, and the current socio-political situation of the indigenous peoples in the region. Drawn significantly from secondary literature and informed by my own primary data collection through fieldwork, these chapters set the backdrop against which one can make sense of the local politics of hydropower in Arunachal. This context-setting helps make sense of the broadly ambivalent responses of the local communities to hydropower development in the state.

[17] Can there ever be a good large dam? On the one hand, the answer is contingent on the baseline of harm, which in turn depends on one's position on the spectrum of defining environmental sustainability. The ecological modernisation position would argue that it is simply a matter of designing the most optimal mitigation solutions. On the other hand, the Deep Ecology position would view the environmental impacts of large dams, such as the fragmentation of the river ecosystem and change of flow regime, as simply too high a cost to pay. Even from a simplistic cost and benefit perspective, it is a vexing question as many impacts, such as those on downstream communities (Richter et al., 2010), impact of river fragmentation and impacts on climate change, and cumulative basin wide impacts (Winemiller et al., 2016) – continue to be poorly understood and hence treated as externalities. However, an examination of this is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

In Chapter 7 and 8, I present the data on local politics at my two case study sites. Chapter 7 discusses the case of Pongging village, situated in the influence zone of the Lower Siang HEP, a 2700MW dam-toe powerhouse project at the foothills of the Siang catchment. As one of the few instances of local resistance against hydropower, this case offers a deviant example. By the time I arrived at the site, the community mobilisation around hydropower was already long past. Therefore, I piece together the events that marked the local politics in one village in the Siang valley, through a reconstruction based on documentary texts as well as interviews. In Chapter 8, I provide thick ethnographic description of my fieldwork in the Shi Valley from the site of three medium-sized cascade projects. This case is a typical representative of community responses to hydropower projects in Arunachal, characterised by acceptance of the proposed project.

In conclusion, Chapter 9 offers a synthesis of the empirical findings, and contextualises this study in the wider theoretical field with respect to indigenous peoples and Development. Further, I consider the policy significance of my findings, the limitations of my work, and suggest further research avenues.

2. Indigenous Encounters with Large Dams and Extractives

In this chapter, I review the literatures on large dams and on extractives[18], with the objective of distilling an analytical map for the investigation of the local politics of large dams in Arunachal. In the 20th century, the role of extractives in Development and their impacts on local communities, have echoed stark similarities to that of large dams. However, at the turn of the 21st century, the extractives industry undertook significant innovations in its community-facing policies[19], which the large dam industry is still catching up with. Therefore, in my opinion looking over to the recent research on local politics in extractives can be valuable for gaining analytical insights.

In section 2.1, the central terms of this dissertation are clarified. I locate indigeneity in the extractives-and-Development debate by tracing how the debate itself has created politics of indigeneity. However, here I focus on the rise and evolution of the discourse of indigeneity. Through this discussion, I conclude that indigeneity is best tethered to territoriality above all other markers, when discussing it in context of extractives-and-Development. Section 2.2 is a brief history of large dams and Development.

I then go on, in section 2.3, to review the recent literature on local politics in extractives, particularly from the Andes and Melanesia. Environmental justice emerges as a central theme in community-extractive encounters in the Andean literature. The Melanesian literature offers a rich empirical portrait of communities ambivalent towards extractives, although the underlying conceptual themes are not explicitly stated. In section 2.4 I stitch the emergent themes from the literature review into a more general social and environmental justice framework that is useful for structuring my own fieldwork findings on the local politics of large hydropower dams. The last section 2.5 is a reflection on the problem of collective agency among indigenous peoples.

2.1. Indigeneity and Development

The rise of indigenous political identity, it is fair to say, was in part an outcome of the Development project of the 20th century. The Development debate in turn was influenced by the critique offered by advocates of indigeneity.

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[18] Extractives refer to any activity that involves removal of natural resources for consumption. In practice though, it generally refers to the hydrocarbons and mining industry. Extraction has been used in the context of forest reserves (Peluso, 1992). Resource extraction has been used to by some authors to cover removal of forest produce too, but due to different implications of technology, scale of ecological impacts, I will not include it in this discussion. Of these, mining is an extractive activity that exploits a wide range of mineral resources, from widely available ones such as sand and boulders which can be extracted with relatively simple tools and technology, to gold and bauxite, which require relatively sophisticated technology for removal and processing. In this section, I will use the three terms, 'extractives', 'resource extraction' and 'mining' interchangeably, to refer mainly to extraction of minerals requiring fairly complex operations.

[19] Whether and how these policies are implemented are dependent on the national legal contexts, as we shall see in a latter section.

The earliest international advocacy efforts for the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples were concerned with the welfare of marginalised native groups in European colonist countries such as the US and New Zealand. These early unsuccessful attempts eventually led to the adoption of the ILO convention (C.107) Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention in 1957. The Convention, and its successor C.169 introduced in 1989, referred to these groups as indigenous 'on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonisation and which, irrespective of their legal status, live more in conformity with the social, economic and cultural institutions of that time than with the institutions of the nation to which they belong.'

Besides this first set of communities in colonist countries, the ILO Convention (C.107) identified a second set of communities for special protection. This set, identified simply as tribal populations, is characterised by the ILO instrument as populations in post-colonial independent countries

> whose social and economic conditions are at a less advanced stage than the stage reached by the other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations.

These tribal populations posed contradictory challenges to the newly independent post-colonial States. On the one hand, these were seen as the opposite of 'modern' - 'pre-industrial', living in poverty and deprivation. Thus the modernising State had to ensure their social welfare and integrate them into the national mainstream (Xaxa, 1999). To address tribal underdevelopment, soft Development measures were designed to provide education, healthcare etc. Such programmes were undertaken for other 'primitive groups' such as the San in Botswana, hunter-gatherers who were made to take up settled agriculture under modernisation programmes. This often led to the 'post-colonial condition' of self-perception of underdevelopment, or of desiring Development. They often suffered from direct negative impacts such as poorer health outcomes as a group (Willis et al., 2006).

On the other hand, the tribes lived on territories teeming with natural resources – forests, water and minerals - which the State desired to fuel its economic growth agenda. The State invoked eminent domain and enclosed the tribal territories for 'hard Development' projects, most notable of which have been dams and mines. This State-enacted dispossession and displacement of tribal populations has been a common experience globally. The displaced communities were most often uncompensated and unassisted in reconstructing their lives and livelihoods. Thus, under the post-colonial modernising paradigm, any good done by paternalistic welfare-oriented programmes targeted at tribal communities, was undone by the violence of Development.

The movement for recognition of indigenous peoples and their rights emerged in direct response to the destruction of their communities in the name of Development. The first instances of the use of the discourse of indigeneity outside of settler nations arose in the late 60-early 70s in Latin America, where the discovery of oil pushed the extractive frontier into tribal territories in the Amazon[20]. The discourse was steadily picked up by other marginalised tribal communities and their advocates in other parts of the world. A claim to indigeneity was thus primarily a claim to post-colonial justice (Canessa, 2007). The impact of the mining industry on indigenous peoples was documented in the landmark 1992 report The Gulliver File (Moody, 1992).

When the indigenous movement demanded that "all policies towards the forests must be based on a respect for cultural diversity, for a promotion of indigenous models of living, and an understanding that our peoples have developed ways of life closely attuned to our environment" (IAIP, 1992), it was essentially a significant rebuttal to the claims of Modernisation theory that all societies must eventually develop towards a singular state of being.

In parallel to the indigenous movements, the 1970s and 80s were a period of growing environmental activism. Extractive projects created an opportunity to marry social justice concerns with ecological sustainability giving rise to the trope of the 'ecologically noble savage" (Conklin & Graham, 1995). This moment was followed by a more radical rejection of the Modernising Development project by Post-Developmentalists (Sachs, 1992). In their search for alternatives to Development's violence and homogenising tendencies, both scholars and activists (Baviskar, 1997, p. 207) identified the indigenous peoples' way of being in the world as an alternative.

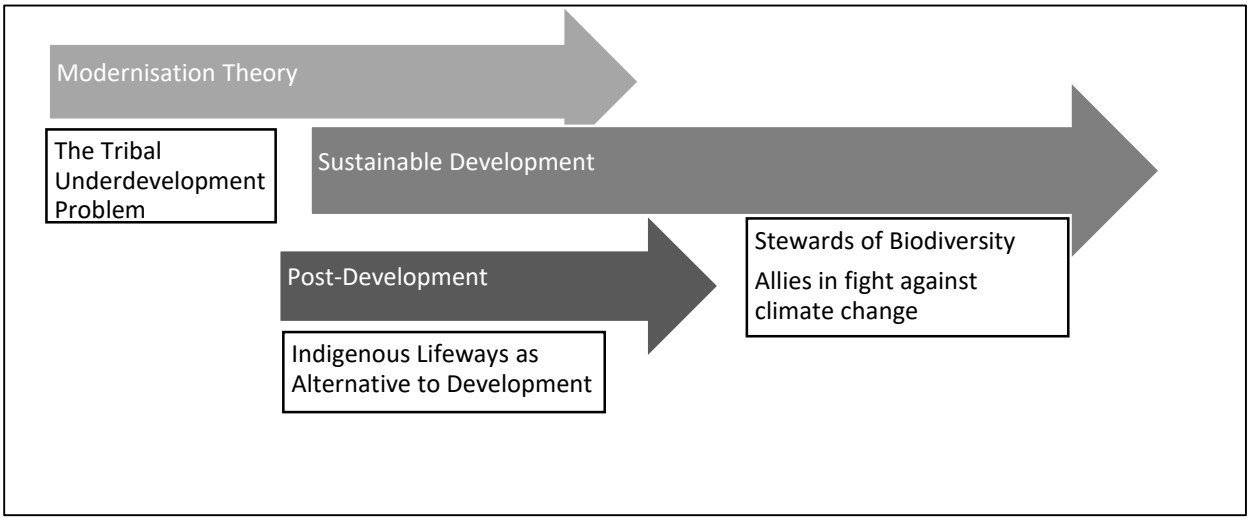

Figure 2.1 The shifting perspectives on Indigenous people through different phases of Development

[20] The two NGOs, Cultural Survival in the US, and Survival International in the UK, were founded as a direct response to the plight of the Amazonian tribes.

Sustainable Development, the newest iteration of Development, has tried to transcend the shortcomings of the Modernisation Theory and address the Post-Development critiques, and in doing so, has magnified the 'ecological native' trope. This has led to the privileging of the relationship between indigenous peoples and the environment (see for example Loomis, 2000) and the reification of indigenous knowledge (Karlsson, 2006). Be it natural resource conservation, or fighting climate change, indigenous peoples are identified as allies and collaborators (Dove, 2006).

This idea of indigenous environmental virtuousness has been challenged since the 1980s (Ellen, 1986). Studies have shown that place attachment and assigning spiritual value to nature do not always translate to environmental prudence and conservation (Baviskar, 1995; Shah, 2010). Even then, it persists both in practice discourse as well as some strands of scholarship. The framing of indigenous peoples as guardians of the environment draws upon the normative hopes of the proponents of this image. It underestimates the impact of acculturative processes, as well as the profound impact of the State-led Development project (this will be explored in the context of the tribes of Arunachal in chapters 5 and 6). Besides, the popularity of the 'ecosystem people' narrative has created a 'double bind' of performativity-versus-inauthenticity (Chandler & Reid, 2018) and a narrowing the possibilities of authenticity (Shah, 2007).

There have been other critiques of indigeneity. Shah cautions us to the 'dark side of indigeneity' and posits that it can be manipulated for the ends of the group elite, leaving the poorest members worse off. Further, the existence of the 'indigenous or tribal slot' also perversely impacts and excludes non-indigenous peoples sharing the same territory (Li, 2000). There have been more fundamental arguments against the value was especially trenchant in post-colonial countries where, it was argued, here are no clean-cut distinctions between 'indigenous communities' and 'settler communities' in the way it exists in new world settler States like the USA or Australia or New Zealand (For the debate on indigeneity in India, see Beteille, 1992, 1998; Karlsson, 2003; Xaxa, 1999). Following this line of reasoning, nation-States like India and Indonesia have argued that the category does not hold up in their contexts as all population groups are indigenous within these territories. However, India does afford constitutional recognition to certain groups as tribal communities, commonly called STs or Scheduled Tribes. Countering this, scholars have argued that being indigenous to a place is not the same as being 'indigenous people' of a place (Barnard, 2006), and that self-identification as IPs is based on a historical experience of domination and marginalisation (Xaxa, 1999, p. 3590).

Be that as it may, the concept of indigenous peoples is already out in the world, and has been adopted by various groups, thus the question of its utility is moot (Karlsson, 2003). Moreover, the concept of indigenous peoples is well-embedded in the global Development discourse and practice

community today. 'Indigenous peoples' and indigeneity are a fundamental part of discussions on Development, be it in World Bank documents, IFC guidelines, Equator principles, Sustainable Development Goals, or Climate Change targets. Various safeguards and rights have been put in place for communities with indigenous status (Karlsson, 2003, p. 413), and mechanisms of undertaking international Development projects have improved. For instance, Free Prior and Informed Consent is now a central tenet and an operational tool for indigenous self-determination in Development projects.

The fact is that the indigenous experience today is extremely diverse and the 'indigenous model of living' cannot be defined purely in terms of dependence on natural resources. The category of indigenous peoples is a wide expanse ranging from very few uncontacted groups in the Amazon, Papua and India, who could still be classified as eco-systems people, to groups in the global North who have harnessed modern technologies into their lifeways. In general, indigenous livelihoods are deeply enmeshed in the market, and people's aspirations are shaped by notions of modernity (van Beek, 1999). When it comes to the extractive industries, some indigenous peoples have made pragmatic choices to participate in the exploitation of natural resources (Valdivia, 2005).

If ecosystem dependence is not a reliable foundation of indigeneity in the 21st century, is there another way we could think of indigeneity? I posit that territoriality offers a firmer tether to indigeneity, particularly in the context of resource politics. Territoriality is a central tenet of indigeneity, particularly with reference to extractives and Development. Claims to indigeneity are often made by communities when facing expropriation of their natural resource base, their 'ancestral lands'. These claims have been made after the experience of expropriation of their 'ancestral lands', or under the threat of such expropriation. Thus, indigeneity is underpinned by land and territoriality. In one of the earliest documents produced by the international network of IPs, the Charter of the International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of Tropical Forests, it is stated:

> Article 3.
>
> Our territories and forests are to us more than an economic resource. For us, they are life itself and have an integral and spiritual value for our communities. They are fundamental to our social, cultural, spiritual, economic and political survival as distinct peoples.
>
> Article 4.
>
> The unity of people and territory is vital and must be recognised.

In this sense, both indigenous peoples and the State are in a contest with one another over natural resource sovereignty. Indigenous territoriality is thus a challenge to the concept of Eminent Domain of a State. The ILO Convention 169 1989, recognised this conflict and made concessions to eminent domain of nation States by stating that "The populations concerned shall not be removed without their free consent from their habitual territories **except in accordance with national laws and regulations for reasons relating to national security, or in the interest of national economic development** or of the health of the said populations (emphasis mine)." The recognition of and respect for indigenous rights and territorial sovereignty are not uniform across the world. Instances of indigenous struggles against the state appear to be almost always a consequence of assertion of eminent domain by the state without the consent of the communities.

Here a reminder is needed that not all tribal groups are able to or need to claim the 'indigenous slot', even though they may fit the category. For instance, for the communities in Arunachal Pradesh (see Chapter 5), 'tribe' or 'tribal' are the chosen emic terms for self-reference. Representatives of the communities have only recently begun to use the language of indigeneity. This is partly because the discourse of indigeneity[21] has percolated to Arunachal very slowly, and partly because the legal category of Scheduled Tribes used by the Indian State has sufficed so far. Even then, I would argue that it is valuable to view them as 'indigenous people', as it brings the experience of the tribal communities of Arunachal into the collective experiences of indigenous peoples.

2.2. Development and Large Dams

The relationship between large dams and Development has been elucidated both by their proponents and opponents time and again. In the last half-century, large dams have traversed an interesting trajectory in Development planning. It was first prescribed as the silver bullet to the Third World's Development challenges in the early days of post-colonisation, then became a symbol of the hubris and violence of Development. Since early 2000s, dams have been prescribed as the silver bullet for achieving sustainable Development goals and warding off climate change. In fact, the rise, fall and rise of large dams cleaves closely to that of the Development project in the 20th century (Nüsser, 2014), with three discernible phases corresponding to the dominant Development discourses: the Rise of large dams in parallel with the Modernisation theory, the fall of Large dams and the Post-Development critique, and the re-ascendance of Large dams alongside

[21] In Arunachal, the discourse of indigeneity has been employed in fits and starts. In general, it has come up in context of the religious conversion and the contest between 'indigenous' faith and spread of Christianity.

the rise of Sustainable Development. Of these, the literature associated with the post-Development critique continues a vast shadow on the subsequent Large Dams-and-Development scholarship.

2.2.1. Rise and fall of large dams and Development in the 20th century

In the years following World War II, especially between 1955 and 1985, the number of planned, constructed and commissioned large dams surged (Oud, 2002). Most were conceptualised and constructed in the newly independent Third World nations searching for economic growth (see for instance the Kariba in former Rhodesia, Aswan in Egypt, Sardar Sarovar in India, Itaipu in Brazil, Bakun in Malaysia). The impetus for this was provided by international Development finance institutions, particularly the World Bank. The consensus on large dams among the planners and financiers of Development was that they were key to unlocking Development. Agriculture and energy production were the two important sectors of focus in the Development of the Third World, and for both, large dams were the alluring silver bullet (Goldsmith & Hildyard, 1984). They were the solution for generating electricity to fuel industries and promote economic growth, and for providing water for irrigation to jumpstart increased food production. Additional benefits were to be urban water supply, leisure, navigation and so on. Furthermore, for the post-colonial nation-states, dams as symbols of monumental modernity, provided rallying points for national pride (Miescher & Tsikata, 2010; Mohamud & Verhoeven, 2016). In this, the concept of Development articulated by the proponents of large dams was very much a modernist vision, congruent with the dominant Development ideology of the period, Modernisation theory. Essentially, large dams were the modernist answer to the problem of economic growth (Nüsser, 2014). Even as Modernisation theory waned, and dependency theory gained ascendance, the leaders of the global 'periphery' continued to fervently believe in the potential of large dams to push their countries out of poverty.

These early large dams had three important characteristics: they were state-led; often they were proposed to be sited in regions inhabited by politically and socially marginal minorities; and the projects were multipurpose and monumental. In the years of planned economic growth following decolonisation, the large dams were promoted by states. They were often financed with expensive loans from multilateral banks as part of Development assistance. The central characteristic of large dams was their monumental reservoirs. As the dams were engineered primarily for irrigation and/or for flood control, besides generating electricity, the reservoirs had to be designed to hold at least a season's worth of flow. The size of the necessary reservoir led to submergence of vast tracts of lands upstream of the dam, which in turn, displaced the populations residing there, and extinguished their access to productive lands. Be it in the global North in Canada or Finland, or the global South in Africa, South America, or South-East Asia, these populations tended to belong to small ethnic minorities which were marginal to the nation-state and its economy to begin with.

That the construction of a dam displaced people living in its catchment was known to the planners of dams. However the technocrats believed that good planning could achieve satisfactory resettlement. Besides, the human costs were seen as a necessary sacrifice by a few for the greater common good of the many, as crystallised in the oft-quoted line from India's first Prime Minister exhortation to the dam affected, "If you are to suffer, you should suffer in the interest of the country." (quoted in Roy, 1999).

By the 1970s, it became clear that the costs associated with large dams were many, and the benefits had been exaggerated. First, it was realised that the cost of achieving satisfactory relocation and resettlement of displaced communities had exceeded optimistic estimates of planners, and it was near impossible to resettle and rehabilitate all those displaced by the dams to any satisfactory degree (Ackermann 1971 quoted in Goldsmith & Hildyard, 1984, p. 42) Besides, the sheer number of affected people was simply too large. The displacement, dispossession and impoverishment caused by large dams, among other development projects, is mind-boggling; by some accounts, the number of affected runs into millions (Gutman, 1994; Kothari, 1996; Scudder, n.d.-a) . In India alone, by the 1980s, the number of persons displaced by various Development interventions, chief among them large dams, was estimated to be close to 50 million. Communities likely to be displaced by new dams began to question why they must be displaced. Secondly, other economic and environmental problems associated with large dams were being discovered, such as introduction of diseases in the catchment areas, fall of agricultural productivity due to loss of silt due to impoundment, and soil salinisation, and reservoir-induced seismicity. Besides, as the environmentalist movement deepened in the 1970s, the negative impacts of large dams on flora and fauna also became an issue. Thirdly, evidence was mounting that not only did the dams fail to deliver on their promises of irrigation and flood control, but their benefits also accrued primarily to the better off urban middle classes in form of electricity and water. The watershed in this critical scholarship was the two-volume compendium by Goldsmith and Hildyard, *The Social and Environmental Effects of Large Dams* (1984), which was part an exhaustive literature review of the large dams scholarship of the previous decades, and part a documentation of case-studies from all over the world.

Although the critique of large dams had three axes – against the social costs, the environmental costs which also had proximate adverse impacts on people, and the shortfall in the promises of delivering Development – the adverse impacts on local communities became most emblematic of the dysfunction of the 'large dams as Development model', reframing it as "a development strategy predicated on the sacrifice of subaltern groups" (Baviskar, 1995, p. 266). In general, the people

affected by the adverse socio-economic impacts of dam-building tended to be overwhelmingly indigenous and tribal groups and ethnic minorities.

This was due to a host of reasons. For one, the siting of such projects were usually on the lands inhabited by indigenous people (Burman & Das, 1992). Secondly, the ameliorative measures proposed by the government almost always fell short, either because the governments were unwilling to take on the expenses, as it affected the economic viability of a project, or for other political reasons such as reluctance to set a precedent for future projects. For instance, in the case of the displaced of the Sardar Sarovar project, the state Government of Madhya Pradesh refused to resettle tribal displaced communities in its forests. Three, due to their lack of political voice, the affected communities could not advocate for themselves (Mahapatra, 1992). Fourthly, as indigenous peoples had a unique place attachment, dependence on natural resources and on their social organisation, they were much more vulnerable to the negative impacts of physical displacement and resettlement in unfamiliar environments. Goldsmith and Hildyard, in noting the resistance of communities to resettlement, observed:

> "Where it is a tribal society which must be resettled, that "love of land" takes on a significance which does not generally apply in societies where land is viewed as just another commodity to be bought and sold. Land is the very charter on which tribal culture is based, the resting place of ancestors and the source of spiritual power; it is thus frequently regarded with a reverence that is difficult to understand in the West." (Goldsmith & Hildyard, 1984, p. 27)

The scholarship in social sciences largely allied itself with the affected communities, and created a body of literature that can be called Development Induced Displacement and Resettlement (DIDR) studies (Oliver-Smith, 2006). The adverse socio-economic impacts of displacement and poorly planned and executed resettlement has been highlighted from every dam-building region of the world. Even supporters of large dams agreed that the inadequate resettlement provisions for the displaced people was an unacceptable drawback of large dams (Biswas & Tortajada, 2001; Cernea, 1997; Scudder, n.d.-b). Related to this, the people's struggles and social movements were also examined as well as valourised. Going even further, the rejection of large dams, among other infrastructure projects, by people's social movements, served as a springboard to question the very rationale of the Development project of the 20th century[22]. Large dams, centrepieces of the modernisation theory, came to symbolise the destructive tendencies of large Development projects. Thus, the negative encounters of indigenous peoples with large dams were marshalled to undergird the post-Developmentalist project to dismantle Development. The affected communities themselves, spurred by the dispossession they encountered at the hands of national governments, struggled to have their rights over land recognised. In the 1980s, their struggles led to the rise of

[22] The contributions to the Goldsmith and Hildeyard report include case-studies titled 'Development for Whom?', and 'Development or Destruction'.

the discourse of 'indigenous peoples' in human rights and Development (Colchester, 2002). In India too, the notion of indigenous peoples started to gain currency (see Xaxa, 1999).

However, the position of indigenous peoples themselves was far from homogenous. For instance, in the case of the celebrated and well-examined Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP), different scholars have acknowledged the ambivalence within the affected indigenous peoples towards the impacts of large dams. Baviskar, in the epilogue to the 2004 edition of her influential book *In the Belly of the River*, looks back with the benefit of hindsight and notes that the resistance had never been a single front to begin with (1995, p. 277). Ranjit Dwivedi, who has written extensively about the SSP, observed similarly that

> The NBA (Narmada Bachao Movement) leadership has in the past expressed worry over the fact that in pre-elections meetings to which contesting candidates of various political parties have been called to express their opinion on the SSP in Nimad, a project-affected region in Madhya Pradesh, discussion revolves around compensation package and rehabilitation demands. To expect the Nimadi farmers to think beyond issues of fair compensation is to place the burden of fighting the 'development dystopia' on a people whose interests appear more immediate and who actually are beneficiaries of this development. (Dwivedi, 1997, p. 14).

However, these observations tend to be asides, rather than the focus of the research, which usually privileged the voices of resistance.

Even so, the twentieth century closed with a strong transnational alliance of environmentalists and human rights and indigenous rights advocates, successfully problematising the Large Dams-and-Development narrative of the preceding decades. They rendered legible the externalities of large dams, which heretofore were left out of the cost-benefit analyses put forth by proponents of large dams. The World Bank, chief proponent of large dams, became the lightning rod for the discontents (Goodland, 2010). It was forced to acknowledge the involuntary risks of its bankrolled projects (Cernea, 1986). In a few instances, it was forced to withdraw funding from projects. In June 1994[23], 326 social movements and NGOs from 44 countries endorsed the Manibeli Declaration, that called upon the World Bank to put a moratorium on the financing of large dams (Dubash et al., 2001).

One of the conditions for lifting the proposed moratorium was that the World Bank would set up

> "an independent comprehensive review of all Bank–funded large dam projects to establish the actual costs, including direct and indirect economic, environmental and social costs, and the actually realized benefits of each project. The review should evaluate the degree to which project appraisals erred in estimating costs and benefits, identify specific violations of Bank policies and staff responsible, and address opportunity costs of not supporting project alternatives. The review must be conducted by individuals completely independent of the Bank without any stake in the outcome of the review" (Manibeli Declaration, 1994).

[23] The Declaration coincided with the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Bretton Woods institutions.

This was reiterated by a second, more strongly-voiced declaration given at the First International Meeting of the People Affected by Large Dams, held in Curitiba, Brazil in 1997. This declaration insisted on the moratorium on the building of large dams until the comprehensive review was undertaken and its policies implemented (*Curitiba Declaration*, 1997). Although the activists framed it as a moratorium, the unspoken hope and belief was that the review would lead to the end of the era of large dams (McCully, 2001).

2.2.2. WCD, Sustainable Development and the Re-ascendance of Large Dams

The demands articulated in the Manibeli and Curitiba declarations propelled the World Bank to collaborate with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), an important environmental advocacy organisation, in putting together the review process, drawing from members from among both the dam industry and its opponents. It resulted in an ambitious exercise of transnational and trans-sectoral governance that came to be known as the World Commission on Dams (WCD) (Khagram, 2004). After two years of intensive process involving the expertise of hundreds of individuals, and world-wide network of anti-dam activists and pro-dam technocrats, the WCD finalised its findings in its report 'Dams and Development: A new Framework for decision-making', wherein it also suggested guidelines to be adopted for better practice.

The outcomes of the WCD process pleased no one. Though the WCD report did take note of the scale of social and environmental destruction that the large dams of the past had wreaked, it remained optimistic that by raising the standards of doing business, negative impacts could be eliminated or mitigated (Goodland, 2010). Anti-dam environmentalists and activists were disappointed that the report did not call for an end to all large dam construction. Medha Patkar, one of the central figures in the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save Narmada campaign or NBA) and a Commissioner of the WCD, wrote in her note of dissent against the recommendations of the WCD, "The problems of dams are a symptom of the larger failure of the unjust and destructive dominant development model." Proponents of large dams were equally dismayed because the standards suggested by the report were so idealistic that dam construction would be next to impossible, as project time would lengthen and costs would go up (Gagnon et al., 2002).

Even so, the value of the Dams and Development report lay in its acknowledgement of the unconscionable human costs of large dams, and its push for the social and environmental externalities of dam building to be incorporated into the decision-making and planning process. The hydropower industry was spurred to initiate its own Hydropower Sustainability Assessment Forum to address such externalities (Locher et al., 2010), resulting in the development of its own Hydropower Sustainability Assessment Protocol based on the WCD's recommendations to a great extent (Skinner & Haas, 2014).

This phase of soul-searching in the large dam industry coincided with the reorientation in the larger Development discourse towards sustainability and climate change. The Millennium Development Goals prioritised the need for providing energy and water to all people (Alhassan, 2009). In the UN Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, hydropower, though not specifically large dams, was named as one of the energy technologies crucial for powering sustainable development (World Summit on Sustainable Development, 2002). In 2004, the UN hosted a Symposium on Hydropower and Sustainable Development in Beijing where "the strategic importance of hydropower for sustainable development" was reiterated for "providing access to energy, especially for the poor, and to mitigating greenhouse gas emissions" (UNDESA & United Nations, 2004, p. 1). Thus, belying the hopes of the activists and the predictions of scholars (Khagram, 2004), large dams found renewed relevance as a source of energy deemed renewable.

One of the central issues underlined in these documents is the need to protect indigenous peoples from the negative impacts of large dams. An entire thematic review in the WCD process was dedicated to the assessment of impacts of large dams on indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities (Colchester, 2000). The final report acknowledged the disproportionate negative impacts that large dams had on indigenous peoples across the globe. Similarly, in the industry-backed Hydropower Sustainability Assessment Protocol that assesses the sustainability of projects by assigning scores to various topics, Indigenous Peoples are treated as a whole topic, and not simply filed under the related topics of Project Affected Communities and Livelihoods, and Resettlement (IHA, 2010). This is indicative of the rising profile of Indigenous Peoples as a major concern as well as an important stakeholder group in Development projects.

2.3. Indigenous peoples, Development and the Extractives Sector

Indigenous peoples worldwide have suffered the negative consequences of extractive activities, and mining in particular, for decades, and centuries in some instances. In some parts of the world like Canada, Australia and New Zealand, indigenous peoples have lived alongside mining since at least the 19th century. In other parts such as Latin America, the experience of mining has been even longer, going back to the 16th century. But they did not emerge as an important actor in the scholarly discussion until the late 1980s. Till then, the study of 'local communities' in mining focused primarily on mining communities that coalesced around mines (Godoy, 1985). The interaction of local communities, often consisting of immigrant labour, with the other stakeholders, i.e., State and Capital, was also viewed primarily through the lens of industrial labour relations. In Godoy's influential 1985 review of the literature, the impacts of mining on indigenous populations were relegated to a short paragraph, even though in some parts of the world indigenous peoples suffered

negative consequences of extractives. This changed soon after, as several conflicts between indigenous peoples and extractive projects erupted in different parts of the world. These conflicts followed the unprecedented expansion of the industry into greenfield areas of the world.

In the 1970s, the extractives sector witnessed the expansion of mineral exploration and extraction into greenfield regions of the world[24]. In many regions of the world, this expansion increasingly brought international capital directly in conflict with small rural communities that are today commonly known as indigenous peoples[25]. Large-scale open-pit mining caused the displacement of communities through the enclosure of their lands. For indigenous peoples, displacement from their traditional lands meant not just physical dislocation, but also emotional, cultural and economic dislocation. Loss of land led to disruption of community, kinship networks, livelihoods and lifeways. Even when communities did not face displacement, the environmental impacts of mines were significant. The process of mine site development involves land and forest degradation through excavation and removal of topsoil. In addition, noise and particulate pollution from mine operation can directly affect the life quality as well as the health of the residents nearby (IIED, 2002, pp. 207–208). The extraction process and the post-processing of some minerals involve harmful chemicals in the processes, such as the use of mercury in gold leaching, which when not managed effectively, can cause serious pollution. Mine operations also overdraw on local water resources, thus directly competing with the ecosystem functions as well as agriculture (Bebbington & Williams, 2008). Such environmental impacts may disturb the natural resource-based livelihoods of local communities and degrade their ambient quality of life.

Affected communities and allied activists responded to the intrusions of the extractive industry with resistance. In some instances, the resistance escalated into well-known violent conflicts such as the Bougainville Civil War in Papua New Guinea. Since the debate on Development and extractives took an indigenous turn in the 1980s, environmentalism of the poor has been the dominant lens of viewing indigenous encounters with extractives.

In response to the resistance from indigenous peoples, the industry underwent significant changes in the 1990s and early 2000s. Impact Assessment of extractive projects were incorporated into the

[24] This was due to several factors. On the one hand, the global demand for minerals was growing. On the one hand, the economically viable reserves in the traditional mining area reserves in the industrialised regions were depleted, and tougher environmental legislations and higher labour costs have made mining less attractive. At the same time, the reduction in the costs of global transport allowed for raw ores to be shipped cheaply from the source of extraction to any other part of the world for processing and consumption, making extraction in remote regions viable (MMSD p.35). The steady increase in the volume of extraction is fuelled by increasing demand across the world, a process that Martinez-Alier et al. call global social metabolism, which poses a quandary on the 'ecological limits to growth' (Vira, 2015). However, this direction of enquiry is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

[25] This is not to discount that non-indigenous local communities, are also affected by natural resource extraction. However, as will be discussed in the following subsections, indigenous peoples tend to have a different degree of vulnerability to the impacts of extractives, and at the same time may lack political resources to deal with the industry.

process of environmental governance of mining (Ballard & Banks, 2003). Protections and participatory processes for affected local communities were put in place. In 1998, a section of the mining industry launched the Global Mining Initiative as a step towards internal reform[26] (https://www.iied.org/mining-minerals-sustainable-development-mmsd). In 1999, the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) was commissioned to undertake a scoping study to "to set out the global challenge of sustainable development facing the mining sector and to propose the scope of a two-year process of participatory analysis to explore the role of the sector in the transition to sustainable development". The subsequent study resulted in the Breaking Ground report, published in 2002. Free Prior and Informed Consent became prominent on regulatory mechanisms.

In the years since, significant changes have taken place in the international policy context governing extractives. Environmental governance and its instruments such as Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIA) and Impact Management Plans are now de rigueur. Indigenous rights are now firmly embedded in the international Development discourse and practice, and with it, Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) has become a mandatory mechanism of resource governance. Besides, there have been gradual changes in the business practice – both within mining industry as well as in the finance sector. These changes have percolated to national arenas to varying degrees and effectiveness. So, while in some countries, newer modes of community-extractive engagements have emerged, in others, communities continue to resist extractive projects in their localities.

The very same momentum that wrought these changes in the conduct of the extractives business was also responsible for pushing indigenous peoples on to the Development agenda. In fact, it is fruitful to read the emergence and ascendance of the discourse of indigeneity and indigenous peoples against the backdrop of Development, particularly its Modernisation phase. This is laid out in detail in the next section.

2.3.1. Indigenous peoples and other Actors in Extractives

Until the 1980s, before the rights of indigenous peoples had gained international recognition, the State and private capital were the two important stakeholders in the extractives arena. There continue to be a few instances of State-led extractives development wherein the State takes on the role of the resource developer, in most other cases, the State's role was that of a gatekeeper and rentier while private companies exploited the resources. The State-apportioned mining

[26] This was a significant difference from the review process of the large dams sector, which was initiated by the World Bank after a series of calls by a transnational network of activist and grassroots organisations. It is also worth noting that the World Bank's own Extractive Industries Review was initiated in 2001.

concessions, regulated agreements with private mining companies, and levied a royalty on the mine output. This was primarily due to the high entry costs as well as the risk of investment. The worldwide sweep of neoliberal policies has only strengthened the presence of private companies in resource extraction.

Even today, in parts of the world where the land ownership rights of the local communities are not recognised by the state, and where indigenous peoples continue to be marginal to the national political regime, the dyadic model of State-private capital continues to dominate. This is the status quo in many countries in parts of Africa and Latin America.

In other parts of the world though, the attitude of nation-states is not uniformly dismissive of indigenous rights. At the same time, in many post-colonial countries, indigenous peoples have developed an ambivalent relationship with the State. While resistance (Scott, 1985) has been the popular lens of choice to look at the relationship of indigenous peoples to the State, newer studies have challenged this characterisation. Instead, they point out that these communities may seek access to the State's resources, and buy into its Development projects that promise prosperity (High, 2008), even as they chafe at the State's eminent domain over the natural resources that they view as their own.

Here, the emergence of Free Prior and Informed Consent has created a middle ground for possible compromise between the conflicting demands of indigenous territoriality and national eminent domain. Besides, the international policy environment has changed to enable local communities to mobilise their indigeneity for better outcomes. The institutionalisation of social impact assessment protocols in mining (Ballard & Banks, 2003, pp. 288–289), and the need for companies to obtain 'Social Licence to Operate'(Prno & Slocombe, 2012, p. 347) have created formal participatory spaces for local indigenous peoples in the arena of resource development.

For many institutional actors in international Development, self-ascription is the foremost criterion for identification as indigenous people (IPs). in case of private sector projects, where companies must raise capital on the market and must depend on institutional funders, the international acceptance does create a comfortable space for negotiation for IPs. FPIC creates the potential for the IPs to be participants in Development and gives them discursive space to articulate their vision for Development and exercise agency.

All this has led to the emergence of local communities as important actors besides the State and private capital, in decision making and political processes in the mining sector. In terms of governance contexts, two main configurations can be discerned. The first is where the state retains the authority to assign mining concessions to private companies, as well as the rights over the

royalties and how to distribute it. The African and Latin American cases, which could be called 'traditional' mining regions, fall under this category. In these nation-states, the local communities may not have formal land rights, or their status as indigenous peoples may not even be recognised. The tribal groups in Central and Eastern regions of India have experienced something similar.

Under the second configuration, the State may continue to have the prerogative to get into agreements with private companies. However, the ownership of land by local communities is recognised. Indigenous land rights are enshrined and formally recognised by the government, and the indigenous concerns are central to the governance agenda. This grants the local communities a strong leverage position and they may directly enter into further agreements with the private companies. The capital-community interactions in the Pacific region in the recent decades reflect this configuration. These regions differ from the 'traditional' mining regions in that the local communities tend to maintain ownership over land, and this is recognised by the state. Thus, according to customary rights, local communities have the authority to lease the lands to developers, and not the government. North-eastern India including Arunachal have a much more established recognition of customary land rights.

The three[27] groups of stakeholders are not monolithic. The state and industry are constituted by a variety of actors with differentiated motivations and actions. For instance, within the national government can be the environmental protection agency, whose purpose can be at loggerheads with the ministry of industry. Similarly, within the industry, the Corporate Social Responsibility may act differently from an executive manager of the project. There may also be differences between local, national and expatriate staff of the company. Among the three major stakeholder groups, community is perhaps the most diverse, which we will come to shortly in a following sub-section. Similarly, 'junior companies' which may not enjoy the same visibility and attention of monitors as large mining companies, are likely to be less conscientious regarding following norms and guidelines.

Even so, the interactions in the politics of resource extraction then tends to be discussed along these three axes – state-capital, state-community, and capital-community (for an elaboration, see Bebbington et al). The state-capital and state-community relational dynamics are often described from a political economy perspective. However, as the state gets relegated to the background

[27] A fourth group of stakeholders are the environmental and human rights advocacy NGOs. As Le Meur et al note, "Increasingly, new players are entering the scene: international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), environmental grassroots groups, indigenous transnational networks, international aid and development agencies" (2013) . However, as they appear peripherally in the literature I review, I do not include them in the discussion.

particularly in the case of the Melanesian literature, capital and community interactions are examined at the local level through a rather *more* agency-oriented approach.

In fact, in many parts of the world, the emergence of local communities has coincided with the withdrawal and thinning out of the state on the ground on the one hand, and a simultaneous shift of sites of resource extraction to the resource frontiers. At the resource frontier, the state presence tends to be thin on the ground. Not only has this been the case historically, it has been compounded by the state roll-back due to the reforms of 1980s. In these zones, not only is the state presence low in terms of its representatives, but it also suffers from low legitimacy due to its dwindling capacity for delivering welfare services on the ground (Banks 2008 p.24). In the greenfield areas, this has created the conditions for private companies to fill the gaps left by the State. The prospect of an extractive project poses new opportunities as well as threats to the communities.

The degree of the presence of state influences the responses of frontier communities to its claims on the resources (Ballard & Banks, 2003, p. 296). At the resource frontiers, the state may hold the legal authority to issue leases for resource development, but the communities may hold tenure or ownership rights to the land. Thus, companies and state may be required to seek community consent to resource development. Moreover, the legitimacy of the state may be perceived to be low if it fails to deliver adequate services, law and order and Development. Ballard and Banks note that in this scenario, communities may decide to bypass the state and connect directly with private capital (2003, pp. 296–297). As the state is absent to mediate between companies and communities, mining companies too may choose voluntarily to enter into direct agreements with the local communities.

The most common configuration of direct community-capital is the grant of access to land in exchange of benefits such as "infrastructure, jobs, business contracts and compensation, equity in the development and a royalty shares" (Banks, 2008). Thus, the revenues are also directly accessed by the communities, instead of being filtered through layers of governments at different levels. In cases of weak and non-existent presence of the state, capital can take on a quasi-government role in matters of provision of welfare measures. Garvin et al (2009) and Negi (2011) provide instances from Africa that bolster this view that the communities increasingly expect mining companies to point to the case of gold mining in Ghana where the local government shifted all manners of service provision to the mining company, and abdicated responsibility for managing expectations. In Ghana, the retreat of the state from social spending has forced mining companies to increase their CSR commitments. Negi puts forth a similar argument in the context of mining in Zambia that Corporate Social Responsibility has become "an important site of politics of and about

development" as "it links mining capital and local communities" (2011, p. 28) through contribution towards provision of social services.

The benefits offered by extractive companies are often packaged as corporate social responsibility. While Corporate Social Responsibility is much more multifaceted than just community engagement (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001), in the literature on community-mining company interactions, it is now widely used as a short-hand for the projects catering to the basic needs of affected communities. Hence, I will continue to use it in the sense of a bundle of initiatives as the local level. Community relations, community development, and corporate social responsibility are adjacent terms frequently used in the business studies (for greater detail, see Kemp, 2009).

Underlying the increasing acceptance of corporate social responsibility among extractive companies is the concern with due process and reputation risks, with an eye on the bottom-line. The necessity of nurturing community relationship was founded on the realisation that the cost of not doing so affected profitability by enforcing disruptions and even closures. On the other hand, a thoughtful community policy on part of the company ensures a social license to operate, and declarations of adherence to certain values such as community, sustainability etc. and can give it competitive advantage in the market through garnering stakeholder and consumer goodwill (Humphreys, 2000; Murray & Vogel, 1997). Commonly, capital tends to be represented by trans-national mining companies, with their headquarters located in developed countries (Muradian). This makes them especially vulnerable to the amplification of bad publicity by transnational NGOs.

Even if companies were reluctant to step in with consideration towards their profit margins, knowledge about CSR is now so widespread that communities expect it. Ignoring these expectations can lead to a perception that community issues are neglected by the company and this generates conflicts. To avoid conflicts, companies may therefore participate in 'community development' programmes. CSR projects can be focused on education, healthcare, and community development (Kapelus, 2002, p. 289). Banks et al. suggest that in the three decades of mining in Papua New Guinea, the relationship between large-scale mines and their neighbouring communities in PNG may have undergone shift between cooperation, conflict and accommodation in no small reason due to community development projects, which include a number of health and livelihoods programmes (2013, p. 12).

Thus, there has been a tremendous expansion of the scope of CSR activities by mining companies in greenfield areas, a phenomenon that could be termed corporate development creep. While Horowitz (2014) posits that CSR is merely a tool for legitimising capitalist development, and calls it 'legitimacy capture' by companies, others have pointed out that he issues arising out of corporate

social responsibility fulfilling the Development desires of the communities is addressed by Negi (2011) who posits that CSR as an emerging site of mining capital's Developmental impacts.

However, as mentioned earlier, the capacity of indigenous peoples to negotiate with the developer company depends, to a large extent, on the existing legal framework that recognises their ownership claims (O'Faircheallaigh, 1996a). For instance, the customary land ownership of indigenous groups is enshrined in the constitution of Papua New Guinea, which has given the indigenous peoples a huge bargaining power. This contrasts with instances of other communities, say in South Asia, or Australia, where the national or regional governments may claim absolute sovereignty. Thus, the agency of the local communities is circumscribed by the larger institutional structures.

However, even among communities with no formal recognition of their land titles, or where the nation state do not recognise the sovereignty or land ownership of communities, contests which may look like environmental struggles "are, more broadly, contests over the right to participate both in the management of resources, and in the benefits deriving from them." (Perreault, 2006). This could explain the deeper conflicts that characterise the South American scenario. Finding themselves at a disadvantage in negotiation implies that they might be more inclined to reject proposed projects outright.

This comes up against the tacit assumption mentioned earlier in the section about indigenous peoples as inherently possessing of conservationist ethos and as an alternative model to Development. As Filer (1999, pp. 97–98), paraphrasing Jackson (1991) wrote

> "Although anthropologists may feel that they have an instinct or duty to sympathise with the underdog, we should be wary of assuming that landowning communities have collective interests which are diametrically opposed to those of the mining companies… (t)he indigenous customary landowner in PNG is not the downtrodden romantic hero beloved of Cultural Survivalists, but a true force to be reckoned with… Far from defending the authenticity and integrity of traditional village life, this force is normally applied to the search for some form of 'development'."

While this may be an accepted fact in the academy, the belief in indigenous peoples as environmental allies persists among environmental activists (personal communication with an activist friend, 19/02/2022).

2.4. Theorising the Community Responses

2.4.1. Community Responses to Extractives

In the two decades since the changes in the extractive industry described in Section 2.1., the scholarship on the indigenous experiences of extractives is polarised into two geographical clusters

– the Latin American cluster, or more particularly the Andean cluster, and the Oceanian cluster, particularly around Melanesia.

The Andean literature slants strongly towards resistance wherein indigenous peoples are singularly opposed to large-scale mining activities in their locality (Acuña, 2015; Bebbington, 2009; Deonandan et al., 2017; Dougherty, 2011; Gordon & Webber, 2008; Kuecker, 2007; McDonell, 2015; Urkidi, 2011; Urkidi & Walter, 2011; Walter, 2014). After Alier (2001), many scholars explicitly characterise the local community-corporate conflicts as ecological distribution conflicts or environmental conflicts. Among the Indian instances of community-extractive encounters, the resistance of the Dongria Gondhs against bauxite mining in India falls into this set (Kumar, 2014; Oskarsson, 2017; Pattnaik, 2013; Temper & Martinez-Alier, 2013).

The second set of scholarship can be named the Melanesian literature, due to the preponderance of studies from the tiny island nation-states in the Pacific that constitute Melanesia, although research from the indigenous lands in the global North such as Canada, Australia and Scandinavia also contribute to its argument. This body of research veers away from resistance. Instead, the studies engage with instances of cooperation between communities and extractive companies. Studies from Papua New Guinea (Banks, 2002, 2008; Filer, 1997; Filer & Macintyre, 2006; Macintyre & Foale, 2004), New Caledonia (Ali & Grewal, 2006; Horowitz, 2002) as well as Australia (O'Faircheallaigh, 1996b, 2013; Trigger, 1999) highlight numerous instances where communities have actively negotiated for better outcomes for themselves in exchange for allowing access to land. More and more, these outcomes are formalised as mutually beneficial contracts between communities and companies known as Impact Benefit Agreements (Le Meur et al., 2013; O'Faircheallaigh, 1996a, 2013).

Between these two extremes of resistance and cooperation lies an entire spectrum of community-company engagements with varying degrees of conflicts. Here, I use conflict in the broader sense of disagreement, and not only 'protracted violent armed conflicts', which is its popular meaning in one set of natural resource politics studies (greed and grievance, resource curse etc.). A few studies from Latin America refute the singular narrative of community resistance. Bebbington et al. point to communities whose goal of contesting projects is ultimately to "negotiate compensation for dispossession and/or guarantees against dispossession of asset quality and who would withdraw contestation once the mining company had put in place plans for environmental remediation and social compensation" (2008). Some communities may not only seek a one-time compensation but ask for a fairer share of resource revenue (Haarstad, 2012). Within the Melanesian scholarship too, a few studies investigate community-corporate conflicts. Often, contentious encounters are geared towards securing a better outcome or leveraging for a stronger negotiating position, rather than

pursuing the expulsion of mining activities (Walton & Barnett, 2008). Instances of cooperative engagements may also be marked by sporadic conflicts.

Community responses to mining are mutable over time. Their perceptions of the costs and benefits of a project may evolve if the company responds to the concerns driving the contestations (Ballard & Banks, 2003). Kirsch notes that communities themselves evolve and change due to their interaction with the extractive industry (2001). The second aspect of temporality is that the impacts of resource extraction unfold at different paces during different phases of mining. The evolving sequence of mining activities means that the expectations and attitudes vary throughout the lifetime of a mining project. As a mine goes into operation, its environmental impacts from functions such as pollution caused by tailing etc. can lead to the emergence of new stakeholders.

This is to say that indigenous-extractive encounters generally fall on a spectrum spanning conflict to cooperation. At one end are instances of anti-mining resistance struggles waged by local communities with the sole aim of getting mining projects cancelled. These 'pure' anti-mining conflicts have no interest in negotiating for a better, beneficial form of mining. At the other end, lie indigenous peoples who cooperate and negotiate with corporate miners for Impact Benefit Agreements in exchange for access to their territories.

The discussion above leads to the question – what explains the heterogeneity of community responses to extractives? To answer this question, Conde and Le Billon (Conde & Le Billon, 2017) reviewed 224 primarily peer-reviewed studies on community responses to mining. Their perspective was informed by the underlying assumption that the default and appropriate response of the community to mining is resistance, and the absence of resistance is mainly due to hindrances created by the state and capital. Thus, they identified and evaluated numerous factors through the lens of resistance. These factors were categorised into four sets – project-related, community-related, company-related, and state-related. The four sets are then classified as hindrances to or drivers of resistance, and as having mixed effects, i.e. the influence of the factors could work both ways (see Table 2.1 for a detailed summary).

	Hindrances to Resistance	Mixed Effects	Drivers of Resistance
Project		Geography and resource type, have differential extraction techniques and impacts, and hence different responses. Remoteness of project – can either engender resistance for defence of land and livelihoods, or cooperation to achieve economic transformation through mining.	Locally felt socio-environmental impacts of extractive processes on livelihoods Displacement and related risks for community
Community	Political marginalisation – communities excluded from decision-making mechanisms unlikely to resist. Mine dependency – communities of mining towns unlikely to resist.	Place and territory – relational spaces embedded with cultural meanings and emotional significance Economic marginalisation – communities no longer relying on land may not resist. Alliances with extra-local actors for knowledge and resource support	Distrust of mining company and the state as a guarantor of environmental safeguards Lack of participation
Company		Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) – based on the design of CSR program for addressing grievances and community needs, it can mitigate or exacerbate resistance Corporate-driven participation in decision-making and through lease-sharing and employment can reduce resistance.	Compensation – when perceived to be inadequate, can trigger resistance
State		State-driven participation	Pro-industry state policies Criminalisation of dissent Inadequate planning and implementation Rent seeking behaviour and corruption

Table 2.1. Classification of factors as hindrances or drivers of resistance (Conde & Le Billon, 2017)

I find it more useful to see resistance as one end of the spectrum of community responses to extractives, ranging from resistance to acceptance, and from contestation to cooperation. Furthermore, seen this way, the factors identified by Conde and Le Billon may be alternatively reframed as determinants of community responses to extractive projects (see Table 2.2). These can be broadly clustered into four sets. The first set is intrinsic community characteristics. For instance, remoteness and place connection, and political and economic marginality are often part of the experiences of indigenous peoples. These are immutable in the short term. The second set is project characteristics and their immediate social and environmental impacts. Generally, these factors are also limited in their changeability in the short term. For instance, the technological aspects of a project mediate the nature of environmental impacts. Communities tend to evaluate the project and its impacts through the lens of their own intrinsic characteristics. The third set comprises extra-community factors. These factors are largely characteristics of the other actors in the extractives arena – the state and the company. They influence the well-being outcomes for the communities can be positive, and whether communities can participate in the decision-making process. The last set comprises negotiable outcomes impacting well-being and process. Their perceptions of the project and its impacts may be affected by secondary factors such as the measures proposed by the company to mitigate the negative social and environmental impacts of the project.

Community Characteristics	**Project Characteristics**
Remoteness Political marginality Economic marginality and livelihoods Mine dependency Place connection	Geography and resource type Socio-environmental impacts, such as displacement
Extra-community factors	**Negotiable Outcomes and Process**
Pro-industry state policies Rent-seeking behaviour and corruption of state Criminalisation of dissent by state Distrust within communities of other actors Corporate social responsibility programmes by company Alliances	Impact mitigation measures Compensation Participation Planning and implementation of project

Table 2.2. Determinants of Community responses to Extractive Projects (based on Conde & Le Billon, 2017)

The first three sets of factors are largely stable within the duration in the timeframe of a project. That is to say, the characteristics of the community and the project, and the extra-community factors are not prone to changing drastically. On the other hand, well-being outcomes are essentially mutable policy decisions. Most often, it is the potential outcomes and the quality of the process that are the direct subject of community responses, be they conflict, cooperation or

negotiation. The factors identified and discussed by Conde and Billon may interact with one another and in some cases, catalyse other factors. For instance, extra-community factors such as rent-seeking behaviour and corruption can ingrain distrust of the state and company in the minds of the communities.

2.4.2. Environmental Justice as an explanatory approach

The Andean scholars often use the concept of environmental justice to explain the community responses to resource extraction (Martinez-Alier, 2001; Rodríguez-Labajos & Özkaynak, 2017; Urkidi & Walter, 2011). The concept of environmental justice arose in the US in the 1990s in the context of environmental racism and its toxic outcomes suffered by minority communities (Čapek, 1993). In its infancy, environmental justice was primarily concerned with the spatial and geographical distribution of environmental goods and bads. For instance, it noted that environmentally hazardous facilities such as landfills and incinerators, were disproportionately sited in the vicinity of minority communities (Čapek, 1993). Schlosberg, a prominent theorist in environmental justice studies, drew on the liberal theories of social justice of Young (1990) and Fraser (1997), and expanded the narrow conception of environmental justice as a purely distributional issue to a multi-dimensional pluralistic understanding (2004). Schlosberg set up environmental justice as a parallel to social justice; whereas theories of social justice deal with issues of social and economic goods such as wealth, opportunities and social privileges, environmental justice tackles environmental goods and bads. Through a review of the discourses employed by global social movements against global trade, for food sovereignty, and for indigenous land rights, he identified procedural and recognition dimensions of justice in addition to distributional and equity issues. In a departure from the social justice theorists, he argued for the recognition of the community as the important unit of analysis.

The Andean scholars argue that communities resist mining projects as a response to the maldistribution of environmental 'bads'. In doing so, they focus on the distributive aspects of environmental justice. In this point of view, resistance is the default expression of their agency. Absence of resistance may be explained through factors such as CSR that discourage or dissuade communities from resisting. The best possible outcome through the environmental justice lens is for the project to cease operation (Rodríguez-Labajos & Özkaynak, 2017). The underlying assumption of this scholarship is that the extractive sector always impacts communities negatively. Although the Melanesian scholarship does not refer explicitly to environmental justice, it is interesting to note that similar themes of justice emerge in across numerous studies. Participation and the perception of process, which Conde and Le Billon identify as a factor of resistance (2017) also appear frequently in the Melanesian literature. Related to the process is the recognition

dimension, which is often tied to place connection and territoriality. Therefore, I explore these three aspects of environmental justice, with examples from the two bodies of scholarship.

2.4.2.1. Distribution

In environmental justice, the distributive aspect refers to equity and fairness in how the environmental goods and bads are distributed among the stakeholders and within communities (Schlosberg, 2004). Conflicts are a result of inequity in the distribution of these goods. In the first-wave environmental justice movements in the US and South Africa, the distributive dimension primarily referred to the spatial location of environmental bads, such as toxic dumps, in a racially segregated manner. Instruments of environmental governance, such as social and environmental impact assessments and impact mitigation plans have emerged in response to distributive concerns flagged by first-generation environmental struggles. These instruments go some way to mitigate the negative environmental fallouts.

An important characteristic of the environmentalist conception of justice is its view of local resource politics as 'ecological conflicts'. Ecological conflicts are defined by them as "mobilizations by local communities, social movements, which might also include support of national or international networks against particular economic activities, infrastructure construction or waste disposal/pollution whereby environmental impacts are a key element of their grievances" (Temper et al., 2015). In this framing, distribution refers only to environmental goods and bads. Community members may conclude that the environmental impacts and resource enclosure are entirely irremediable. The struggles under environmentalism of the poor were primarily about distributive justice. The endangerment of their livelihoods due to the enclosure of their natural resources, and displacement were framed in terms of distributive injustices of environmental externalities.

Distributional justice is concerned not only with environmental impacts but also with the 'equitable distribution of benefits deriving from the exploitation of natural resources' (Perreault, 2006, p. 154). In Melanesia, conflicts animated by distributive justice claims can occur between local communities and the state, and within the communities too. The Melanesian literature also contain numerous instances of distributive justice claims. Unlike the EJ conceptualisation, in these instances the justice claims go beyond the environmental impacts alone, and circle back to the distribution of economic goods and resources, in the manner of social justice conceptualisation. In fact, some authors even argue that the environmental impacts of mining play only a minor role in the calculus of local communities. While there have been some attempts to characterise resource conflicts in Melanesia as ecological conflicts (Hyndman, 2001; Kirsch, 1997, 2001), the wider consensus refutes this (Banks, 2002). Indigenous peoples do not make a distinction between nature and society in the way of Euro-centric tradition, and the environment is indivisible from other

aspects of social life (Banks, 2002; Walton & Barnett, 2008). Thus, they may not perceive the ecological impacts of mining activities as negatively as environmentalists do. Macintyre and Foale make the provocative point that "environmental damage" is often viewed as an economic resource, and that the communities would rather claim financial compensation than demand higher mitigation standards of the environmental impacts (2002, p. 10). The avoidance or mitigation of environmental impacts is rarely the end goal of local politics. Ali and Grewal note that indigenous peoples in Melanesia approach mining projects with "cautious and differentiated pragmatism" rather than the "positional resistance of environmental activists." Even if they work together with environmentalists, the "convergence is post hoc and based on shared political ends rather than epistemological consistency." (2002, p. 2).

The other part of the explanation could be the role resource extraction plays in local aspirations for Development and modernity (Filer & Macintyre, 2006). As discussed in the previous section, measures for mitigating environmental fallouts are now mandatory for extraction projects in many parts of the world. Further, it is now standard practice for communities to be paid compensation as amelioration for loss of livelihoods and life quality. Compensation is 'the awarding of damages for any loss in value or damage to land, water, foreshore or other resources as well as rights, arising from prospecting, exploration and mining activities, to landowners, occupiers and surrounding communities, in monetary or non-monetary forms' (Mcleod, 2000, p. 121). Aside from compensation, a resource extraction company can become a source of other cash transfers such as royalties, equity participation, employment and business contracts (Banks, 1996, 2002). For communities with limited opportunities to enter the monetary economy and earn cash livelihoods, these benefits can represent a significant resource. Further, corporations have adopted Corporate Social responsibility activities to gain social licence to operate. In the absence of a strong state presence, CSR activities may play a critical role in fulfilling the social welfare requirements of local communities.

Under this paradigm perceptions of distributive inequity and injustice arise primarily over economic goods and resources. If community members perceive that the proposed mitigation and compensation measures are incommensurate with the actual or anticipated environmental impacts and resource losses, they may agitate against the company. In instances where companies overpromise, and under-deliver, dissatisfaction and disappointment may also lead to conflicts (Arellano-Yanguas, 2010). On the other hand, within the communities, distributional inequities may arise along gender and generational lines. Monetary benefits may not always be equitably distributed among community members. Some individuals may gain more than others due to several reasons – membership to the landowning faction, education level that gives access to jobs,

skills relevant for getting business opportunities etc. leading to dissatisfaction among those excluded. They may in turn withdraw their support.

Furthermore, the distribution of economic goods can be affected in the course of the life cycle of a project. For instance, employment opportunities may become scarcer when mining operations become more technologically complex, and demand specialist skills. This can lead the mining enterprise to be closed off from the local community, leading to contestation. Similarly, second-generation distributive issues may emerge at a later stage of the life of the project, when social effects of resource access, such as social stratification, increased economic inequality and resulting social disintegration (Filer 1990), begin to emerge.

Issues of social goods and bads are more complex. Second-generation distributive issues may emerge at a later stage of the life of the project, when social effects of resource access, such as social stratification, increased economic inequality and resulting social disintegration (Filer 1990), begin to emerge. The social outcomes of the arrival of a resource extraction project unfold in phases over the entire duration of the project itself. Social cohesion may be impacted more immediately by contestations over claims of land ownership and legitimacy to be a representative community. (Banks 1996, 233). The emergence of compensation practices may also lead to the individuation of land rights (Macintyre & Foale 2007). On the one hand, there are proximate impacts of the presence of a mining operation and resource development and resultant social change. For instance, a sudden influx of cash in a previously subsistence-oriented community can lead to wasteful consumption of mine-related benefits, alcoholism, gambling, drug use, marginalisation of women, domestic violence, sexually transmitted diseases (Filer & Macintyre, 2006, p. 218). Longer term changes may be the emergence of a new elite based on compensation gains, reorganisation of social networks (Bainton, 2009), and sometimes social disintegration. Resource extraction can exacerbate inequality within previously (relatively) egalitarian societies through resource exploitation and selective access to benefits to some parties (O'Faircheallaigh, 1998). This may happen along axes of gender, age, location, subsistence status, education, kinship, land ownership, and ethnicity. Banks writes at length regarding the social disintegration caused by the award of compensation to members of the Porgeran society, affected by the Porgera gold mine. There are few case studies that offer any explicit evidence of community-company conflicts arising due to the social outcomes, although they do underlie a baseline anxiety regarding the large-scale changes.

At the same time, the scope of environmental impacts mediates community responses. While certain kinds of impacts like deforestation may be tolerated in exchange of compensation, other impacts with unaccountable risks for community life, such as uranium mining or gold mining which

requires cyanide leaching, may be opposed unconditionally. It is of course possible that in certain instances of mining, the environmental impacts are so malignant that local communities may find the fall in ambient quality unliveable, and thus reject the project entirely. The consultas in Latin America in the 2000s were animated to a great extent by the negative impacts of mining on their land and water resources which were perceived to be chronic and unmanageable (Urkidi & Walter, 2011). The communities were motivated by the unmitigated environmental impacts of the projects on their lives and livelihoods. The anti-mining resistance of the Dongria Kondhs in India against a proposed bauxite mining on their territory is a similar instance. These are clear examples of 'Environmentalism of the Poor' paradigm, which have now been subsumed under Environmental Justice movements.

2.4.2.2. Recognition

Schlosberg defines the recognition dimension as the 'recognition and preservation of diverse cultures, identities, economies, and ways of knowing' (2009, p. 86). He points out that demands for socio-environmental justice by indigenous movements not only demand recognition for their existence in particular places, but also demand that their traditions and cultures be recognised "as valid, and on par with other cultures" (2009, p. 87). This articulation of recognition is in line with the definition of recognition injustice proffered by first-generation environmental justice movements as place stigmatisation and misrecognition'. Thus, the recognition of customary land rights of indigenous peoples or lack thereof seems to mediate whether the communities view the presence of the extractive activities as net negative or net positive.

It could be argued that the increased prominence of indigenous peoples as a special category in international Development discourse has remedied the problem of misrecognition to some extent. In practice though, communities in different parts of the world receive widely varying degrees of recognition. As discussed in the previous section 2.1.2., in the Andes, the indigenous status of local communities is not legally recognised or even acknowledged by the State and the communities continue to struggle for recognition of their land rights (Andolina, 2003; Urkidi, 2011; Yagenova & Garcia, 2009). It is therefore significant that local communities use the discourse of indigeneity in their anti-mining resistance movements to strengthen their claims on natural resources.

In contrast, the Melanesian communities are accorded the status of indigeneity. Here, the claims to recognition justice differ significantly from the Andean instance. They expect recognition of their territorial sovereignty and sovereignty over their resources. Their customary land rights are also respected by the State as well as Capital, in that mining companies seek to make land transfer agreements with the indigenous companies. Recognition is of particular relevance to the indigenous experience. Not only does recognition refer to their need to be recognised as impacted by the

projects, but also their resource sovereignty. In this view, not only do they want to be consulted, but in fact would like to have the final word on the matter. Very often, the local contestation against a resource developer is focused on gaining recognition as landowners, sometimes couched in terms of claims to economic benefits, and at other times, framed as concern for environmental damage. While the recognition of the land ownership claims of local communities by the other actors, i.e. State and capital, is a necessary dimension of sovereignty, it is not the only one. Ali and Grewal point out that, "the primacy of sovereignty in contemporary indigenous movements is often neglected by environmentalists and developers alike. The former assumes it to be synonymous with a primordial subsistence lifestyle, which most indigenous groups are happy to move away from, while the latter assume it to be synonymous with cash payments, which indigenous groups also find patronizing and demeaning. Ownership is more akin with control over decisions and the legal authority to occupy and manage land" (2006, p. 385).

The issue of recognition is also at play at the inter- and intra-community level in a couple of different ways. For individuals in land-owning communities, recognition as the landowner is necessary for gaining access to resources. Since project authorities may use land ownership in order to circumscribe the scope of their obligations for compensation etc., struggle for recognition may trigger contestation over land titles. Similarly, definitions of community – inclusion and exclusion in the 'affected community' - may be a trigger for conflicts.

Secondly, within indigenous peoples, status recognition itself is a capital. Analysing an instance of the heterogenous responses of Kanaks, indigenous to New Caledonia, to a nickel-mining company, Horowitz (Horowitz, 2002) found that the value of the 'reception of royalties or priority in employment' from the mining company is not only about the financial benefits, but also about the recognition as a customary landowner. Since the Kanaks derive their social status through 'membership of a first occupant clan', clans who originally settled the land, inclusion in the beneficiary list was an acknowledgement of their high-status member of a first occupant clan. Thus, those who expected an increase in their recognition, supported the project. On the other hand, those who feared loss of control over land due to their socio-political positions in the local community, invoked arguments about ecological impacts or spiritual dangers in order to oppose aspects of the mining project.

In the case of indigenous peoples, the risk of misrecognition is especially stronger, as claims of resource sovereignty are often based on migration histories of particular communities and groups, and these claims are often overlapping and conflicting.

2.4.2.3. Process

Procedural justice initially referred to "fairness in process and regulation, inclusion in decision-making, and access to environmental information" (in Walker, 2009, p. 617) and but it can also include 'greater participation and transparency in decisions over the management of natural resource' (Perreault, 2006, p. 154). National regulators as well as the business community have come to accept Free Prior Informed Consent as an instrument for due process.

For Ali and Grewal, is not only about legal disclosures but includes a temporal dimension, i.e. the process must unfold at a pace "that allows for the flow of information to be absorbed by the community" (2006, p. 385). For the state and private companies, participation may mean inclusion through consultation processes for 'prior informed consent'. In contrast, communities may often want full-fledged participation or at least some semblance of participation in decision-making. This could be in terms of siting decisions of infrastructure components or seeking formal stakes in resource exploitation projects. Banks writes in detail about three instances of local protests in Oceania and argues that the 'environmental impact of the Porgera mine was, from the local perspective, about issues of marginality and involvement in decision-making, about control (or lack of it) over resources (environmental, political, cultural, and economic), and about the direction of change in people's lives.' (2002, p. 51)

This desire to assert control over the changes may be especially evident among community members who are not in the immediate vicinity of the project and may therefore be left out of the discussions or negotiations. Banks (2002, p. 51) offers the instance of the Duna people of Papua New Guinea, who lived downstream of a goldmine, and found themselves deprived of the prosperity from the mine relative to their Ipili neighbours whose lands were closer to the mines.

2.4.3. Section Summary

Not all instances of conflicts can be characterised as pure resistance; and not all resistance struggles are environmentally motivated. Building on the work of Conde and le Billon and other researchers, I use Schlosberg's trivalent understanding of environmental justice - distribution, process, and recognition – to understand community responses as various justice claims. As Schlosberg himself emphasises, these claims are usually interlinked, and may even be cross-cutting. For instance, distributive issues can be inseparable from the issue of recognition. Take for instance the case of compensation as an equity issue. In practice, project authorities only identify those individuals or families as eligible for compensation whose land ownership is formally recognised. For all three aspects of justice, intra-community aspects of justice are equally, if not more, important as the extra-community issues.

The trivalent conception of justice as put forth by Environmental Justice proponents is a useful framework for making sense of local politics beyond resistance and environmental struggle. The underlying assumption of reifying indigenous peoples as bastions protecting nature against extractive industries is both normative as well as naïve. In some instances, communities may adopt a pragmatic perspective and negotiate with extractive companies for economic benefits in exchange for access to their natural resources. Thus, at the local level, it may be more productive theoretically to view environmental degradation and environmental politics as significant but subsumed under local resource politics.

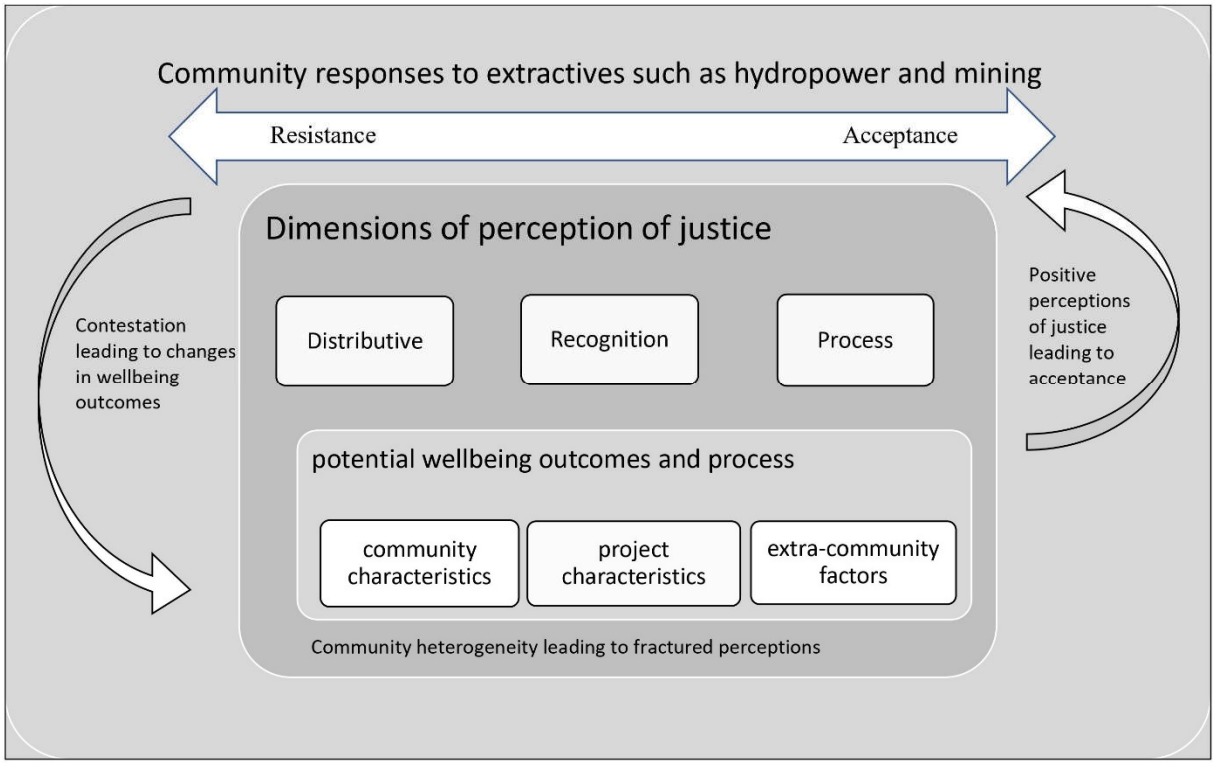

Figure 2.2 A socio-environmental justice explanatory framework

2.5. Intra-Community Heterogeneity within Indigenous peoples

In popular discourse as well as the broader academic studies, the fact of intra-community heterogeneity within indigenous peoples is generally underemphasised. Here, it is necessary to note that the current concept of 'community' in Development studies has primarily risen from the 1990s work in community-based natural resources management (CBNRM), following the failure of decades-long conservation work (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999). In the CBNRM literature, the definition of community has evolved over time from a homogenous place-based group of people working towards a common goal, to a more varied and changeable group of stakeholders often differentiated by caste, class and gender status (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999).

However, when it comes to IPs, the tendency is to revert to the 'mythic community that is small and integrated and uses "locally evolved norms to manage resources sustainably and equitably" (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999, p. 640). This could be partly to do with the centrality of community to indigenous people. After all, the big difference between the non-indigenous and the indigenous society is the primacy of the community over the individual, and how the kinship network organises the community as a tightly knit group. Hence, the 'communal' aspect of the indigenous community tends to be valorised, and the intra-community heterogeneity is overlooked. Sometimes, indigenous peoples as well as their advocates may also gloss over the internal heterogeneity in a bid to fit the 'indigenous slot'. Academic researchers may similarly hesitate to bring the internal heterogeneity of such communities to light.

Contrary to their portrayal as unified entities, indigenous peoples may be fractured by a range of interests. In the Melanesian account of indigenous encounters with mining, there are some instances of intra-community conflicts. When encountered with extractives, constituencies within the community may differ on the assessment of the impacts of mining (Filer & Macintyre, 2006). The differences tend to be based on the distribution of impacts and benefits. The local differences then can be based on issues of land ownership, which constrains or enables certain groups to claim benefits and not others. For instance, in the case of mining's environmental impacts, downstream groups whose land and water may be affected by tailing discharge are often not recognised as project-affected. Thus, while they may be negatively affected, they are not usually ignored in terms of allocation of compensation or benefits. The heterogeneity may be due to intrinsic differences in world views among community members. This is especially significant for indigenous peoples where the existence of a range of lifestyles and livelihoods varying from traditional to modern may lead to divergences in evaluation of the impact of resource extraction (Trigger, 1999). Heterogeneity in livelihood practices and claims on land affected by the mines also mediates perceptions of extractive activities on indigenous lands. The contest over the differential impacts of extractives may play out through contests over community identity and boundaries of belonging (Horowitz, 2011).

At the same time, local communities, finding themselves in entirely new situations find means of engagement with agents of capital. This may take the form of formal organisations based on land ownership, sometimes introduced by state or capital, but with the passage of time, they tend to take on the role for advocacy of community interests. The non-indigenous stakeholders such as the State (in some cases) and the company often view the community as a homogenous unit, with a simple representative structure. However, individuals in positions of formal authority may not necessarily act in community interest. When this occurs, it may generate a crisis of legitimacy within

the community, and entrench mistrust of the project developer as well delegitimise projects (Lane & Chase, 1996).

As traditional norms are not designed to or can help with the influx of monetary resources, the strain on the social relationship then manifests as "anger and frustration both focused internally and projected outwards onto the resource developer and government." (Banks, 2008, p. 30). He goes so far as to say that there is no such thing as a 'pure resource conflict' in Papua New Guinea, and that natural resources become a proxy for other social and political concerns (2008). Thus, conflicts that appear to be corporate-community conflicts at first glance may have escalated from underlying inter- and intra-community conflicts.

2.6. Chapter Summary

The objectives of this chapter were two-fold: first, to offer clarity on the definition of the 'stretchy' terms I use in the dissertation, i.e. Development and Indigenous Peoples; and two, to glean important elements of local politics of extractives from a wide swathe of studies of local politics in mining. I looked to the research on indigenous encounters with extractives in order to create an explanatory framework for understanding the local politics of hydropower development. I made this choice because the extractives industry has been relatively more agile than the large dams industry in responding to the grassroots resistance that the industry faced in the late 20th century. Similarly, the changes in local politics in response to shifting industry attitudes are better documented for the extractive industry.

3. Research Design and Methodology

3.1. Researcher's Bias and the "damned Dams"

Before getting into the discussion of my research design and methodological choices, I want to briefly lay out why I chose this topic and how I arrived at my research design. Feminist scholars Avishai, Gerber and Randles (2013) have noted the tension between a researcher's political project and the task of producing reliable knowledge, reconciling "a political commitment to advance progressive social change through research" on the one hand, and "a methodological commitment to prioritize our subjects' voices" on the other. To produce a reliable report, it is important to recognise one's political project. The purpose of this short autobiographical section is to be radically honest with the reader about the 'research instrument' that is the researcher, and thereby enable her to view the research design critically and gauge the validity of the research findings that will follow in the subsequent chapters.

My politics and my belonging to Arunachal led me to the topic of the hydropower development in Arunachal. As a young adult in the late 1990s-early 2000s, my politics was shaped by the social and environmental movements of this period. This was the period when the first World Social Forum took place under the slogan "Another World is Possible". At this time, the Narmada Bachao Andolan, one of the most influential and well-known grassroots resistance movements of late 20th century, appeared to be on the verge of upsetting a massive governmental plan to construct 55 dams in the catchment of the Narmada River. In 2005, I joined a research and advocacy NGO in Delhi as a junior researcher. I was assigned to a project monitoring the 50,000 MW Initiative of the Government of India. As the name suggests, the 50,000 MW Initiative was intended to add 50,000 MW of hydropower to India's power generation capacity. Almost half of it, more than 40 projects, were proposed to be in my home state Arunachal Pradesh. When the third *South Asian Forum on Rivers, Wetlands and Peoples* was held in Arunachal that year, the congregation of social and environmental activists framed it as a "development option, imposed by the government of India upon the indigenous peoples of Arunachal Pradesh and their traditional lands", and they expressed fear that it would "definitely spell total annihilation of their peaceful livelihoods, and irreversible destruction of all cultural and social fabrics, histories and traditions." (Nirjuli Consensus on Rivers, Wetlands and Peoples, 2005)

A couple of years later, a curious thing happened. Instead of rejecting this imposition of what appeared to be a sure-fire destruction of the indigenous lifeways of Arunachali communities, the state-level politicians took over the leadership of hydropower development from the Government

of India. Furthermore, the scale of the programme ballooned from the initial list of 40 potential projects to 150 MoAs in a state with an area of 84,000 sq.km. And yet, no state-wide groundswell of opposition to the government's massive hydropower agenda emerged. Bar the contestations at a few sites, there was a wider "absence of resistance". This triggered my interest. I wanted to investigate this "absence of resistance" as a political project, as well as to earn legitimacy as a Gramscian "organic intellectual" to advocate for social justice for people who were, in my mind, going to be 'victims' of hydropower development.

All this is to say that I began this study with an anti-dam bias. I suspected that this "absence of resistance" was acquiescence enforced through bonds of political patronage. An illustrative incident happened early on during the research design process. After I presented my draft research design, a senior researcher said to me, "You seem to expect that communities should resist large dams." I am not certain if I said this out aloud, or I just thought it, but my reply was "because dams are destructive for small indigenous peoples, their livelihoods and their natural resources". At this point, I failed to recognise the bias in my worldview, and the underlying assumptions about small groups of indigenous peoples, their livelihoods, their relationship to their natural resources as well as to Development.

This unacknowledged bias also informed the initial angle of my enquiry and thus, the framing of the research questions. It therefore limited my initial literature review. For instance, I focused on the resistance literature, social movements, and acquiescence before I began my fieldwork. The bias also influenced my expectations of what I expected to find, which was that the state-level political elite had successfully suppressed local resistance against hydropower projects through coercion and political patronage.

3.2. Research Approach

The starting point of my research was to understand why the indigenous peoples of Arunachal were not resisting the ambitious state-led programme to plant large and mid-sized dams all over their territories. This study is situated in the field of Development Studies, following in the lineage of resistance and social movement studies that emerged in the 1980s[1]. My point of departure from the lineage is the "absence of resistance". Development studies, though identified as within the social sciences, is explicitly animated by an instrumental motive of social justice, and is a normative discipline with a "commitment to the practical or policy relevance of teaching and research" (Sumner, 2006). My interest in the "absence of resistance" was not simply motivated by academic

[1] This is to distinguish it from resistance studies including peasant struggles which predate the 1980s.

curiosity about the phenomenon, but also its implications for the current and future well-being of the indigenous peoples of Arunachal.

For this study, I take a critical realist position. As my research engages with indigenous peoples and large Development projects, it involves dealing with "phenomena with differing ontological status" (Sumner & Tribe, 2004). After all, large dams are substantive 'things', with a tangible presence and impacts like the submergence of forests, and displacement of populations. The dam will have a certain height behind which water will be retained. On the other hand, the social impacts of dams and the local politics engendered by its arrival are firmly ensconced in the subjective realm. I found that the critical realist position allows for reconciling these disparate ontological statuses, and for the investigation of the local politics.

I take an inductive approach towards my investigation, borrowing liberally from the grounded theory approach. Inductive research is meant to be 'hypothesis-generating'. Having said that, I cannot claim to have entered the field free of hypotheses. As I mentioned in the section above, based on my interpretation of the literature of 1990s early 2000s, I had assumed that the local communities were not pro-large dams as it would disrupt their livelihoods.

3.3. Data Requirements and Fieldwork

For my research, the three main sets of data of interest were: the characteristics of the local communities, the mediating factors of the social acceptance of the hydropower projects, and the dimensions of the local politics animated by hydropower development (See Fig.2 in the previous chapter). Given the qualitative nature of the data, I decided to undertake fieldwork as my primary methodology.

3.3.1. Site selection and defining the field

I conducted my fieldwork in the influence zones of two hydropower projects in the catchment of the Siang River – the first among the Ramos affected by the upcoming Endor projects (Chapter 8), and the second at Pongging village of the Panggi tribe, situated directly upstream of the upcoming Lower Siang Hydroelectric Project (LSHEP, dealt with in Chapter 7). These were different from the sites I had proposed during the research design stage. During the research design stage, I had identified the 2880MW Dibang Multipurpose project and the 600MW Lower Demwe project in the adjacent districts of Lower Dibang Valley and Lohit in eastern Arunachal. I had wanted two sites with contrasting community responses to the hydropower development, both projects had been beset with contestations in the previous years. But the contestations had had different outcomes. While the contestation against the Dibang had grown into a firm

resistance, at the Lower Demwe site, the public hearing was eventually held and the affected communities accepted the land compensation package. Moreover, both sites were inhabited by small tribes belonging to the larger Mishmi group. Hence, they were still comparable in terms of community characteristics.

Once I was back in Arunachal, it became apparent that the Dibang and Demwe projects were no longer viable study sites. This was because the local activities that constituted the political process around hydropower development were triggered only when a public hearing was announced and became dormant when the public hearing was conducted or called off. I needed to identify new 'active' sites. To maximise the possibility of substantial observable interactions going on within the community (Morse & Field, 1996), I decided to base my site selection on the schedule of upcoming public hearings. I sought this information from the Arunachal Pradesh State Pollution Control Board, the state government agency responsible for the conduct of public hearings. In 2012-2013, the only public hearings expected to come up were for a set of three projects in the Shi Valley in the then West Siang district. The three projects - Pauk, Heo and Tato-I – were meant to be developed together as a run-of-river cascade with a cumulative installed capacity of 571MW.

As I started my fieldwork in the Shi Valley as my first site, it became gradually apparent that it represented the typical dynamic playing out at most hydropower sites in Arunachal. The Lower Siang HEP (LSHEP) offered a good contrast as a second study site, which could be considered a deviant case. First, unlike the Shi Valley cascade project, the LSHEP had faced sustained, sometimes violent, resistance. Secondly, LSHEP was a 2700MW dam-toe project, unlike the run-of-river design of the Endor projects. This technological difference implied a different order of potential environmental and social consequences. At the same time, the affected communities at the two sites were part of the same cultural sphere. The Ramos and the Panggis belong to the Adi subgroup of the Tani people and have similar social structures and norms. In fact, the Shi River was a second-order tributary of the Siang on which LSHEP is located.

Since I intended to use the village as a bound arena of my study, I had to choose one village in the project-affected area to anchor the locus of my investigations. Following the principle of maximisation again, I chose the villages where some displacement was anticipated. In the case of the Endor projects, that was Purying village. In the case of LSHEP, it was the Pongging village.

While selecting the 'research sites' was relatively simple, demarcating the field was much more complex. Before starting fieldwork, I had intended to base myself in one village and conduct classical ethnographic fieldwork. However, once I was on location, it was evident that the conduct

of politics was not geographically contained within the villages. Instead, the local actors regularly moved across the local, the district headquarters, and the state capital. In fact, in the case of the Endor projects, very little happened in Purying itself. Instead, the nearby administrative town of Mechukha was the key location for politics. For both the sites, the state capital anchored the offices of as well as the Members of the Legislative Assemblies. For the Endor projects, the field shifted between Mechukha, the circle headquarters, and Aalo, the district headquarters. Similarly, for the Siang site, the locus shifted between Pongging village and Pasighat, the headquarters of East Siang[2].

My fieldwork had to necessarily move between the village, the district headquarters and the administrative outposts in between. In total, I had to collect data at seven locations – I conducted non-participant observation at three locations, I conducted interviews at all seven sites, and I collected documents from the government archives at five locations. This again illustrates that local politics in Arunachal cannot be neatly cordoned off within a small physical locus.

3.3.2. Entering the field

As discussed above, my field was multi-sited. For the Endor projects, I had four sites, and for the LSHEP, three. Due to the multi-sited nature of my field, 'entering the field' was a recurring event throughout the duration of my fieldwork. In Itanagar among the technocrats and activists, in the district headquarters, where the quotidian administrative decisions regarding the hydropower development were made, and the 'local' where the members of the community lived. In general, as a 'native' researcher (a concept that I discuss in detail below in Sub-section 3.5.1) I encountered relatively little gatekeeping at the different sites, and I could ask for access without great challenges.

It was hence relatively easy to get access to interview partners in the state capital and the district headquarters. Many relevant actors were either my friends, or friends of my parents. This gave me seamless access to them, and they generously introduced me to their contacts. I knew actors in the anti-dam movement of Arunachal, and my relationship with them pre-dated my research. These actors, primarily urban intellectuals and professionals, then shared their network with me. Similarly, I was also allowed into the government offices with relative ease, due to the status of my father as a senior government official.

[2] This is interesting to note, because technically, Pongging village belongs to the Upper Siang district. However, as the office of the private company was located in Pasighat, and also because until 1999 when the Upper Siang district was carved out of East Siang, the village had been part of the unified East Siang district, and the village elite had a domestic base in Pasighat. Moreover, the village is closer to Pasighat than to Yingkiong, the headquarters of Upper Siang.

On the other hand, entry at other sites such as Mechukha, Purying and Pongging village was more challenging. This was mainly because my network did not extend to these locations. While I was given some names of potential informants at the two case-study sites, I had no firm introductions. Moreover, even when one was allowed into the larger community, different factions within the community responded differentially to my presence. For instance, some factions were more reticent than others. In Mechukha, this had less to do with my positionality, and more to do with my perceived closeness to the other faction, which had been entirely coincidental.

In Mechukha, I had a stroke of luck. On my second day there, I met a woman from my father's village who had married a Ramo and moved here. She almost instantly extended her hospitality and familial warmth to me. She and her husband introduced me to the Ramo society as their relative, as her 'niece' who was doing research. I firmly believe that having my clanswoman's acceptance significantly eased my entry into the field, which would have been otherwise impeded by my status as a researcher with affiliation to another tribe and to a foreign university.

While Mechukha was a 'live' site, LSHEP was akin to a 'fossil' or an archaeological dig site. This also reflected in how in the live site, discourses and positions were in constant flux, while at the sedimented site, the actor positions had now frozen into singular stances. By the time I reached my second site, the significant events and mobilisations were long in the past. The second leg of fieldwork started in the middle of December. By the end of 2012 when I arrived at the 'scene', hydropower development was not a hot topic of public discussions. Shaktidhara, the concerned project proponent, had withdrawn most of its staff from the Pasighat office and had relocated them to a project site in Bhutan after some violent protests against the company during the Public Hearing in April 2012. There were no activities at the project site, and there were not even any further attempts to press for another public hearing. Similarly, activists had also suspended mobilization and had moved on to more immediate issues like their own livelihoods or the forthcoming local elections. However, there was a significant amount of documentation created by the community members themselves, as well as the company and the government, which I could use as archival data.

For the LSHEP leg of fieldwork, I based myself in Pasighat. as it was the town nearest to the LSHEP project site, and the location of the office of Shaktidhara. Also, it was a convenient base camp for making trips to Pongging. Coincidentally, in Pasighat too, I found out a kinswoman living there, who was married into a Pasighat family. They could offer me room and board. As it turns out, they had previously rented out the accommodation to officials from the hydropower

company. So, over mealtimes I heard a lot of ring-side perspectives from the husband of my kinswoman.

I recruited research assistants at both sites to overcome the language barrier. In general, almost every Arunachali under 50 communicates in patois Hindi, some older villagers could only express themselves in their own languages. While I belong to a tribe that is also part of the Tani group, the languages are not entirely mutually intelligible due to different vocabularies. I could understand just about enough to know that a lot had been said, but not enough to know precisely what had been said. For LSHEP, I could recruit a graduate student of anthropology from the Rajiv Gandhi University from an Adi tribe who could speak Panggi. For Shi Valley, it was not possible to find someone with a research background. In the end, I could find a Ramo engineering graduate. Although her presence gave me some access to older Ramo-speaking individuals, I suspect there was some degree of loss of nuance and information. This was apparent during some interviews in the village, where my research assistant was unable to translate simultaneously during the interview, and her translation felt significantly shorter than the duration of the speaker's speech.

3.3.3. Fieldwork and data collection methods

My fieldwork was conducted in two main phases corresponding to the two project sites. For the first phase, I was based in Mechukha, and for the second phase, I was based in Pasighat. These two phases were punctuated with data collection in the state capital and the district headquarters, as well as additional visits to three other hydropower sites in Arunachal and Himachal Pradesh for triangulation. In Arunachal, I visited the Lohit Valley and the Dibang Valley where the Demwe and the Dibang Multipurpose projects are located. In Lohit valley, I interacted with a few individuals representing the private developer, the political establishment and the technocracy. In Dibang Valley, my visit was limited to attending the public hearing for the Dibang multipurpose project. In Himachal Pradesh in the western Himalayas, I visited the Allain-Duhangan project, one of the oft-written projects in the hydropower literature. Here too, I interacted with a few company representatives, activists as well as individuals from the local community.

As mentioned earlier, the two project sites under study were different in that the local politics around Endor projects was ongoing, while the LSHEP was dormant, i.e. no activities related to hydropower development were taking place. Therefore, while at the latter site, I depended primarily on interviews and archival data collection, at the former, I conducted more typical fieldwork involving peripheral observation, participating in conversations, etc. At both study sites, I conducted interviews with actors and less prominent stakeholders. Besides, I conducted rapid

village studies that helped me to understand resource bases and livelihoods practices, and kinship and political groupings, and the attitudes towards hydropower development.

During the first phase conducted on the Shi Endor projects, I was based in Mechukha. I paid three short visits to the Purying village. Although I had intended to employ participant observation as a key method for data collection, its unsuitability for studying high-stakes local political processes became evident early on. I state that my observation method was non-participatory because I could not actively participate in any meaningful way in the ongoing activities related to hydropower politics in the Shi Valley. This simply was not possible as I was not a resident of the area, and as such I had no real stakes in the hydropower development process. However, peripheral participation in the community in Mechukha town as well as in the study village was useful in creating rapport and gaining a degree of trust of a few community members. For the foreground information on local politics, I relied on non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews.

In Mechukha I spent a significant amount of time hanging around and shooting the breeze. My clanswoman ran a sundry shop on the short main street of the Mechukha town, right across from the office of the Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC). The ADC's office is the highest government office of the town and subdivision (a unit of the district). Beside her shop were the Panchayat Hall, the Kebang Hall (local judiciary system) and a popular tea shop. This fortuitously provided me with a vantage point to meet people and familiarise myself with the happenings, as any time there was a Panchayat or Kebang meeting, or if anyone visited the office of the ADC, people would come to the tea shop, and discuss the events, including those related to the hydropower development process. I soon discovered the advantages of drinking and sharing tea. Non-participant observation was useful for understanding the social networks of the actors. Aside from the everyday non-participant observation, I was able to sit in as an observer at the meetings of the Core Committee of the organisation representing the Ramos in the negotiations with the hydropower development company. I was also allowed to sit in during a meeting between the District Commissioner, the highest government official in the district, and the executive members of the community organisation mentioned above. Further, I attended a larger congregation of the Ramos with the Libos and Ramos, their affiliated tribes, in Monigong, a border town that lies in the neighbouring Yomi Valley.

Figure 3.1 Looking out from the tea shop, Mechukha

In contrast to the Endor projects, the LSHEP project was a dormant site, as mentioned earlier. Therefore, I relied almost entirely on interviews and archival trawling for data collection. The LSHEP and the resistance movement against it were well-documented in the state and national media. Because of this, it was easy in the beginning to sketch out the history of local contestations through the press releases of the organisations leading the resistance. At the same time, as mentioned in the previous section, the project site had gone dormant since April 2010, when an attempt by the government to conduct EIA public hearings had been met with protests which turned violent. Since the movement itself was well-documented, it was also easy to identify the individuals to interview. Some of the Itanagar-based actors in the resistance movement were already known to me. I could get introductions for some actors through people I knew.

Interviews were an important method in my fieldwork. I conducted interviews for mainly two sets of information: the first was to construct the narrative of events: the answers to 'who' 'what' and 'when' questions. The second was to understand attitudes and perspectives: to answer the 'how' and 'why' questions. This was especially necessary for the Endor projects, as there was no existing

documentation to build on. In general, interview partners were selected purposively. My interview partners ranged from the local actors, the state-level anti-dam activists, officials of the hydropower companies, and government bureaucrats and technocrats at the state as well as the district levels.

Almost all of my interviews were semi-structured. While I always prepared a list of important topics to be covered in an interview, often I let the interviewee take a great degree of control. In my experience, I found respondents to be much more forthcoming and even volunteer information on their own, when in a less-formal setting, or even a conversation. During a structured interview, people tended to be on guard and the conversation was stilted. In Pongging, the most informative and revealing interviews were the ones with those actors who considered themselves peripheral to the goings-on. While they participated in the collective actions, they did not consider themselves as leaders.

Figure 3.2 An interviewee pausing preparing construction materials to read list of questions (credit: Tanong Tapak)

Most of my interview partners spoke in patois Hindi, a version commonly spoken in Arunachal that has a simplified grammatical structure and numerous loan words from Assamese and English. In a few instances of interviewing older people, they communicated only in their mother tongue. On those occasions, I had to rely on my research assistants for translation. Interestingly, almost all of the communiques from the community organisations were in English. Only a handful were in

the mother tongue of the specific communities. These were translated either to Hindi or English by my assistants.

Another set of data I obtained was the rapid village studies as well as household livelihoods survey and attitude survey. I wanted to understand the socio-economic context that grounded and informed the differential local responses to hydropower development within the same communities, particularly from the vantage point of the affected villages. Rapid ethnography helped to identify livelihoods bases, and to understand power relations. I then followed this up with a randomised survey seeking information on livelihood practices, and the extent of knowledge of hydropower development.

To select my sample for the village studies, I sought information on the socio-economic status of the villages from the government departments, as well as information on voters' lists from the Block Development Office. Anecdotal evidence from other parts of the state suggested not to take the official records too seriously, as community members often gave false data. For instance, the Below Poverty List (BPL) is not a good indicator of the financial status of a family. Instead, it is known to be a way to reward political supporters with government subsidies. I therefore triangulated this information with my own observations in the village, e.g. using ownership of televisions, two-wheelers, hand tractors etc. as a proxy for wealth. Purying being a small village, I could visit all 13 households. Pongging has fifty households. Here I did basic stratification of the households based on prior information on the main actors in the politics as well as non-participant observation of their characteristics of status (the presence or absence of piped water connection inside the family property was a useful proxy), wealth and degree of impact from the proposed projects e.g. loss of land, and drew a random sample within these categories.

An additional purpose of my village stays was to understand the local attitudes to hydropower development and the companies. Although it was not my intent to produce a definitive statement on whether the affected communities supported the hydropower projects or not, I considered it an important piece of background information which grounded and gave meaning to the actions of the actors, who purported to speak on behalf of other local stakeholders. Land ownership and contestations over land ownership were at the heart of the local politics, therefore collecting genealogical data and oral history of migration, especially in the case of the contestation in Purying. The questions I sought to answer through this survey were: the extent of knowledge regarding the upcoming project and its known impacts on the village, the extent of power of the villagers and dependence on their village elites for decision-making etc. The village elite consisted of individuals

who tended to have higher education and could communicate with the district bureaucracy. The elite almost always had political ambitions, and the emic label for them was 'leader', perhaps a leftover from the era of Community Development in the 1950s.

The last set of data was the texts produced by the local actors, as well as the state bureaucracy. Sometime in the middle of my fieldwork in Mechukha, one of the main actors in local politics alerted me to the reams of documents produced by the local organisations involved in hydropower politics. Gradually, the actors in the local politics themselves began to share these texts and allowed me to photocopy them. This way I collected a large number of documents produced by the community members, addressed to their community organisations, to government officials, and to the hydropower company officials.

To access the documents from the government offices, I had to apply for access through the Right to Information Act. This was taken up only later because in the earlier months, I was unaware of the wealth of documentation available in the district offices, and only later did I learn that there existed a relatively significant volume of written communication between the communities, the companies, and the state government. and 2) Right to Information (RTI) applications are associated with anti-corruption activism, so I was hesitant to submit such applications for fear that I would be perceived negatively as an 'activist' by government officials. I submitted these applications only after establishing a degree of rapport with the concerned government officials. I submitted RTI applications at the three Offices of the District Commissioner, West Siang, Upper Siang and East Siang respectively in the towns of Aalo, Yingkiong and Pasighat, the respective district headquarters. I also collected data through the same procedure at the Office of the Chief Engineer, Department of Hydropower Development (Monitoring), at Itanagar, the state capital.

3.4. Data analysis and writing

Right from the beginning of the fieldwork, I found myself interrogating and analysing my data regularly. As my study was exploratory and my approach was inductive, the constant interrogation helped me identify the next themes to investigate. Often, data analysis was necessary during the first phase of my fieldwork to reconstruct the chronology of events in the local hydropower development, and to identify important local organisations and actors. Preliminary rounds of coding allowed for tweaking of research questions and the direction of investigation.

The early exploratory conversations on the topic of hydropower development in the Shi Valley were akin to being handed different pieces of the puzzle by different informants. During this time, I struggled to accept what the data was telling me. The data did not cohere with my worldview of

large dams versus small indigenous peoples. Even as community members spoke of seeking business opportunities with the hydropower company, I continued to seek the 'voices of the marginalised'. Gradually, I admitted that the empirics were about a wider range of resource politics and not simply resistance.

After fieldwork, I proceeded with conventional qualitative analysis. The texts were initially coded descriptively and inductively. The codes were clustered around emergent themes. At this point, it became clear that my pre-fieldwork literature review was of little help to theoretically ground my findings. A fresh literature review led me to a rich vein of studies on mining, indigenous peoples, and resource politics particularly in Melanesia. It was also clear that the concept of indigeneity, which had been incidental to my investigation in the beginning, had to be engaged with to explain the findings of territoriality and place attachment.

I had to review my findings again using the emergent concepts from the second literature review. Since the level of investigation shifted from the state to the local during the final research design, and since I had conducted my preliminary scoping only at the state level, my research allowed for only one round of fieldwork. Being in the field without access to the internet and electricity meant that I could not update my literature review on the go.

3.5. Positionality and other concerns

3.5.1. The Native researcher

I was born and brought up in Arunachal. I belong to a tribe that is officially recognised as an Arunachali tribe. Besides, my tribe is also part of the same Tani cultural group as the two communities – the Ramos and the Panggis - among whom I did my fieldwork. To that extent, I was a native researcher. But at the same time, I was viewed as an outsider by the community members. I did not belong to their tribe. I did not speak their languages, and I had not grown up in their cultures. I had to rely on research assistants to conduct interviews with individuals who did not speak Hindi.

I concur with Bonner & Tolhurst that conducting social research as a native confers certain advantages, such as pre-existing knowledge of the social situation under study, or ease of establishing intimacy, which may in turn facilitate honesty (2002). I had tacit knowledge of socially acceptable behaviour. For instance, during village stays, my research assistant and I assisted in cooking meals, washing dishes etc. which gained us approval and goodwill. I could innately slip into conversations and 'read' the social and cultural script. I could pick up nuances and subtexts.

At the same time, Narayan (1993) has discussed the limits of being a 'native' researcher. while my mother-tongue Galo has a lot of similarities with Ramo and Panggi, the lexicons are significantly different. This meant that in case of interactions with older folks, I could only broadly follow the gist of conversations. I had to rely on my research assistants for the details of the content. Similarly, having worked in the state for some time, I had prior experience and knowledge of how the government offices function, and conversing in the solicitous and harmless tone of a subservient. The topic of hydropower is considered sensitive, as it is associated with the controversies of social agitation. Hence, I wanted to present myself in the most non-threatening way possible.

Being native also offered practical advantages for doing research in Arunachal on a sensitive topic like hydropower development. Some features of Arunachal as a research field make it uniquely challenging. Not only is it a border state, it is also delineated from the rest of the country with the Inner Line. The Inner Line This creates bureaucratic challenges that I noticed only when I had to facilitate a visit from my tutor at my fieldwork site. Dr. Joe Hill is a UK citizen, and for him to enter Arunachal, he needed a Restricted Area Permit. This hurdle existed for non-Arunachali Indians too, who would have had to apply for an Inner Line Permit. The Restricted Area Permit is granted for a limited time and only for a limited number of places. Aside from this, the visitor has to report to the local police station on arrival, and must not be seen to be indulging in any anti-state activity. I did not have to bother with any of this paperwork. I could simply come and go as I pleased. Considering that even I as an Arunachali was supposedly kept under friendly watch by the local branch of the State Investigation Bureau during my time in Mechukha, one can only imagine how much freedom a non-Arunachali researcher would have had to investigate the topic.

On the other hand, as a native researcher, I started my research work with certain disadvantages that I came to recognise only in hindsight. The native researcher tends to have stakes in the outcomes of the research. This was certainly so in my case. I had been engaged with the topic as an advocacy researcher and after that as a concerned citizen. I have discussed this above in the section 3.1. how this hindered my research design as well as fieldwork. Another possible disadvantage was the familiarity with the field. By this, I mean that in familiarity lay a potential risk of not picking on important data since it appeared self-evident to a native. As I was acutely aware of the second potential disadvantage, I rather self-consciously adopted a strategy to cultivate naïveté, and experience the field as strange. For instance, I would follow up answers from interviewees with request to explain themselves, especially on topics assumed to be of common knowledge. Sometimes it worked, other times it only annoyed my interviewees.

3.5.2. Positionality in Fieldwork - Tribe, Family, Gender

Being native was complicated by the intersectionality of tribal affiliation, family belonging, gender, and class. Once I entered the field and began to meet people, my ascribed attributes such as my ethnicity, my gender, and perceived class came into play. These ascribed personal and cultural attributes that are "markers of relational position in the society, rather than intrinsic qualities" (Chacko, 2004) and they constitute a researcher's positionality. Positionality mediates not only the access to the communities but also their trust. I believe that my tribal and family affiliations, and to some degree, my gender, shaped early perceptions about me during my fieldwork.

Family affiliation helped with access, especially in Itanagar and the district headquarters at both sites. Both my parents had been associated with the hydropower development process to different degrees from the opposite sides. My mother was an early contact for national-level environmental advocacy organisations. In the early 2000s, she had helped mobilise communities for fruitful public participation in the first environmental public hearing in Arunachal, which was held for the Siyom project in West Siang district. Her status as a well-regarded activist very likely transferred to me valuable social capital among the anti-dam activists, especially those outside Arunachal. My father on the other hand was a senior government technocrat. At the time of my fieldwork, he had freshly moved out from the Department of Power into another department. My connection to my father opened doors to government offices and gave access to bureaucrats and technocrats. I could even gain interviews with some hydropower developers due to my father's introduction. While family connections did ease access, it did not directly follow that information was shared freely as the topic of hydropower was sensitive to all stakeholders involved.

My tribal identity became important at the sites, especially in the Shi Valley. At the time of my fieldwork, the Shi Valley, to which the Ramos belong, was still part of the West Siang district. the Galos are inhabitants of the area around Aalo, the district headquarters. Due to proximity, the Galos have come to dominate the district level political apparatus. This has fostered low key inter-tribal resentment. At the beginning of my fieldwork, someone asked me why I was not doing the research among the Galos. Another person jokingly warned me not to write "bad things" (field notes 08/2012) about the Ramos and their area. However, as I stayed on and developed personal relationships with the community members, these a priori identity markers receded to the background.

Another potentially compounding factor was that many of my relatives on the maternal side were politically active in the district. During the period of my fieldwork, one of them was the Chief

Minister (CM) of the state. Early on in Mechukha, I was told by an informant that "(my relatives) had meddled in the Panchayat (ZPM) and MLA elections" (field notes 08/2012). However, perhaps due to the strong patriarchal and patrilineal attitudes, my extended family connections on the maternal side were generally not considered important.

At the same time, I had agency to some degree to mitigate the contras conferred by the ascribed attributes, such as gender and class. Positionality is not static and immutable. In long-duration fieldwork, the personality of the researcher mediates access and relationships much more than ascribed attributes (Moser, 2008). As a researcher I had control over self-presentation. For instance, by choosing conservative clothing of salwar kurta[3] instead of trousers and shirts, I could signal my approachability to my host community. In Mechukha, seeing me behind the shop counter of a makeshift sundry shop helping my clanswoman probably rendered me familiar and thus no longer just a Galo researcher from Itanagar or the Chief Engineer's daughter.

My gender did have some impact on my fieldwork. For instance, in Shi Valley, an interesting event to observe would have been the intimate meetings of the all-male groups where strategic decisions were discussed, and disagreements were aired. But these meetings centred around heavy consumption of alcohol into the early hours of the morning. As a woman I was not invited, nor would I have felt comfortable enough to attend such a meeting. I do think that a male researcher would have been invited to such gatherings. However, I surmise that I did not miss on vital data, as often, the participants of such meetings did not hesitate to share the contents of meetings with me. In fact, on at least two occasions, I had interviews with very hungover partners. One minor nuisance arising out of being a female in the field were the courtship and marriage proposals I was subjected to. I had to bat away jokes regarding 'bride kidnapping' occasionally. Though these were mostly made in jest, and I was somewhat protected from overt overtures (Chiswell & Wheeler, 2016) partly due to my 'advanced' age and partly due to my family affiliations, sometimes they were discomfiting. Kikon (2019) remarked on experiencing something similar in her ethnography among the foothill communities of north-eastern India living under the extractive regime of coal and oil, and she attributed it to the hypermasculine nature of the mining sites (p.128). The same could be said of the hydropower development process.

My positionality was determined not only by my specific attributes, but also by how people perceived research and researchers. For instance, pro-dam actors such as government officials,

[3] In Arunachal, the north-Indian Salwar-Kurta is a popular outfit comprising two garments – Salwar is a pair of loose fitted pants, and the kurta is a knee-length upper garment. Depending on the fabric, cut and ornamentation, the outfit can span from modest to glamorous.

political representatives, and officials of IPPs tended to be suspicious of any research on hydropower. This was because of the largely negative reporting on hydropower in popular media, as well as critical academic research on large dams and hydropower in the preceding decades. On the other hand, the local community members had encountered research either as a government exercise for population census, or more newly for environmental assessment studies of the hydropower developer. In general, cooperation with a government or company survey was transactional – in exchange of data offered by them, the community could receive material benefits through government schemes. Because of this, some members lost interest in talking to me when they realised that I had not come from the government. Villagers in Pongging had interacted with journalists earlier. To some members here, a researcher was like a journalist who could amplify their concerns. In me they saw an opportunity to be heard.

In general, most people I approached eventually wanted to share their views. Often, it took multiple conversations before individuals trusted me enough to talk honestly with me. For instance, at the Lower Siang site, a locally influential person spoke critically of hydropower project only on our third meeting, after having spent the first two meetings praising the government for the initiative. There were however a few instances where the individuals were unforthcoming, and they refused my overtures of friendship. For instance, in Pongging, an old woman was convinced that I was sent by the company to sown disunity, and she was extremely hostile to my overture. In Purying too, one man who could have been a valuable interviewee was suspicious of me since I was staying at the house of the ex-Anchal Samiti Member (ASM) instead of the GB. I would not gain his trust till the end. I am sure these gaps in data collection diminished my findings to a degree. However I think that it is the nature of qualitative research that my failure to gain the trust of some actors was also an interesting data point.

3.5.3. Ethical Considerations

The core principles of ethical research - beneficence, respect, and justice (*The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research*, 1978) have been expanded in the past decades by constructivists to protect research subjects, especially those in vulnerable positions, from potential harm; and to enhance social justice. Concerns about potential harm are even higher in research among indigenous peoples. As such, social science research is guided by an established codified code of conduct. During my fieldwork, I followed the standard practices of ethical qualitative research, such as acquiring informed consent through disclosure of my research objectives and assuring my interview partners of confidentiality. However, in my experience, informed consent and confidentiality were not simple to implement.

The principle of informed consent is not only about a one-time acquisition of assent, but also "the honest assessment of the researcher as to the risks and benefits of the research to the people participating in it" (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002, p. 217). I found this ethical benchmark more difficult to assess and achieve. Take for instance the distress my very presence caused to a few individuals in the communities. As I mentioned previously, at the start of my fieldwork, I was viewed with suspicion by almost all stakeholders. In the villages, people assumed I worked for the company, although familiarity borne from continued interactions helped establish some trust among most community members. However, individuals held on to their initial suspicion of me in a couple of instances. These individuals had negative views of the proposed dam, so they viewed my presence in the village as espionage for the company. At first, I felt that I should interview them as they had a strong anti-dam perspective. But soon I realised that there was nothing I could do to alleviate their suspicions and my attempts to interview them only caused them distress. I then decided not to impose my presence on them.

I had to similarly grapple with the goal of confidentiality as I began the writing process. At the start, I pseudonymised the identities of the individuals who appear in the text. But as the writing process progressed, I realised that while giving aliases to the actors obscured them from readers unfamiliar with the field settings, the actors themselves would be able to deduce the other actors by means of descriptors such as age and profession. On the one hand, such descriptors were necessary to bring out the nuance and heterogeneity in the community, on the other hand, it left actors vulnerable to being identified. I therefore decided to redact descriptors on a case-by-case basis when using quotations from interviews and conversations.

Early on when I began the writing process, I struggled with the responsibility of telling the stories of these communities. It is not only individuals who are at risk of harm through disclosure of personal information, but also the community as a whole in how they are portrayed in the academic text (Hopf, 2004). Writing on a politically charged topic, the researcher may feel the urge to give voice to the marginalised communities. However, when the voices in the community are heterogenous, this self-assigned task becomes wrought with dilemmas. While writing this dissertation, I have occasionally thought of one older middle-aged woman in Pongging, who said to me, "People like you (researchers) should tell them not to construct the dam". But others viewed hydropower development with cautious optimism and believed that it could bring employment opportunities for the educated younger men of the village. The accompanying responsibility of producing a text on a topic like this became even more apparent once other people kindly read drafts of my work. More than one activist whom I admired warned me of the dangers of my

findings being misused by powerful actors and policymakers as a validation of their positions to the detriment of the communities.

This brought me to the issue of ethnographic refusal (Ortner, 1995). Ethnographic refusal is a term Ortner coined to describe the reluctance of anthropologists studying resistance to engage with the internal politics of the resisting communities, thus impoverishing the analysis of resistance itself. In the passing years, attempts have been made to adopt ethnographic refusal as an empowering reflexive research method (Crampton, 2015) whereby the researcher and the researched collectively and consciously exclude the use of certain information from the academy (Zahara, 2016). However, I continued to be drawn to Ortner's admonition against "the failure of nerve surrounding questions of the internal politics of dominated groups and of the cultural authenticity of those groups", and the exhortation to appreciate the "multiplicity of projects in which social beings are always engaged, and the multiplicity of ways in which those projects feed on and well as collide with one another". (Ortner, 1995, pp. 190–191). The following chapters are an attempt to do that.

4. Hydropower Development in Arunachal Pradesh

This chapter examines some of the factors that mediate local community responses to large infrastructure development. The history of hydropower in Arunachal, the evolving policy context, and the state-level politics of hydropower contextualise community distrust in the government and project developers.

In Section 4.1, I trace the gradual rise of hydropower development from 1947 till the 2000s as an important piece of the economic Development strategy for the Arunachal. This is foregrounded against the macro-economic policy shifts at the national level as well as the state's economic dysfunction. Section 4.2 discusses the political compulsions that pushed the Government of Arunachal Pradesh (GoAP) to embrace hydropower development at the speed and scale it did. Further, it discusses how the shadow economy of hydropower development led to a perception of corruption and created a trust deficit among the affected local communities. The fall-out of this distrust in the local responses is broadly outlined in Section 4.3, and I offer a brief glimpse into the policy changes that the GoAP undertook in response.

4.1. Large Dams in Arunachal – A Short History

4.1.1. Frontier Dams in the Post-Independence Years

Compared to other parts of India, the construction of the first large dam in Arunachal was started many decades later, in the 1980s. But this was not due to an absence of the desire or intent to do so. As early as 1947, the Government of India (GOI) had proposals for the construction of a multi-purpose dam on the Siang River. The primary reason for not undertaking such a proposal was ultimately the remoteness and lack of infrastructure in the territory, which made such projects prohibitively expensive and unwieldy.

In 1947, the first proposals for multipurpose large dams on the Siang and Subansiri rivers were floated. At that time, Arunachal, then known as the North East Frontier Tracts and renamed soon after as North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), was still a part of undivided Assam (see Chapter 5.3). The large dams were conceived primarily as 'flood detention reservoirs' in order to protect the downstream Assam from the frequent floods on the Brahmaputra (Goswami, 2010). Additionally, these projects were expected to generate hydropower. However, the plans were not pursued due to inadequate data and the difficulty of doing scientific studies at that time (Goswami, 2010). Besides, a devastating earthquake of magnitude 8.6 occurred in the region in 1950, which altered the topography as well as the riverine regime significantly. The catastrophe cast doubt over the wisdom of constructing massive structures in such a geologically unstable region lying in the

hazard-prone seismic Zone V[4]. In the years to come projects on these two sites, one on the Siang and the other on the Subansiri, would be investigated time and again. In 1956, the Brahmaputra Flood Control Commission (BFCC), a Government of Assam (GoA) organisation, proposed the construction of two large multipurpose dams in NEFA – one at Gerukhamukh on the Subansiri river, the other at Rottung, on the Siang River. Over almost five decades, projects would be proposed on these very two same sites in various iterations.

Soon after, during the Second Plan period (1955-60), the hydropower potential of the territory was identified as an important economic resource by the Central Water & Power Commission (CWPC), a statutory executive body of GOI. CWPC had identified ten large hydropower sites totalling about 8,175MW, most of them on the Dibang River and its tributaries. However, no immediate plans were made to exploit the potential, as there was no load potential in the region. The National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), a GOI statutory research institution, tasked with conducting a techno-economic survey for the NEFA administration, noted that the development of large projects would not benefit the local population, as it was scattered in small concentrations across difficult terrain, and thus the transmission costs would be prohibitive; secondly, there was no local demand to sustain large scale power production. The report was optimistic that "As the Indian economy develops (and particularly the economic conditions in Assam improve), there will be more demand for power for industrial use and it would be easy to tap the cheap power resources of NEFA" (NCAER, 1967, p. 85).

Aside from the large hydro-potential, CWPC also identified potential microhydel sites at four district headquarters, namely Bomdila, Aalo (formerly known as Along), Pasighat and Tezu. Investigations at seven more sites had been proposed for the Third Plan (NCAER, 1967). However the plan for microhydel based electrification lagged partly due to the political disruption caused by Chinese aggression in 1962, partly the disinterest of the CWPC in microhydels, and partly the lack of trained manpower (NCAER, 1967).[5]

Proposals for multipurpose large dams in Arunachal were resurrected in the 1980s by the Brahmaputra Board[6]. The Board, which began its operations in 1982, prepared master plans for

[4] The National Institute of Seismology, GoI, the country classified the country into five seismic zones. Zone V is associated with the highest risks corresponding to division IX and above on the European macroseismic scale.

[5] At this point, electricity was treated as a welfare measure which had to be subsidised by the government. Diesel generators were set up to provide electricity to the newly emerging urban settlements at the district headquarters. The high costs of transportation of fuel, the low plant load factor of the generators i.e. high idle time of machinery, and the domestic nature of the power consumption meant that the power generation was highly uneconomic.

[6] The Board was set up under the Ministry of Irrigation (later renamed as Ministry of Water Resources) as per the Brahmaputra Board Act 1980. It was created as a river basin management authority, to plan and implement projects

flood control for the main Brahmaputra catchment, and in 1984, proposed two large dams at the same two sites that BFCC had identified decades ago – one on the Subansiri, and another on the Siang. As the primary purpose of these dams was to be flood control, their designs were massive. The proposed height of the dam on the Siang was 200m. The backflow at this height was expected to submerge the major urban settlements such as Yingkiong, Aalo, and Kaying in the Siang catchment (Communication from Chief Engineer, Western Zone (PWD) to DCs, 1995). Similarly, the backflow of the Subansiri would have submerged Daporijo and Dumporijo, important urban settlements in Subansiri district. Significantly, by this time, the Arunachal region had gained autonomy from Assam, and became a Union Territory under the direct administration of the President of India. This enabled the Arunachali population and the newly formed Government of AP (GoAP) to protest against the proposed dams, especially in the Siang district[7]. Consequently, the two projects were shelved one more time. The political elite of Arunachal was also thought to have disagreed "over the sharing of the windfall gains accruing from the construction of these dams", and supported the Arunachali protestors on account that the state was being denied its due share of the revenue (Goswami, 2010, pp. 391–392).

Thus, until the 1990s, success continued to elude the plans of both the GOI and the GoA to construct large dams in Arunachal. The one exception was the 405MW Ranganadi project implemented by the North Eastern Electrical Power Corporation (NEEPCO). NEEPCO, a public sector enterprise owned by the GoI, was established in 1976 for the purpose of planning, executing, and maintaining power stations in north-eastern India. It started the Survey and Investigation (S&I) for Ranganadi in 1978 and submitted the Detailed Project Report (DPR) in 1983. Environmental and Forest Clearances were received in 1985 and 1986 respectively, and the project was given administrative approval by the GOI in 1987. Construction commenced in 1988, and the dam project was commissioned in 2001. At present, it supplies power to parts of Arunachal and other north-eastern states through a network of high-voltage transmission lines.[8]

for flood management, erosion control, drainage management and water resource development in the Brahmaputra valley.

[7] By the time of my fieldwork, the erstwhile Siang district had been divided into East Siang, West Siang, Upper Siang, Lower Siang, and Siang districts. Since then, two new districts – Shi Yomi and Leparada have been created.

[8]It is interesting to note that even in the post-50,000MW initiative era when minor contestations over numerous projects erupted across the state, NEEPCO succeeded in shepherding two large dam projects, the 110 MW Pare project, and the 600MW Kameng project without controversies. Observers have commented that as NEEPCO is primarily staffed with people from Assam and the North-east, they seem to have a better grasp of the local political and cultural ethos.

4.1.2. 1990s – Liberalisation and Hydropower as Investment Opportunity

India's economic liberalisation process, which started in the early 1990s, gradually set the stage for the ambitious hydropower development in Arunachal over the next decade and a half. Liberalisation played a role in two ways – first through the rollback of central aid to the GoAP, and second through the privatisation of the power sector.

The liberalisation process included economic restructuring, which led to the gradual rollback of central aid to the GoAP. The effects of this rollback were not immediately evident in Arunachal, unlike in other states of India. In the absence of thriving primary and secondary sectors, Arunachal was and is still heavily dependent on central assistance. As a Special Category state, it was given several concessions in Plan assistance (Rao, 2004). This was mainly due to its position as a 'sensitive border state' which made it eligible for special investments. Moreover, the state and its politicians had a good rent base in the form of its forests. The numerous sawmills dotting the foothills brought in revenue for the state government on the one hand, and on the other hand, the sale of timber permits to non-Arunachali operators brought rent money into private pockets. However, by the middle of 1990s, two events coincided. The central assistance had been turned into 90% grants which needed to be matched by the GoAP with a 10% contribution to be able to utilise the central grants. At the same time, a ban on timber extraction was suddenly imposed in 1996 at the direction of the Supreme Court of India. This ban led to a tremendous decline in revenue for GoAP. The GoAP struggled to raise the resources to implement Development schemes. On occasions, it had even defaulted on salary payments for its employees. The GoAP began to feel the resource squeeze and was obliged to turn entrepreneurial to raise revenue.

While aid rollback created the impetus for the GoAP to be 'entrepreneurial', privatisation in the power sector created potential opportunities. At the national level, the GOI had begun a series of reforms meant to address the poor power situation of the country. As part of the process, the power sector undertook reforms in order to encourage private companies to set up Independent Power Producer (IPP) projects (Prayas, 2003). Even though the global discourse against large dams was beginning to grow stronger, and international institutional funders had begun to turn their backs on large dams in the late 1990s, large dams remained central to India's power strategy. The technocratic perspective on India's power scenario was that on the one hand, the national demand for power was set to rise steadily, and on the other hand, the poor 'generation mix'[9] affected the

[9]Generation mix refers to the proportion of different power sources providing base load and peaking load. While thermal and nuclear power stations are good as base load generators, hydropower is valued as a peak load provider. Failing peak load leads to power shortage, grid instability, and overall poor quality of power supply which can damage transmission as well as consumer equipment.

quality of power supply. Not only was the proportion of hydropower less than the desired optimal contribution, but it was also declining from decade to decade. Furthermore, the increasing urgency of climate change gave a green rationale to hydropower development ("India's Run-of-River Hydro," 2014).

At about this time, the GoAP started the groundwork to invite private participation (Department of Power, 1994). 81.5MW from ten small projects and 1090MW from six medium-to-large projects were identified for private participation. Given that the peak demand in the state was about 60MW, the target capacity addition was framed in terms of national progress. A departmental notification was brought out in 1994 for this purpose. It stated that "the abundant resources have to be harnessed for anticipated future demand and also for the benefit of the power-deficit country engaged in the momentous task of rapid development" (1994). Acknowledging that "Executing such huge projects involves large funds which is not easy to mobilise in the present state of nation-wide acute resource crunch", the GoAP hoped to attract the interest of private investors (1994).

A few private companies did express interest in the implementation of two large projects, but these early efforts at seeking private sector participation were not fruitful. It is likely that the challenges of project implementation in Arunachal, a state with poor infrastructure, made it unattractive for private investors. Furthermore, even though a few Indian companies had begun large hydropower implementation in states such as Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh as early as 1993, policy roadblocks at the national level, such as rationalisation of tariffs and obtaining Clearances, still needed to be smoothed out (Central Electricity Authority 2003a). The first National Hydropower Policy was formulated only in 1998. The GOI also tried to address the issues of displacement and impoverishment due to large dams through the National Resettlement and Rehabilitation Policy, that came into force in 2004.

In contrast to the failure of the early attempts at privatisation, the Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) were steadily continuing with S&I work and project preparation. Brahmaputra Board, Central Water Commission, NHPC Limited (erstwhile National Hydroelectric Power Corporation) and NEEPCO were active in all the important basins. The Subansiri and Siang projects had been revived by the Brahmaputra Board in 1994. To address submergence concerns, each project was split into three stages, and the flood control components were removed, thus making them purely hydropower projects. By 1999, NHPC was given GOI approval to conduct S&I for the preparation of DPR and take up surveys in the Lohit and Dibang basins (*Dibang Power Project*, n.d.). Simultaneously, NEEPCO was carrying out S&I and DPR preparations in the

Kameng-Subansiri basins. The public hearings for Kameng HEP and Lower Subansiri HEP were held in November 1999 and September 2001 respectively (Menon & Kohli, 2005). Clearances for other mega-projects[10] on the Subansiri and the Siang were also trickling through.

It was fait accompli that these agencies would also implement the projects for which they had undertaken S&I (see Annexure I). In 1999, the GOI instructed NHPC to start the preparation of feasibility reports for two large projects – the Dibang and the Subansiri (Lower) projects. Although electricity is a concurrent subject under the Indian Constitution, it was the GOI which directed the statutory bodies to conduct S&I, and allotted projects to them. The state governments were supposed to ensure smooth processes such as land acquisition and the resettlement and rehabilitation of project-affected persons. The GoAP was expected to rubberstamp the decisions of the GoI. This division of labour – GoAP leadership for small HEPs and GOI leadership for large projects lasted till the mid-2000s.

4.1.3. Early 2000s - the 50,000MW Initiative and early contestations

Moving ahead with its hydropower exploitation plans, the GOI tasked the Central Electricity Authority (CEA) to identify projects for implementation. In 2001, a Preliminary Ranking Study of 399 potential hydro sites was carried out. Out of this list, 162 projects were allotted to seven PSUs for Prefeasibility Report (PFR) preparation which were to serve as a basis for prioritising projects for implementation, as well as a basis for further S&I and DPR preparation (Central Electricity Authority, 2003a). Based on its outcome, in May 2003, the 50,000MW Initiative was launched by India's Prime Minister in a bid to substantially increase the power production portfolio of the country (Central Electricity Authority, 2003a). Under this initiative, 42 projects in Arunachal were identified to be taken up in the 12th Plan period (Central Electricity Authority, 2003b).

Although the preparation document said that projects "could be offered for development to prospective entrepreneurs in India and abroad" (Central Electricity Authority, 2003b, p. 18), it appears that the PSUs which had conducted the PFRs for the prospective sites expected to be allocated these projects. For instance, NHPC declared that it intended to implement projects with a combined installed capacity of 25,000MW ("NHPC turns to NE," 2003). Of course, its repertoire of projects included those under S&I and DPR preparation predating the projects listed under the 50,000MW Initiative.

[10] The 'Mega' status was a regulatory classification awarded to projects over 350MW in Arunachal as per its Hydropower Policy. This status makes projects eligible for certain concessions such as tax breaks and no custom duties on capital equipment.

This early phase lends itself to a classic political economy reading. The narrative and the push for hydropower was led by the GOI and its PSUs. As Himanshu Thakkar, a well-respected activist monitoring water resource projects in India pointed out, "the Central Government and its institutions like NEEPCO, NHPC and Brahmaputra Board, and water and power ministries" were making the relevant decisions, while the people of the region were bystanders (2002). Even so, in the early 2000s, the GoAP was amenable to rubber-stamping the large projects at the behest of the GOI. During the period from 1999-03 when Mukut Mithi was the Chief Minister (CM), the GoAP signed two Memoranda of Agreement (MoAs) with the NHPC, including for the Dibang Multipurpose project in his constituency. A few years later, this project would become the site for sustained local resistance.

The earliest concerns by civil society groups converged around the NHPC projects. Environmentalist groups from outside the state[11] flagged issues regarding the construction of large dams in a seismically active and critical biodiversity hotspot (Menon et al., 2003). The concerns stemmed from the region's ecological significance as well as its tribal population which was largely dependent on traditional natural resource-based livelihoods (Anon, 2005). Many of these groups had been previously part of social movements against large dams in other parts of India and continued to monitor the GOI's dam-building. Their worries were therefore partly founded on past experiences, as scholar-activists belonging to Lokayan wrote "The existing dams clearly foretell what the negative impacts of the present proposals will be. These dams have irreversibly damaged the fragile ecosystems of the region. … This destruction has directly affected the livelihood of many communities in the vicinity." (Kothari & Wangkheirakpam, 2003).

At the first north-eastern 'Regional Consultation on Dams and Development' in 2001, facilitated by Delhi-based organisations, there were no civil society representatives from Arunachal. Environmental issues and impacts of Development and infrastructure projects were not a priority for the Arunachali people in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This was in part due to a lack of awareness regarding the impending projects and plans of the GOI, in part because of the absence of civil society groups[12], and in part due to the disinterest of the public in environmental issues[13].

[11]The January-March 2003 special issue of The Ecologist Asia, a well-regarded magazine in environmentalist circles, titled Large dams in Northeast India: Rivers, Forests, People and Power, can be considered to be the first alarm sounded regarding the GOI's hydropower ambitions for the region.

[12]According to a study by the Centre for Environment Education-North East, in 1999 (cited in a JNU Thesis on Assam movements), there were only six NGOs in Arunachal, out of which only one – CEDGE – was concerned with environmental issues.

[13]In the 1990s, as deforestation accelerated due to the overharvesting of timber, there was absolutely no discussion within the political establishment or among the public. It did not even register as a concern in the public mind.

The national and regional groups initiated contact with receptive individuals in Arunachal and attempted to raise awareness and build advocacy capacities at the same time. "Back then, there was little news in the public domain about projects proposed for the region. … It was clear that all the planning and decision-making was taking place in Delhi and NGOs or citizens' groups in the region had no clue of it." (Menon & Kohli, 2005).

Due to the efforts of both national and regional advocacy groups, Itanagar-based NGOs such as Arunachal Citizens' Rights, a governance reforms advocacy group, and CEDGE[14], an environmental advocacy group, joined the network of organisations contesting the large dams in Arunachal and the North East. In 2004, these groups launched information campaigns regarding the risks of large hydropower development in the Middle Siyom belt before the public hearing and took part in the hearing[15]. In 2005, the third meeting of the South Asian Solidarity for Rivers and People (SARP), a jamboree of NGOs resisting large dams in the sub-continent, was held in Nirjuli, Arunachal. Through interactions with other activist groups, the urban activists of Arunachal adopted the discourse of environmental degradation and the vulnerability of indigenous peoples to demographic pressure by the in-migration of non-indigenous workers from outside the state, as well as concerns of displacement. I believe that during this period, activists were prepared to block the projects using the same strategies that had worked in the 1990s – to prevent financial institutions from funding these projects through highly visible transnational advocacy.

During this period of incipient contestations against large hydropower development, the then CM of Arunachal, Gegong Apang made a public statement that the state would proceed with caution regarding such projects, especially those involving large reservoirs, to avoid the negative consequences such as submergence of large tracts of land and the displacement of people. He said no to storage projects altogether ("Apang Decision Stumps Delhi," 2005). Apang had been the CM when Arunachali communities had rejected the Siang and Subansiri flood control dams proposed by the Brahmaputra Board. Perhaps it was this experience that made him reject the latest push from the GOI to develop large dams in Arunachal. It is also possible that he decided to demonstrate his authority as the CM of the state, as he had already been chafing at the top-down decision-making of the GOI and the unilateral behaviour of the NHPC (Rina, 2005), and had been resisting the creation of a centralised North East River Valley Authority. The national and international network of activists believed for a short time that Arunachal had narrowly

[14]Both my parents were founding members of CEDGE, and my mother participated in the grassroots awareness raising against the Middle Siang project. She also participated in the 2004 public hearing.
[15]These groups did not make any attempts to block the conduct of public hearings. The Middle Siyom was granted Environmental Clearance in 2005.

escaped being inundated with large dams. The International Rivers Network, an international NGO known for its advocacy against dams, sent Apang an appreciative letter saying "We congratulate you to your realistic assessment of the dangers of large dams and want to support you in your assessment of alternative options to meet energy needs (sic)" (Schneider, 2005).

By the mid-2000s, two mega-projects were on the verge of implementation. The Lower Subansiri project under NHPC had been granted clearance in 2004 and was launched in 2005. The 600MW Kameng by NEEPCO also got Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs clearance in December 2004. The DPR was ready for the third project, Middle Siyom, also under NHPC and its public hearing was proposed for 2004.

4.1.4. 2004 onwards - The Deluge of Hydropower Projects

Soon after the announcement to proceed cautiously on large dams, the GoAP formulated its first large hydropower policy (*Hydro Electric Power Policy-Gazette*, 2005). Having laid the groundwork, the GoAP signed five Memoranda of Agreement (MoA) with three private companies in February 2006. All five projects – 500MW Hirong, 1600MW Siang Lower[16], 1000MW Naying, 1000MW Siyom and 700MW Tato II – had been under exploration by the NHPC and were at advanced stages of project preparation. The DPRs had been prepared for the Siyom and Siang Lower projects, and the environmental clearance had already been acquired for Siyom after the conduct of the public hearing. Further, PFRs had been prepared for the other three projects by the NHPC under the 50,000MW Initiative (Bhaskar, 2006). As the CM, Apang allotted 14 projects to private companies during a one-year period. These projects were from the CEA shortlist of feasible tariff. The average size of the allotted projects was 662MW, with five projects above the size of 1,000MW. The total installed capacity of 9,275MW was signed off to the private sector.

The rationale of the Apang government for approving the mega-projects was that these projects were run-of-river schemes, and therefore environmentally benign. To be fair, the shift to pure hydropower projects did mean that these projects no longer had to have reservoirs that led to large-scale submergence and displacement of populations. Aside from the technical rationale, it appeared that the CM considered private companies to be more amenable to his terms and conditions as opposed to the NHPC (Bhaskar, 2006). Aside from agreeing to give 12% of the generated power free of cost to the GoAP, the companies also agreed to pay a non-refundable upfront premium as a signing amount (See Annexure II for an example of a MoA). When the Lower Siang project was withdrawn from NHPC and a new MoA was signed with a private

[16]The installed capacity was later optimised to 2700MW after new hydrological studies.

developer, it was alleged that this was because the NHPC had been unable or unwilling to pay the upfront premium. In September 2006, likely as a conciliatory gesture towards the GOI, five MoAs were signed with PSUs.

These developments unfolded under great secrecy and uncertainty. Let alone the local communities who would be affected by the projects, even the political representatives of the areas, where the projects were located, were kept in the dark regarding the contents of the agreements. For instance, a veteran political leader from one of the constituencies lying in the impact zone of Lower Siang claimed that he learned about the allotment of the project to the company Shaktidhara much later, only when the information came out in the public domain through a Right To Information (RTI) request[17] (field notes 2012). It is therefore interesting to note that almost all the projects that came to be strongly resisted by local communities, e.g. the Lower Siang HEP and the Nyamjangchu HEP, were from this first batch of projects allotted under the then CM Apang. Of these, the case of Lower Siang HEP is examined in Chapter 7.

In April 2007, Dorjee Khandu, who had been the Power Minister in Apang's cabinet, launched a successful contest for leadership of the government and replaced Apang as the CM. According to US Cables released by Wikileaks, Apang's unilateral decision to hand over NHPC's projects under development to private companies may have convinced the GOI to side with the political dissidents and thus paved the way for the transfer of power (Wikileaks, 2007). On the other hand, it was also rumoured that private companies, unhappy with Apang's intent to limit hydropower development in the state, funded Khandu's challenge, as Khandu was perceived to be enthusiastic about maximally exploiting Arunachal's hydropower potential.

Under Khandu's leadership, the pace of signing MoAs accelerated. In the first year[18] of his leadership, the GoAP signed 52 MoAs. Among these were the three projects by Endor Energy, one of my case studies which will be described in Chapter 8.[19] The MoA signing spree of the GoAP prompted the Minister of Environment and Forests, GOI, to remark on the 'MoU virus' that had bitten the GoAP (Baviskar, 2010).

[17] Under the Right to Information Act, a citizen of India can file an application for information from any public authority. Since its enactment in 2005, the RTI has become an important tool for those seeking transparency and accountability in the public sphere, giving rise to what is called RTI activism.

[18] In India, the official financial year runs from the 1st of April to the 31st of March of the following year.

[19] According to an industry insider, the company Endor Energy was able to get a foot through the door because of the recommendation of a powerful politician who had been approached by an associate of the company. This was confirmed by the concerned politician in a personal communication. At the same time, somewhat contradictorily, the politician asserted that he would have liked the projects to have been allocated through the global tender bidding route.

Emboldened by the unabated interest of private companies, and the attraction of upfront premiums (see section 4.3.1 below), the Khandu government encouraged companies to prospect for potential project sites themselves, going way beyond the CEA list. Till April 2011, when Khandu died in a helicopter accident, the GoAP had allotted nearly 150 projects to private sector IPPs. Many of these private companies that entered the Arunachali hydropower market were new entrants to the sector, with no previous experience in planning and execution of hydropower projects and were making a lateral entry from irrigation projects. A few companies did not even have experience in infrastructure development in other sectors. This would later cause issues of conflicting project areas for private companies, leading to delays in project investigations. According to a government official involved with the sector, "Almost all of the projects allotted to IPPs have been on the sole recommendation of elected representatives of people, implying the apparent agreement of the people for implementation of the projects in their area and subsequent approval of the CM /Cabinet" (government official, personal communication, 2021).

It bears noting that in this MoA-signing spree under Khandu, except for the 3,000MW Demwe project, the average size of the allotted projects was just 65.7MW. This is in stark contrast to the massive projects allotted under the leadership of Apang. For the GoAP, the Endor projects were part of a raft of projects that were handed out in the subsequent rounds of privatisation of hydropower development. The upfront premium charges for the signing of MoAs were significantly increased.

Initially, the GoAP had little in-house capacity to advise and coordinate efforts on hydropower development in the state. A civil construction wing headed by the Superintending Engineer (Civil) was established under the Department of Power (DOP), Government of AP, in May 1994. The said Civil wing under DOP with limited supporting staff and field functionaries was upgraded in the year 2003 as the Department of Hydro Power, Arunachal Pradesh (DoHP, AP), tasked with the development of small, mini and micro hydropower projects besides other civil works. In early 2009 the DoHP AP was expanded with the addition of a Monitoring wing under the Chief Engineer (Monitoring) with a complement of supporting staff. The newly appointed CE (M) came to be the official entity authorised to "facilitate implementation of the projects already allotted and keep track as to their progress by regular interaction with the project proponents post-allotment and also with the GOI" (government official, personal communication, 2021).

4.2. Hydropower as White Gold – Powering the Ecoomy

We saw above that by the mid-2000s, the GoAP had reassessed hydropower as a natural resource to be exploited with the help of the private sector, and to be exported out of the state for the benefit of the exchequer. The hydropower sector pivoted to an extractive industry.

4.2.1. Hydropower as state revenue

Baruah has suggested that the support of the Arunachali elite for hydropower development was in fact a product of the Developmentalist discourse pushed by the Indian state in an effort to "assert control over this frontier region" (2003, p. 918). This may have been so right in the early 2000s, but at the same time, the Arunachali political elite learned soon that hydropower development could be the key to economic self-reliance. In section 4.1.2 above, I discussed how the structural changes and the timber ban of the 1990s had constrained the cash flow for Arunachal. GoAP soon realised that once the numerous hydropower projects were completed and commissioned, encashing the 12% free power at market rates would give it a reliable and perennial revenue stream in the longer term. The GoAP has claimed that if all the projects were to be developed, the state would generate annual revenues of 9541.00 crores by 2022-23 from the sale of free power amounting to 5339.11 MW (presentation by Department of Hydropower Development, GoAP). For perspective, the total budgetary outlay in 2008-09 was INR 2,065 crore (PTI 2008). According to Khandu, the hydropower potential of the state was to be the "bedrock for the State's socio-economic development… The revenue generated through the free power would make our State self-sufficient and self-reliant besides providing ample job opportunities for our people." (S. Talukdar, 2010).

By the middle of the 2000s, the cash crunch for GoAP worsened. In the same period, GoAP faced at least three financial problems that were also politically volatile. These were the Public Distribution System (PDS) crisis, the APEX Bank[20] crisis, and the Sixth Pay Commission recommendations (Mimi, 2013). The crisis of the Apex Bank was particularly volatile politically, as bad loans were mainly to state politicians[21], and it threatened to sink the savings of many citizens. In this scenario, the liquid cash from the IPPs in the form of upfront premiums and processing fees was a much-needed financial relief. The upfront premiums and processing fees were a non-refundable amount that the IPPs deposited into the state coffers at the time of the signing of the MoAs. The CM Dorjee Khandu said once that he was able to rescue the Apex Bank, and thus the

[20] The Apex Bank is a public bank owned by the Government of Arunachal Pradesh.

[21] These bad loans were related to a scam concerning the public distribution system (PDS). This was another crisis for the GoAP, as the PDS crisis could lead to food shortage in many of the poorer and remote administrative blocks.

Financial year	Chief Minister (CM)	Installed capacity (in MW)	MoAs signed		Upfront premium (in Crores)*
			Public	Private	
>1999			1	0	0
1999-03	Mukut Mithi	2000	2	0	0
2003-04	Mithi (Jul)/ Gegong Apang (Aug)		0	0	0
2004-05	Gegong Apang		0	0	0
2005-06	Gegong Apang	5900		5	14.88
2006-07	Gegong Apang	10880	5	8	40.72
2007-08	Dorjee Khandu	6891		51	347.20
2008-09	Dorjee Khandu	8078.5		33	519.62
2009-10	Dorjee Khandu	3804.8		26	229.16
2010-11	Dorjee Khandu	3059<		15<	181.00
	Jarbom Gamlin	Unavailable	Unavailable	Unavailable	
2011-12	Nabam Tuki	Unavailable	Unavailable	Unavailable	56.24
2012-13	Nabam Tuki	Unavailable	Unavailable	Unavailable	1.49
2013-14	Nabam Tuki	Unavailable	Unavailable	Unavailable	52.46
2014-15	Nabam Tuki	Unavailable	Unavailable	Unavailable	52.03

savings of many thousand people of Arunachal, through the money received for the Dibang Valley project. Similarly, the GoAP was able to implement the Sixth Pay Commission recommendations for its employees because of the revenue accrued from the upfront premiums.

. Table 4.1 Annual collection of upfront premium (collated from a news report by Taba Ajum (2013).

However, in the longer run, the channelling of the signing amounts and upfront premium into short-term expenses eroded the GoAP's ability to terminate MoAs for projects which were

rejected by the host communities. For the GoAP, hydropower development thus was a lifeline for its economic survival.

4.2.2. The shadow economy of hydropower development

Aside from the overboard upfront premium which went to the exchequer of GoAP, it is widely rumoured that a parallel flow of money into private hands grew out of the hydropower project allotment. The secrecy around the first MoAs did not help in dispelling the suspicions of wrongdoing by the state actors. Apang, the first CM to introduce the practice of charging upfront premiums, was thought to have kept the per MW rate of premiums deliberately low, and for that, it was speculated that he had received kickbacks. The GoAP under the CMs to follow – Dorjee Khandu, Jarbom Gamlin and Nabam Tuki – continued to maintain the opacity. This secrecy was so pervasive that activists had to invoke the Right to Information Act at a considerable financial cost to themselves, in order to get any information from the GoAP (Dharmadhikary, 2008). This unwillingness to share information with the public contributed to the negative perception of the motives of the GoAP and its functionaries (e.g. Dodum, 2015).

Other factors also contributed to the perception of corruption. The first was that the GoAP ignored its own norms and policies when allotting projects. For instance, contra its own stated policy, most allotments were not given out through a bidding process (Deka, 2010). The Agreements were also in contravention of the National policy that the state government could not allot projects above 100MW and that bidders could not agree to share free power above 13%.

Secondly, the general profile of the companies securing allotments in Arunachal failed to add confidence in any earnest intent on the part of the GoAP. Bar a handful of large power companies, most other IPPs had no experience in the hydropower sector or even the energy sector. Many were Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) companies based in Andhra Pradesh, a southern Indian state, where they had gained some experience in irrigation dams and construction, but had no experience in the power sector or financing and operating projects[22] (Rajshekhar, 2013b). Other companies were speculators who wanted to acquire allotments and later sell them to serious developers at a profit. Some were even tourism companies. This lack of discernment in allotting projects fuelled the perception that the GoAP was not sincere about developing the state's

[22]It was thought that for many of these companies, acquiring the allotments for project sites in Arunachal was a means for laundering black money made through deals in Andhra Pradesh, and that they were not earnest about developing the projects per se.

hydropower potential, but rather for overt and covert fundraising. All IPPs, bar one, are Indian organisations.[23] These companies are alleged to have paid bribes to the tune of 5-6,00,000 INR/MW[24] over and above upfront premiums (Rajshekhar, 2013c).

However, unlike Apang, Khandu managed to earn the support of the political establishment because he supposedly widened the range of 'beneficiaries' of the kickbacks to include representatives of the concerned catchments as well as technocrats and bureaucrats[25]. As recounted by a state politician, Khandu doled out cash to villagers on his tours around the state, in what can only be called a 'direct cash transfer' (Rajshekhar, 2013a). It is also alleged that a significant proportion of the kickbacks from the MoA deals were funnelled into the Indian National Congress (INC) party coffers, especially before the 15th General Elections conducted between April and May 2009 (Singh, 2013). The good relationship Khandu shared with the INC high command is evidenced by the size of the INR 20,000 crore aid that the Prime Minister announced for Arunachal in 2008. This may have been the reason that after Khandu assumed leadership, the state-level political climate remained relatively stable.

4.3. Emergent Local Politics

The host communities for proposed projects, especially the early mega-projects, learned about the projects through word-of-mouth. Details about the scope of the projects and their potential impacts on the communities were scarce. On the other hand, rumours about the improper conduct of the GoAP and the political classes in Itanagar circulated. Their situation was made even more precarious by the absence of any policy safety net for compensation and restitution. It is important to note that when the hydropower projects were being rolled out, the GoAP had almost no socio-economic remedial policies. It was only in 2008 that the GoAP formulated a Resettlement and Rehabilitation Policy. Its Hydro Electric Power Policy formulated in 2005 was also rudimentary[26].

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[23] Endor Energy, a French firm whose projects were a part of this/my study, was the lone international organisation. One MLA who was briefly the Chief Minister and was the Power Minister during the period of MOA signing, said that he would have liked the projects to be tendered at the global level. It was rumoured that Endor was able to get these projects solely because of the recommendation of this MLA.

[24] At 2008 exchange rates, 5,00,000 INR was about 7900€ per MW. In 2008-09, MOAs for more than 8000MW total installed capacity were signed. That represents a shadow transaction of more than 63,200,000€.

[25] A technocrat who had briefly been the Secretary, the Department of Power, GoAP, told me that during his tenure, a minister had requested him to clear the allotment of a project to a private company. It was indicated that that he would be 'taken care of', a euphemism for financial kickbacks. The technocrat claimed that the MoA was cleared anyway, as there were no grounds to block it. He further claimed that there was no need for offering any inducement.

[26] An example of its fuzziness was the fact that although it was formulated with the intent to allot large projects to private companies, the document barely mentions this. In fact, it gives the impression that IPPs were being sought for projects under 25MW.

4.3.1. Earl community responses

In 2007, the first signs of local contestation against the GoAP's hydropower programme emerged in Lower Dibang Valley district ("Disquiet in Dibang," 2008). The then 3000MW Dibang Multipurpose Project was one of the older projects greenlighted before the 50,000MW Initiative was launched in 2004. The project had been long in development by NHPC.

The Dibang was one of the 17 large hydropower projects planned in the Dibang catchment, mainly on the traditional territories of the Idu Mishmis.

> DIBANG MULTIPURPOSE PROJECT
>
> At 278 m, the gravity dam for the Dibang Multipurpose project will be the tallest in India. The high dam is necessitated by its function as flood moderation, which requires an enormous storage for seasonal flow spikes.
> The backflow of the reservoir will be 43 Km, and it is expected to submerge 4009 Ha of land. Besides, an additional 5827.8 Ha of land is needed. 1877 individuals belonging to 43 villages of the Idu Mishmi tribe will be affected. Per the 2001 census, the total population of the Idu Mishmis was 11,023. This project will impact more than 15% of the population directly. However, as there is little direct displacement, the proponents of the projects have labelled it 'economically viable'. (Summary Based on Mimi (2013))

The project had been first cleared for public hearing in May 2007. Popular resistance was mobilised by the Idu Students' Union and the Idu Mishmi Cultural and Literary Society, a civil society body comprising the intelligentsia of the community ("Villagers set RR Policy 2007," 2010). The main argument of the movement leaders was that the cumulative in-migration due to 17 large and mega-dam projects would completely upturn the social and political lives of the indigenous Idus, who would be vastly outnumbered by the in-migrants. The movement against the Dibang project succeeded in thwarting the conduct of public hearings a record 14 times (Mimi, 2013).

Between 2007 and 2009, it appeared that a popular anti-dam resistance was growing in the state. Besides the resistance against the Dibang, contestations were emerging elsewhere in the state too. Local resistance against the Lower Siang project appeared to be growing in 2008. The Demwe Lower Project in the Lohit district was similarly greeted with opposition from the local landowners. The fourth instance of resistance, the movement against the Nyamjangchu in Tawang, arose after the conduct of public hearings and the handing over of Techno-Economic Clearance and Environmental Clearance.

4.3.2. State Government's responses

As if in response to the burgeoning dissatisfaction among the local communities, in 2008 the GoAP overhauled the State Hydropower Policy (*Address of Chief Minister*, 2009). This version included provisions for the creation of a Local Area Development Fund through the allotment of 1% free power from the project. Similarly, clauses for job reservations for local people and contractors were inserted. The State Legislature also devised the first Rehabilitation and Resettlement (R&R) Policy in 2008 based on the National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy 2007. The state R&R Policy was tailored to the specific conditions of the hill populations. For instance, while the national policy recommended that an area would be declared as project-affected', only when 200 or more families are involuntarily displaced, the state policy sharply reduced this number to twenty. This was more in line with the demographic realities of the hills. The R&R Policy also specified detailed provisions on land for land compensation and ex-gratia payments for financial compensation, financial assistance for the self-employed, and transportation grants for the displaced.

When the provisions of the State R&R Policy were criticised by affected communities as being inadequate, the GoAP promptly amended the R&R Policy to reflect these concerns. For instance, whereas the 2008 policy stated that "Each of the affected families who are rendered landless after acquisition shall be provided an ex-gratia grant of Rs. 50,000", this was changed to "Each of the affected families… shall be provided an ex-gratia grant of **such amount as the State Authority may decide but not less than** Rs. 50,000 (emphasis mine)."

This apparent responsiveness could be partly due to the intimacy of electoral politics in the state (discussed in Chapter 6) which made it difficult for the GoAP and the political elite to ignore the concerns of the local communities. In part, it was also because the de facto land ownership rights rested with the local communities, and the GoAP needed the cooperation of the communities to push the hydropower agenda forward.

On the other hand, the GoAP was willing to concede only so much ground. In 2008, the Chief Minister in his Independence Day address accused the activists who protested hydropower projects of being anti-Development and anti-national, thus signalling to local communities that dissent had no place in the hydropower discourse of Arunachal. The GoAP's response to the anti-dam protests against the Nyamjangchu and the Lower Siang demonstrated that cancellation of projects was not on the table. This can be attributed to two possible causes in turn. The first is the cancellation of the MoAs would have exposed the GoAP to legal proceedings from the IPPs,

which it likely did not want to face. Secondly, many among the political elite genuinely believed that exploiting Arunachal's hydropower potential was its best bet for prosperity, and conceding to community demands for project cancellation at one site could start a flurry of similar demands.

Against this constrained responsiveness of the GoAP, local host communities appraised the potential impacts of hydropower projects on their lives and livelihoods and strategised their responses (this is explored in detail in Chapters 7 and 8). This is not to say that anti-dam sentiments were widespread in Arunachal to begin with, or that budding anti-dam resistance struggles withered in the absence of political opportunity. Rather to the contrary, aside from the handful of resistance movements mentioned above, most host communities viewed the arrival of hydropower projects in their areas positively. In fact, amid the MoA signing rush, some communities even appealed to the GoAP that some projects should be implemented in their valleys too.

In the case of the Dibang Project, in March 2013, the public hearings were finally conducted successfully. I was able to attend one of the public hearings in Roing town, and there I met with a few key actors of the anti-dam movement. They cited movement fatigue and great personal cost to the movement leaders as the main factors for the gradual decline of the anti-dam movement. However, they were also cognisant that the movement lost support among the affected residents of the host villages after the Resettlement & Rehabilitation Policy came into effect ("Villagers set RR Policy 2007," 2010). Finally in March 2022, the compensation amounts were disbursed to the affected community members.

4.3.3. Contestations amidst cooperation?

Other than a handful of sites such as the Dibang, Lower Siang and Nyamjangchu, local[27] responses to hydropower development plans ranged from ambivalent to positive across the state, although there is variability of support over time.[28] One measure of the absence of outright contestation against the hydropower projects was the reportage or lack of it, in local media. It was common practice for actors to organise themselves around issues into formal groups and send press releases to the media, which were then published as news. Since the local media in Arunachal were highly

[27]Here, I refer to the contestations by communities within Arunachal only. Since 2013, contestations by communities in Assam against these projects have strengthened.

[28] This appears to be a phenomenon more common than reported in literature. Aside from my two main studies, I visited three other sites of contests – the Dibang project and the Lower Demwe Projects in Arunachal, and the Allain Duhangan Project in Himachal Pradesh. Rapid and random conversations with local community members revealed a wide range of responses to hydropower development, with a tendency towards cautious conditional support for hydropower development. Local communities were especially cognizant of the economic opportunities that such projects brought.

supportive of anti-dam movements, as some of the leading journalists themselves were anti-dam activists, there was no reason to suspect that news of contestation was suppressed.

The other measure was the conduct of public hearings, of which many more were conducted than not in the period till 2013. Under the Indian environmental governance regime, the conduct of public hearings is mandatory for a project to be given Environmental Clearance, one of the many Clearances that a project needs to garner. While scholarship tends to view public hearings as a space for the participation of affected communities in environmental governance, at the local level, community members take a more pragmatic view. Having come to realise the importance of public hearings for the IPPs, local communities leveraged the hearings to negotiate for material benefits for the community. In the period before the public hearing, community actors tended to issue their demands in the form of representations to relevant government bodies such as the Arunachal Pradesh State Pollution Control Board (APSPCB), or to the Chief Minister himself. The document sent to the APSPCB as a call for comments on the Environmental Impact Assessment report of the Lower Demwe project in 2009 is one such example. More than 20 representations were sent in the name of the various clans of the Digaru Mishmi tribe residing in the zone of impact and beyond of the hydropower project (Arunachal Pradesh State Pollution Control Board 2009). A typical representation was as follows:

> … We, the public of Wakro circle are in favour of the construction of the project. All the Public leaders and public of wakro [sic] circle after discussion have a few grievances which are given below:-
>
> All jobs and business opportunities priority should be given to local Public [sic] of the concern [sic] area.
>
> We request the Project authorities along with the Govt. for the development of Wakro circle area as per the request made by the Public of respective villages.

This was then followed by a wish list that enumerates desires such as infrastructure like 'renovation of Wakro township water supply', and 'solar light and gas cylinder for BPL persons' (Arunachal Pradesh State Pollution Control Board 2009 p.80-84). Another representation offers a more critical perspective – it raised the issue of the environmental and social costs of allowing such a project, like 'impact on demographic profile, health and culture of indigenous population', (p.36). It also critiqued the performance of dams across the world and in India but then suggested that in lieu of bearing these costs and the risks of seismicity, members of the affected communities should benefit in the form of contracts for 'building construction, road construction, supply works,

construction of an engineering college in the area, bridge and 'Hospital 60 Bedded at Demwe with modern facilities', 'fishing right on the reservoir' etc.

At the same time, it is interesting to note that despite the support for the projects, these projects were still marred by strong local conflicts, which even turned violent sometimes. While the communities were in broad support of hydropower development, it did not naturally follow that they cooperated fully with the IPPs and the government agencies. There was mistrust of the intentions of the IPPs and the government. At the community level, discussions around land acquisition and monetary compensation for land loss often hit a roadblock because of this trust deficit. Local communities wanted the process to be directly between themselves and the company, without any intervention from the state government. They feared that if the process of land acquisition were mediated by the GoAP, the government functionaries would end up funnelling the bulk of the money to themselves, leaving little for the villagers.

4.4. Chapter Summary

This chapter dealt with the mediating factors that shaped the social acceptance of hydropower development programme in general and individual projects among the various sections of the Arunachali society.

The policy and political context of large hydropower development in Arunachal today diverged radically from the political economy of large dam building in the last decades of the 20th century. Although the state's vast hydropower potential was recognised early in the post-independence years, its exploitation was not prioritised due to the prohibitive investments. It was only in the 1980s that large dam construction in Arunachal was seriously considered. At first, the large dams were intended for flood protection in downstream Assam. By the 1990s, hydropower became the main rationale for large dam planning. As the large dam agenda shifted from flood control towards hydropower development, the well-known negative impacts of large dams such as submergence and displacement were significantly scaled down. Besides, GoAP wrested control over decision-making from the GOI and its statutory bodies, by allotting projects to IPPs. The emergent extractive characteristic of hydropower in AP, as well as the policy evolution on the Resettlement and Rehabilitation front, set it apart from the 20th-century experience of indigenous peoples against large dams in India.

At the same time, the hasty and secretive privatisation of the state's hydropower sector without public debate led to perceptions of corruption and trust deficit. Conflicts emerged in a handful of affected areas as local communities rejected the GoAP's programme. Although the GoAP

demonstrated some responsiveness to grassroots concerns, it was fait accompli that under no circumstances would the projects be cancelled.

By and large though, hydropower projects were received with cautious support at many more sites than with resistance. To understand this phenomenon, it is necessary to understand the historic entrenchment of the practice of Development in Arunachal Pradesh and the consequent socio-economic and political changes in the indigenous lives. These are discussed in the next two chapters.

5. The Tribes and Development

Community characteristics such as their livelihoods bases, dependence on natural resources, and their economic and political marginality within the national schema can determine how they perceive disruptive projects like extractives and infrastructure. The Arunachali experience was generally at variance with the dominant narratives on indigenous experiences worldwide and in neighbouring north-east Indian states. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss how the specific characteristics of the indigenous Arunachali communities emerged in the context of their particular historical experience of Development. They set out to understand the experience of Arunachali communities as indigenous peoples in India, with a particular focus on the Siang region in the central part of the state.

While in Chapter 6, I provide an ethnographic account of the socio-economic and political lives of two communities in the present day based on my fieldwork, this chapter looks back at the historical processes, particularly that of the State-led Development, that shaped the modern-day lives of the indigenous peoples of Arunachal. In Section 5.1, drawing primarily from secondary sources, I establish a baseline of the tribal social, economic, and political lives at the time of colonial contact. In Section 5.2, I touch upon the relatively benign policies of the colonial government towards the frontier tribes that left them on the eve of independence remarkably unscathed by phenomena such as dispossession, disempowerment and de-territorialisation suffered by other indigenous communities under colonialism. Section 5.3 is an exploration of the era of state-led Development under the stewardship of the post-colonial government of India. Here, I examine in some detail the social, economic and political Development programmes that have had consequential impacts on the lives of the communities.

This chapter is not an exhaustive account that holds true for every tribe of Arunachal. The state's population comprises many small and medium-sized tribes, distinguished by languages, food and religious practices – there are affiliates to Tibetan cultural sphere, others with similarities to Southeast Asian Buddhist culture, and there are singular liminal groups. Because of their specific geographical and cultural circumstances, different tribes had different historical experiences. For instance, while tribes in the west who raided the plains in Assam were rewarded with peace-offerings, Mishmis in the East, who traded their produce, were subjugated and attempts were made to bring them under the colonial taxation regime (Luthra, 1971b). Even different tribal groups in various sections of the foothills had varied encounters with the State (see Kikon, 2019). Therefore, it is near impossible to offer one overarching account. At the same time, the experiences of the

Ramos and the Panggis represent two ends of the range of the Arunachali indigenous encounter with modernity.

5.1 The Stateless Tribes

Up until 1947, a large proportion of the tribes[29] that comprise the present-day population of the Siang region lived beyond the pale of state dominion. Bounded in the north and the south by the Tibetan and the Ahom kingdoms respectively, most tribes inhabiting the vast stretch of land in between were mostly left to themselves by the adjoining States. Only the tribes at the edges of the kingdoms had relatively more contact. These tribes were considered savages by their neighbours. The Ahoms called some of their northern neighbours 'Abor' or 'uncivilised'. Similarly, the Tibetans called the southern territories Klo-yul or 'barbarous country' (Sun, 1993, p. 7) and its people as Klo-pa or 'barbarous people'[30] (T. Huber, 1992, p. 10). The present-day Ramos, residing close to the Tibetan estate of Pachaksiri now present-day valley, were one of the many tribes along the long border that made up the Klo-pa (or Lhoba), and the Panggis, settled close to the foothills, were likely part of the groups identified as Abors[31] (Luthra, 1971b).

There are accounts of attempts by Tibetan governors of the bordering provinces to extend their dominion and collect taxes, which they succeeded to do in some pockets[32] (T. Huber, 2012) and failed in others (T. Huber, 2011, p. 265). The Ramos remember with some pride their role in the assassination of Deba Tomden, a Tibetan administrative official, who visited the tribal territories on an expansionary mission (Dhasmana, 1979; c.f. T. Huber, 2011). On the southern border, the Ahoms did not attempt to colonise the Abors. Instead, the Abors were known to regularly raid the foothill Ahom villages for slaves, although it is unclear if the Panggis participated in such raids. The Ahom rulers had instituted the Posa system, an annual tribute paid to the Abors so that they would not raid the villages in the plains. This suggests that the Ahoms acknowledged the sovereignty of the tribes and were uninterested in gaining dominion over the hill communities (Luthra, 1971b). Rather, their policy was of conciliation (Haldipur, 1966). In between these two frontiers lived other tribes who had little direct contact with the two kingdoms. The territories

[29] It is difficult to pin the number of tribes. There is evidence from oral narratives that some tribes died out, e.g. the Kiris were said to have been the older inhabitants of the present-day Shi valley. Due to lack of male children, the tribe died out, and got replaced by the Ramos.

[30] This group comprises the modern-day tribes that include the Nyishis, Idu Mishmis as well as the Ramos and their affinate tribe Bokars.

[31] This group comprises the modern-day tribes of the Pasis, Padams, Minyongs and some clans of the Galos.

[32] The Bokars, while not under the dominion of the Tibetans, did pay an annual tax in exchange for trading rights.

themselves, often referred to as 'terra incognita' by scholars (von Fürer-Haimendorf, 1948), were unmapped and unexplored.

Although the tribes of Siang lived outside the dominion of the State, they were not isolated like the present-day uncontacted tribes of the Amazon. Rather, they participated to varying degrees in the wider culture through trade and consumption, even as they stayed outside the dominion of States. The Abors traded extensively with the Ahoms, and the Klopas with the Tibetans. They bartered forest and agricultural produce in exchange for silk and wool fabrics, metal tools and utensils, jewellery, and salt. The trade in the southern foothills was organised through annual trade fairs. Even the vast majority of tribes in the middle hills who did not have cultural access to the northern Tibetan kingdom or the Ahoms, as they were prevented "by the intervening tribes from visiting the plains" (Chakravarty, 1973, p. 44), were consumers of the traded goods, and extracted tolls from the traders of other tribes for safe passage. Individuals of warring tribes cultivated friendships for strategic cooperation for trade access. For instance, many Ramos of Purying were said to have personal relationships with individuals of neighbouring other tribes such as the Membas[33] towards the north and the Boris of southeast (field notes 08/2012).

The tribes in the upper hills, by their proximity, tended to have trade and cultural affinities with the Tibetan kingdom. They adopted material practices and customs such as dairy farming, as well as the use of Tibetan ornaments and household items. These tribes conducted trade with the Tibetans and bartered Tibetan goods southwards. Earlier, before the arrival of the government, Purying was a leading trading partner (field notes 08/2012) for the Membas of Mechukha, a private Tibetan estate (T. Huber, 2011, p. 264). Due to its salubrious location, its fields were considerably more productive than the other Ramo villages, and the villagers could trade their agricultural surplus such as maize and dairy products as well as forest goods like fur, bear-spleen etc. with the Membas in exchange for luxury goods such as iron implements, jewellery and woollen textile.

Both the Ramos and the Panggis were part of a cultural group of what is called today the Adi supra-tribe[34]. The Adi tribes are thought to have come down in several waves of migration from somewhere in present-day southern Tibet (Nyori, 1993). Details are sparse on when these hills came to be inhabited, however migration lore of various tribes suggest that many groups descended to Arunachal at least twenty generations ago. Colonial reports thought that these

[33] Huber (2011) (2008) is careful to distinguish the modern-day Membas from Tibetans and calls them Pachakshiriwa who followed Tibetan Buddhism.

[34] The Adi supra-tribe belongs in turn to the Tani cultural group, a conglomeration of tribes that trace ancestry from a common mythical first man called Abo Tani. It also includes other tribes like Galo, Tagin, Apatani and Nyishi. The Tani tribes share similar languages and material culture.

animistic tribes were driven southwards by the Tibetans (*Report on the Administration of North East India: 1921-22*, 1984). Before settling down after descending into the lower hills, the various bands restlessly crisscrossed through the hill ranges, foraging, hunting, and practising swidden agriculture.

The migration lore of the Ramos goes thus. Ato Yorko was a Bokar man from the Yomi valley, who accidentally wandered into the Mechukha after he lost his path while tracking a Bembo (a bison). After spending some time among the Membas and finding the land inhospitable to his needs, as it was unsuitable for swidden cultivation, he travelled eastwards along Shi River. The land was already inhabited by the Padus and Kiris, but they had suffered from population decline. Therefore, in exchange for the promise of a ceremonial burial by Yorko and his sons, the Padus and Kiris supposedly gifted the lands to them. The Kiri line has died out, and only one village of the Padus, called Padusa, remains today[35]. A prominent group of the Ramo clans – Koje, Kotin, Komi, Kodung, Kochung, sons of Yorko, and Pusang, Pupor and Puyor, sons of Tinpu, son of Kotin - are descendants of Ato Yorko. Besides the Yorko clans, a few other clans migrated to the area, such as the Hangongs, Meyings and Dupings. The Hangongs are said to have descended from Ato Yorko's sister, Yormi. Another segment of the Ramo society was the slave class.

In time the settlements became more permanent, with different tribes[36] establishing dominance over their own regions. Some groups had been settled in their first 'mother' villages for at least ten to fifteen generations while others had been at their present natal villages for less than ten generations. Pongging, the first study village, was settled eight generations ago by a group sent down from Sibum, the mother settlement of the Panggis, to secure the lands from Minyong claims (fieldwork: see Chapter 7). The village was founded about eight generations ago, with the arrival of the two Panggi moieties at the confluence of Yamne and Siang from two different directions – the Mongkus arrived at the present location from the plains after a long migration through the Siyom valley and a short sojourn in Assamese plains, while ancestors of the second moiety the Mones took a straightforward route southward from the Panggi origin village of Sibum-Sumsing.

[35] There is a more prosaic version of the migration lore, as documented by Dhasmana. This version that I have shared here is more popularly told.

[36] It is difficult to assert if self-identification of belonging to a tribe, as is presently understood, has existed previously. Even today, the boundaries of various tribes are being renegotiated, as belonging becomes political currency. Endogamy, usually accepted as a marker of tribal boundaries, seems to have existed within certain clusters of clans. But this was often a function of geographical proximity and practicality above all. There is disagreement between local scholars and tribal leaders on the use of terms such as tribes, subtribes, etc. since there has been a new trend of agglomeration of smaller tribes under a single tribal identity.

Similarly, Purying, the second study village, was settled by people moving down from Rapum, the mother village, eight generations ago (field notes 08/2012).

While the story of the founding of Pongging appeared to be commonly accepted, there were more than one version of the story of the founding of Purying. One version told to me by a resident of Purying is that Purying was founded by the sons of Ato Pusang – Sape and Same, who took shelter on the left bank of the Shi river to escape a punitive expedition of the Tibetan Governor (Deba) in retaliation for a raid conducted by the two on a Memba village of Mechukha in which some people were killed. Later, after the retreat of the punitive expedition, they decided to stay back at the same location. However, another version attributes the founding of the village to a slave of Ato Pupor who resided in Rapum on the right bank of the Shi. It was supposedly Ato Kamdong[37], the slave, who crossed the river and set foot on the left bank of the valley and brought it to use by planting arum. In the present day, these differing stories of the founding of Purying were used by different clans to bolster their claims on the lands in Purying.

The Adi tribes lived in semi-permanent villages, subsisting mainly on swidden agriculture, with production of basic needs, supplemented by hunting and foraging. The economy was 'traditional in its pristine form', lacking specialisation, or regular production of surplus for commerce, and plagued by stagnant primitive technology (Sikdar, 1982). The land ownership of various tribes (and clans and families) tended to be demarcated by naturally occurring boundaries such as the ridges of hills, streams and rivers. Neighbouring tribes and clans co-existed in an uneasy peace, with frequent wars over land or slave acquisition. Homesteads of villages used to be sited on high spurs, for convenient vigilance against raids. For instance, the village of Pongging, which lies on a gentle slope close to the river Siang today, used to be on top of the western ridge that shelters the village from the lands of the Minyongs, another Adi tribe that used to have hostile relations with the Panggis (Panggeng, 1977).

Politically, the Adi tribes were republican, to the degree that there was no chieftainship. The village was the effective economic and political unit and all matters were discussed at the Kebang, the council of elders. The elders were the statesmen (Bentinck, 1913) who had demonstrated talent

[37] Aside from the differing versions of the origins of the village, there are also contesting narratives of whether Ato Kamdong was a slave or not. According to Nyayor Dumak, a wizened old man who I met in Purying, himself a member of another ex-slave clan, Ato Kamdong had belonged to one of the lower groups that now inhabit the Kambang area of West Siang, further down in the valley. He had run away upstream along the valley after committing a crime, and had taken shelter with Ato Pupor, son of Tinpu, grandson of Ato Kotin and great-grandson of Ato Yorko. This in effect made him a refugee, a status different from and more elevated than that of a slave who was usually acquired in a raid or purchased.

for either martial or oratorical skills, and gained knowledge of customary laws through years of engagement in public affairs (Nyori, 1993, pp. 143–144; Pandey, 1991; A. Talukdar, 1989). This was of course proscribed by gender and blood. Women and slaves were excluded from participating in this democracy. Leadership was to be attained through meritocracy, at least in theory. Among the population of Siang, the Kebang or the council of elders was a widespread institution. Smaller tribes like the Ramos did not have full-fledged Kebangs, but seemed to have had leadership of charismatic individuals known as Gembos, who offered diplomatic, martial as well as trade leadership (Dhasmana, 1979).

The society had some basic structuration, in that the orators, the shamans and the hunter-warriors were celebrated. Generally, the orators and the hunter-warriors tended to accumulate more wealth and prestige too. However, the material difference in the quotidian life of a rich man was not vastly different from that of a poor man. Slavery was prevalent (Thakur, 2003, pp. 38–39 for the instance of slavery among the Ramos), and the acquisition of slaves was one of the prime motivations for inter-tribal wars (Dhasmana, 1979, p. 31). Wealthy men who had claims to larger areas of farmlands owned slaves to supplement their agricultural labour. Even then, they themselves had to participate in the hard labour of cultivation and worked alongside their slaves. Metal utensils and fabrics imported from Tibet and Assam were valued as symbols of wealth.

5.2 The Colonial State arrives

In 1826, the colonial government arrived at the southern border of the Siang region, even though the British East India Company had been present in the Brahmaputra valley and Northern Bengal for at least four decades (Cederlöf, 2014). The Company had just defeated the Ahoms in the first Anglo-Burmese War and taken over the Ahom Kingdom and annexed it to the Province of Bengal. For the most part, the colonial policy towards the tribes was guided by the desire to secure its commercial interests in Assam valley and to gain overland trade routes to Tibet, China and Burma (Cederlöf, 2014; Sikdar, 1982). Even as the hill territory continued to be outside of the administration and taxation structure, the colonial explorers started to explore the lands almost immediately, looking for trade routes to China. In 1826, when the British government started to send exploratory missions through the Siang region, they came across small independent tribal groups that appeared to live in isolation but were part of a wider network of trade and cultural exchange.

The arrival of the colonial government did not mark an immediate, significant departure in the interaction of the State with the hills of Arunachal. Except for exploratory or punitive forays into

the hills, the British government kept to a policy of distant indirect control and non-intervention. The government continued the Posa system with the Abors. According to Nari Rustomji, a latter administrator in pre-independence north-eastern India, "it was really bribery in all but name and its retention is significant as illustrating the extent to which the government was prepared to go to appease the tribes rather than risk involvements that would oblige them to establish, at heavy cost, a network of administrative centres in the interior hills" (Rustomji, 1983, p. 94). By 1850s, the Posa system[38] had been changed to direct cash payment in exchange for good behaviour (Sikdar, 1982).

Till 1875, the Siang region was included under the territory of 'North-East Frontier of Bengal', used as a fuzzy denotation of the hill tracts that enclosed Assam valley on three sides. The last administrative outpost in the east, a settlement called Sadiya, was the nominal centre governing the Siang region. The first administrative boundary that would go on to define the modern-day Arunachal, including the Siang region, was marked in 1875 under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulations 1873 (Mohanta, 1984). This was the Inner Line[39], and the hills of the Siang region beyond the Inner Line were declared as 'Excluded Areas'. Some authors posit that the Inner Line was mainly intended to keep the 'tribes' out of the commercial ventures in Assam (1984) while others contend that it was to regulate trans-frontier trade, while yet others write that the Inner Line was to prevent British subjects from trading in 'jungle products' in these areas. Whatever its intended purpose, the Inner Line has turned out to be a significant legacy of the colonial period which was inherited and retained by the new postcolonial government of independent India and has survived to this day[40].

[38] For a fresh outlook on the Posa system, see Bodhisattva Kar's Nomadic capital and speculative tribes: A culture of contracts in the Northeastern Frontier of British India (2016)

[39] At that time, a complementary Outer Line demarcating the boundary between British India and Tibet had not been drawn, and it would not come into existence until as late as 1914 when the Simla Convention would be finally signed with the Tibetan Government, and the McMahon Line would be drawn as the international boundary between India and Tibet.

[40] Two other northeast Indian states, Nagaland and Mizoram, also continue to have the Inner Line. In 2019, with the introduction of the Citizenship Bill in the Indian Parliament, the debate on bringing in an Inner Line for Manipur and Meghalaya (tribal majority states without Inner Line) became loud. In December 2019, the ILP regime was extended to Manipur.

Figure 5.1. Colonial map of the Province of Assam, 1875, showing the Inner Line boundary.

Foothill tribes had been avid participants in the annual trade fairs since Ahom days. Under the colonial administration, their participation in colonial commerce only grew, and rubber, timber, ivory and musk became major export items at Sadiya. In 1911, an administrative outpost behind the Inner Line was established at Pasighat. Small settlements of Pasi, Padam and Minyong tribes had already been established in this area. A small number of young people from the foothills also joined the school in Sadiya and joined the administration as Dak-runners or Orkoras[41]. By the middle decades of the 20th century, the number of these employees would increase, and they would go up the ranks as Political Interpreters or Kotokis[42], the forerunners of the native administrative cadre (L. Ete, 2011). These individuals were the foundation of the new elite (Rustomji 1983). A few enterprising young men from other tribes such as the Galos sought new

[41] Orkora is an Assamese word, which in turn is a loanword from Hindi. Harkaras were employees of the colonial government.

[42] In the period after World War II, my maternal grandfather had worked as a cane harvester for an Assamese contractor. He had a chance encounter with PLS James, the Political Officer of Siang subdivision, in 1946, and was recruited as an Orkora that year. In 1949, he was promoted to Kotoki, and worked as a Kotoki until his retirement.

modes of gaining wealth by first participating in the trade of commercial forest produce such as cane and rubber[43] and cane, and later on by seeking employment with the administration.

The Panggis, though living close to the foothills, were not allowed from any contact with the plains by the more powerful tribes in the south (Bentinck, 1913). The Panggis were a small tribe of the Adi group residing in the area between the rivers Siang and Yamne. There are only a handful of references to the Panggis in historical texts. Pongging is the last traditionally settled village of the Panggis. As a small tribe ensconced in the middle of big warring tribes of the Minyongs and the Padams, the Panggis perhaps did not warrant the attention of the colonial explorers and administrators. Bentinck (1913, p. 101) in his report on the Abor Expedition mentions in passing that the Panggis were a 'poor and weak tribe'. The villagers of Pongging merit one mention due to the fact that they nursed to health an escapee of the infamous Williamson Massacre of 1911 and sheltered him until the Abor Expedition.

In the meantime, the colonial government began the practice of appointing 'village headmen'. The administrative reports from the officers of the period are replete with mentions of 'headmen' who came to greet the visiting officers with various requests and appeals for something or the other. Known locally as Gams or Gaonburas[44], this was a hitherto unknown position among the village republics. The Gaonburas were to become the foot-soldiers of the local colonial administration.

Up until 1941, under Reid's plans, the hills were known as unadministered areas. In 1937, the contiguous areas of present-day Arunachal were declared the Excluded Areas of the province of Assam. Administratively on the map, the colonial government brought the ungoverned regions and its people under the government of India. While the colonial government had successfully mapped the hill territories which were now part of the cartography of India, most of the communities continued to be outside of the bounds of the state. The hill tribes continued to be outside of the tax system, and customary laws were allowed to continue to guide dispute settlements. Unlike in other parts of the country, modern infrastructure was not developed, nor were Development programmes or welfare services extended into the hills of Arunachal, except in the limited area in the foothills around Pasighat.

By the time of independence, the colonial state had carved out a limited presence in the middle hills of the Siang region, till the new administrative centre of Along (present-day Aalo). Some clans

[43] The exploitation of rubber was extremely short-lived. As it did not have any indigenous usage, its harvest for sale to the traders was done unsustainably. In a few short years, the trade declined (Sikdar 1982).

[44] 'Gaonbura', or alternatively 'Gaon Burah' means literally 'old man of the village' or 'village headman' in Assamese.

of tribes that resided close to Aalo and Pasighat benefited. However, its presence had yet to make significant changes to the lives of the smaller tribes such as the Ramos and the Panggis. For most members of the contact tribes, the colonial government was either an unknown quantity, or a distant benign entity that distributed valuable cloth and aluminium goods, or a nuisance at worst that interfered with their practices such as holding of slaves. The Ramos, situated as they were high up towards the Tibetan border, had no contact at all with the colonial administrators.

As such, a large section of the Siang region emerged late into the 20th century, unscathed by the experiences of colonisation and accompanying violence and exploitation that scarred many other indigenous peoples across the world, and in parts of India. At independence, the new postcolonial government of India inherited in the north-east a frontier region which was practically ungoverned, its peoples largely an unknown entity for the rest of the nation.

The following observation by Robert Reid, the Governor of Assam from 1937-42 made in 1944 on the hill tribes of Assam is remarkably astute in hindsight:

> There is no doubt they will develop. It will be no case of stagnation as museum pieces or anthropological specimens. Education is there and is in great demand. Interest in the outside world is there and is growing. Contact with the outside world has been immensely widened by the war and will be more widened as time goes on, and the leaders of these peoples have no intention of being left in a state of savage contentment. They have already the germs of selfgovernment in various forms in their own polity, and when they are ready, they will be the first to say so, but they are not ready yet. (1944, p. 29)

5.3 The postcolonial State and the Tribal Problem of NEFA

In 1947, the first post-colonial government of the newly independent India inherited the frontier tracts, and along with the land, a diverse group of small tribal communities most of whom still lived outside of the state's reach. At independence, the two tribes – the Panggis and the Ramos – had vastly different places within the Indian nation. The Panggis had already had some contact with the British administration since the early 20th century. The Kebang Abus of Pongging were recognised as headmen or Gams by the Political Officer of the colonial government. Pongging was less than a day's walk away from Pasighat, which had been a centre for education and administration since 1911. In contrast, it was not until 1954 that the Indian state made their first contact with the Ramos in Shi Valley. Mechukha was declared an administrative outpost in 1951, but the presence of the state remained minimal until 1962, and I was told that the Membas continued to pay taxes to Tibet until the Chinese army invaded NEFA (fieldwork).

The era of Development started in earnest in Arunachal after 1947. Here, it is useful to use the phases of Development proposed by Das (1994), a social scientist who did some pioneering work on the evolution of Arunachal Economy. He identifies three distinct phases that he calls the Frontier phase (1947-62), the Transitional Phase (1963-71) and the Modern Phase (1972 onwards)[45]. The Frontier phase was defined by slow penetration of the administration. This was partly by design, and partly by the constraints of limited resources of the new post-colonial government (Rustomji, 1983). The Transitional phase was triggered by the Indo-Chinese war of 1962, which exposed the risks of leaving administrative vacuum at the borders. The Modern Phase started with the decision to introduce the Panchayat in the region in 1972[46] and separate it from Assam.

In the following sub-sections, I discuss the Development interventions under two separate heads of administrative and political changes, and social and economic changes, using Das's phases of Development as milestones.

5.3.1. Administrative and Political Development

In the four decades after independence, the territory evolved from a largely unadministered frontier zone to being fully federated to the Indian State. Early on, the GoI hastened to establish administrative nuclei across the unadministered areas. In contrast to the territorially expansionist policy, the GoI took a slower approach to political integration (G. Das, 1995).

At the same time, regional leaders were tasked to advise the newly formed Constituent Assembly of India on the matter of 'Fundamental Rights, Minorities, Tribal Areas'. The North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub-Committee, or the Bordoloi Committee, recommended that 'the future of these hills now does not seem to lie in absorption', rather 'evolution should come as far as possible from the tribe itself'. It suggested several empathetic measures, such as regulation of immigration of non-tribals into the hills to protect tribal land rights and prevent exploitation, non-interference in tribal customary laws and local institutions and so on. Therefore, the Nehru Government kept the Inner Line in place, and, perhaps due to inertia, so have

[45] Dr. Jumyir Basar, an anthropologist teaching at the Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal, pointed out to me that "(the phases of) Development can be divided into the NEFT, NEFA, Post 1962 and post 1991 with India's new economic policy." (personal communication). While I agree with her, I consider the changes in the first three phases as more consequential than those that occurred post-1991. In my opinion, the most fundamental changes to the society and politics of the tribes of Arunachal were accomplished till India's Liberalisation. As such, in the previous Chapter Four, I have discussed the main economic impacts of Liberalisation on Arunachali politics.

[46] The NEFA Panchayat Raj Regulation, 1967 became an Act in 1968. In 1969 the first election in form of indirect election to panchayat took place.

subsequent governments of India till the present day. Haimendorf noted that the due to this policy, the tribal populations of the region had been able to keep control of their lands without any competition and dispossession at the hands of non-tribal settlers (1980). This holds true today too. This had a significant consequence for the people of the region, in the tribal communities have virtually had no experience of dispossession.

During **the Frontier phase**, Arunachal Pradesh, then called the North Eastern Frontier Tracts (NEFT), and renamed as North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) in 1952, and its people were recognised by the postcolonial government as a backward area requiring of special interventions to mitigate the 'poverty, disease and lack of education' stalking the tribal groups. This was part of a wider approach of the government towards the tribal communities of the country wherein they were granted Constitutional protections and concessions, and special tribal development programmes were designed for areas with a high concentration of tribal populations. A significant innovation of the Indian State was the formal recognition of the tribal communities as Scheduled Tribes (ST), giving them access to several constitutional protections. While the colonial government had weighed its policy interventions primarily against a calculus of commercial interests, the new post-colonial government was guided by the idea of nation-building. The more nationalist leaders advocated for a policy of assimilation and detribalisation.

On the other hand, Verrier Elwin, an anthropologist who was the Advisor to the Government of India on Tribal Affairs, recognised that "NEFA offers a unique opportunity to every member of the Administration, for it is attempting an exciting and unusual experiment which, if successful, will write a significant page in the history of civilization's dealings with primitive people" (Elwin, 1959). He advocated that "We do not want to preserve the tribesmen as museum specimens." He further said, "(We) do not want to stop the clock of progress, but we do want to see that it keeps the right time. We do not accept the myth of the Noble Savage; but we do not want to create a class of Ignoble Serfs." (1959, p. 59). He articulated five principles as the Philosophy for NEFA: letting people develop along the lines of their own genius, respect for tribal rights in land and forests, avoiding too many outsiders in tribal territory, avoiding over-administration, and judging the results qualitatively. A special Indian Frontier Administrative Service was also created, whose officers were trained specially to "understand the basic values of the tribals, the importance they attached to their land, their forests, their water rights and to understand that there was beauty in the handicrafts of the tribal people." (Rustomji, 1983, p. 103).

To get a sense of how rapidly the administration expanded, the following numbers are useful. In 1947, there were only five administrative centres in the Frontier Tracts, four of which had been established within the past five years. Pasighat, the only administrative centre in Siang region, was at the foothills far away from the vast interiors where a majority of the people lived. In the first decade, administrative centres were established in the remotest places that were only accessible through airways. By 1964, there were 82 administrative centres all the way till the McMahon Line.. The administrative centres were the hub of the GoI's development activities. Aside from the offices of the government representatives, educational and health facilities were provided in these settlements (these are discussed in sub-section 5.3.2).

The six Frontier Divisions were each led by a Political Officer supported by a skeletal staff drawn mostly from outside NEFA. On the ground, the administration worked through a cadre of tribal men recruited as foot-soldiers of the administration. These men, designated as political interpreters (PIs), facilitated development works such as the construction of roads with the Kebang leaders of the villages. As mentioned in the section above, many Adi tribes traditionally had a council of elders known as the Keba[47] or Kebang, consisting of free-born males. Towards the end of its rule, the colonial government incorporated the Kebang as part of the government by giving it a formal stature through the Assam Frontier [Administration of Justice] Regulation, 1945, for the 'express object of ensuring that a vast majority of disputes and cases, both civil and criminal, may be adjudicated in accordance with the prevailing traditional codes of the tribal communities.' (Luthra, 1971a, p. 19). The Gams were thus the first rung of the postcolonial administration. The GOI continued to work with the Kebangs for the implementation of community development programmes and did not interfere with their authority on matters of 'crime and punishment, village administration, village land and forests, and other areas of village life' (G. Das, 1995).

In contrast to the rapid expansion of the administrative network, the political integration of NEFA into the body polity of India went at a slower pace. The universal adult franchise was not extended to the people of NEFA immediately after independence on the advice of the above-mentioned Bordoloi Subcommittee which raised concerns about the low level of consciousness among the tribals. It was only in 1952 that the people of NEFA got representation in the Parliament through

[47] According to the Galo-English Dictionary (Post), Keba (or Kvbaa in Galo script) n. 1. meeting; village council. 2. public; the general public. (p. 81). Loosely, every clan, village, and tribe could conduct a Keba. Even today, the traditional version of Keba or Kebang, outside of the state-recognised Kebang system, is practised to resolve inter-personal or inter-clan disputes, when the involved parties do not wish to enter the formal legal system.

the nomination of Chow Khamoon Gohain from Chowkham to the Lok Sabha. They finally participated in the Indian general elections in 1978, three decades after Independence.

In 1962, the Indo-Chinese war broke out, and the northern border of NEFA was the main theatre. The Indian side was pushed back, and the Chinese troops occupied many sections of the region for months before retreating unilaterally. The loss destabilised the Nehru-Elwin approach of 'hurrying slowly', thus triggering the Transitional phase. Nari Rustomji made the following observation about the abandonment of the Nehru-Elwin approach:

> By then, strong and solid foundations had already been laid and there was a nucleus of tribals in Nefa with a balanced approach to the changing situation and who were largely free from the apprehensions and suspicions that had poisoned the relationship between tribals and non-tribals in other parts of the country. The administration had gently held its hand during the crucial fifteen years since Independence, without pushing or hustling them. They saw India, therefore, not in the light of an aggressors, either territorial or cultural, but as a friend and guide… (1983, p. 128)

Around the same time, the NEFA administration expanded, and as the volume of development works grew, the need for "indigenous representative government of the people above the village" was felt (Luthra, 1971a, p. 28). To this end, the Government of India appointed the Daying Ering[48] Commission to examine how best to address the problem of lack of representation at supra-local levels. On its recommendation, the North-East Frontier Agency Panchayat Raj Regulation Act was passed by the Parliament in 1967 that put in place a four-tier structure comprising the village council or Gram Panchayat at the grassroots, Anchal Samiti 'coterminous with the community development blocks', Zilla Parishads which was to operate at the District level, and the Agency Council at the level of the Administration which was to sit with the Head of the Administration, namely, the Governor (Luthra, 1971a). The Agency Council was the precursor to the latter State Legislative Assembly.

1972 marked the start of the Modern phase in which the integration of Arunachal into Indian polity was accelerated. The first Agency Council comprising representatives drawn from the various local communities was created in 1972, along with the creation of the Panchayati institutions. In 1972, when NEFA was granted Union Territory status, and renamed as Arunachal Pradesh, the Agency Council was re-formed as Pradesh Council. Until 1974, the region had been governed out of Shillong, the capital of undivided Assam. In 1974, it was decided to move the

[48]Daying Ering was an Arunachali born to a Minyong family settled in Pasighat. His career as the first national-level politician from Arunachal, going on to become a Minister in the national cabinet, is illustrative of the structural advantages gained by the foothill tribes.

administration closer to the people, and Naharlagun, a village in the lower hills of Subansiri district, was designated the administrative centre of NEFA. In 1978, the centre was shifted westwards to Itanagar, an urban settlement created from scratch. The state Legislative Assembly grew out of the Pradesh Council, and its function was supposed to be primarily legislative. The citizens of Arunachal participated in the Indian electoral democracy for the first time during the Sixth General Elections in 1977. Similarly, the first Vidhan Sabha elections to elect thirty representatives to the State Legislative Assembly was held in 1978 (Mohanta, 1984).

Thus, the trusteeship to imagine and bring about development was finally passed into the hands of the indigenous leaders. At the same time, it subordinated the traditional notions of democracy by decreeing that the Political Officer "appointed by the Governor" would appoint as village authority "such person or persons as he considers desirable to be the members of a village authority" (Regulation 1945). Thus, not only was the independence of the village democracy curtailed, but also the scope of its powers limited to judicial matters. The institution of the Kebang was appropriated into the governance structure as the bottom-most tier, with the 'village elders' being selected by the government.

Here it is valuable to point out what did not happen. By and large, the Indian state succeeded in penetrating the ungoverned terrains and bringing the communities into the national fold. There were sporadic incidents of violent resistance such as the Achingmori incident of 1953 involving the Tagins, and the Kure Chambyo of 1949 involving the Apatanis (which was only recently documented by Dr. Rimi Tadu, an Arunachali scholar of the Apatani tribe). In my opinion, the very sporadicity of violent conflicts between the Indian state and the tribes illustrates that the process of subsuming of the stateless hills into the Indian state was relatively peaceful. It is also possible that there may have been other officially undocumented conflicts[49]. However, even so, nowhere in Arunachal did it deteriorate into a long-drawn violent conflict, like it did elsewhere in some other tribal states and pockets of north-eastern India. The actual experience of state violence and everyday violence in forms of terrorism and secessionist groups were strikingly missing from Arunachal. The steady penetration of the Indian administration also led to scaling down of the intertribal conflicts (Rose & Fisher, 1967, p. 26).

[49] Indeed, in the Shi valley, my host in Purying laughingly told me about the short-lived resistance put up by his grandfather against the forward party of the first official visit from the post-colonial Indian administration. Apparently, the Ramos had plotted an ambush on the group, but it collapsed within minutes in face of the firepower of the administration.

The administrative and political changes also had important socio-economic components as well as consequences for the indigenous peoples. These will be discussed in the next section.

5.3.2. Socio-economic Development

In the Frontier phase, the main thrust of socio-economic development was on social welfare based on the principle of self-sufficiency in food, clothing and other material goods. This phase, coinciding with the first two Five-Year plans, was devoted to the expansion and consolidation of administration across the Inner Line. In this period, industrial development focused on the revival of traditional handicrafts.

The other important goal was to replace swidden agriculture with settled cultivation to stabilise migratory populations and to improve food self-sufficiency. The introduction of wet rice cultivation (WRC) was a major thrust area for the administration. In 1952, the first Community Development block was opened at Pasighat. Under the Community Development Programme, which was later renamed the National Extension Service, demonstration farms promoting WRC, horticulture, pisciculture and animal husbandry were established. Agricultural extension services were provided through village-level workers (VLWs). WRC turned out to be feasible at the lower levels of the valleys with gentler slopes and a conducive climate. However, the attempts to improve agricultural productivity hit the limits of agro-ecosystem in the higher altitudes of the Upper Siang region. Therefore, while the adoption of wet rice cultivation was highly successful in plains and lower hill areas of the Siang region, in the colder higher reaches, settled rice cultivation could not take root.

Interestingly, today, it is common for certain to individuals within a community to self-identify as 'leader' and for others to call themselves 'public'. The terms 'leader' and 'public' appear to be leftovers from the era of the 'community development'. Under these development programmes, young men in the village were nominated as 'youth leaders' and given responsibility for mobilising the village community. Nowadays, the term Leader signifies a person who is a member of a political party and has fought in an election (local, panchayat, or state level), successfully or unsuccessfully. 'Public' refers to anyone who is not employed by the government and has no aspirations for political office.

Alongside the economic development activities, the government expanded social welfare access. A large proportion of Plan investments was allocated to the extension of health and educational facilities, as well as the gradual expansion of infrastructure for physical connectivity. Aside from these, the other major intervention in the social sphere was the abolition of slavery. The first anti-

slavery campaign was launched in 1950, with the administration officials financially empowered to purchase the freedom of slaves. A decade later in 1961-62, the campaign was intensified, and it was announced that individuals who did not liberate their slaves within a certain timeframe would be subject to legal action (Rose & Fisher, 1967, p. 54). The Ramos remember this campaign as the Pordokhoni[50] when the government asked them free their slaves (fieldwork). The clan organisation in the Ramo area became more complicated after the abolition of slavery by the Government. Some ex-slaves left the Shi Valley to look for their relatives in Subansiri Valley. But many stayed back in the Shi Valley. Of these, some took on the clan names of the ex-masters. Others sought out their old clan names.

Despite the stated goal of the frontier administration to shield the tribal communities from the alienating influence of speedy modernisation, change was unstoppable. The report of an ethnographic survey conducted in the Siang district in 1964 observed,

> "In the administrative centres of Along market and Pasighat, the Gallong, Minyong and other Arunachal people get opportunity to come in contact with the plains people and be acquainted with new styles of dress, items of food, or learn about film stars by seeing cinema. Whenever any villager comes to Along a part of the cash money he earns or brings is spent in taking tea and snacks and for seeing cinema…. the market at Along give(s) a good platform for economic transaction and the Gallong and the Minyong come to purchase different types of clothing, luxury items, utensils or buckets, etc. And homespun products… or horticultural products… are also sold. Cosmetics, viz., snow, powder, lipstick are used by some girls reading at Along; and they use them even at their villages." (Lal & Das Gupta, 1979, pp. 123–124)

This led to a gradual but fundamental shift from barter exchange to cash economy. Rather than being a planned intervention, this was an outcome of a slow process involving early adopters of cash[51] on the one hand, and the increasing availability of goods for purchase on the other hand. The administration had started to pay in cash for services such as porterage provided by local community members. In the early years, a strategic decision for economic development was to focus on traditional crafts. Mass-produced goods from beyond the Inner Line, such as textiles and cosmetics started to trickle into the main administrative settlements, although factory-produced liquors and opium were banned. The government went about setting up cooperative stores for stuff deemed as 'essential supplies' such as sugar, kerosene, soap, and cloth. Barter exchange was gradually limited to ceremonial functions and rituals (personal observation).

[50] Pordokhoni literally means 'exhibition' in Assamese, the possible explanation being that the anti-slavery campaign was tied with a government-sponsored exhibition of its other activities.

[51] In the beginning most of the coins forming the cash payment ended up being turned into jewellery.

However, the situation was different in the high hills. The international border was closed, and cross-border travel and trade were criminalised. A measure of the valley's remoteness was that until 1995, the area did not have road access. Before Tato got connected by road, the Ramos had to trek for at least three days till the administrative centre of Kaying to take a bus to Aalo, the headquarters of the then undivided West Siang district. Due to the absence of amenities, government functionaries posted at Tato or Mechukha further beyond were hardly ever present in station.

By 1962, with the closure of the Indo-Tibetan border, Mechukha became a remote outpost of the gradually advancing nation-state, and the barter trade between the Ramos of Purying and the Membas slowly declined. Prior to the incorporation of the upper valleys of Arunachal in the state of India, the livelihoods of the Ramos were made up of swidden agriculture of maize and millet, hunting and gathering. Further, the Ramos participated in barter trade with the Membas, and acquired luxury goods such as wool fabric, metalwork and the precious salt in exchange for fur, vegetable dyes, and other produce of the forests. This trade was discontinued after the flight of the Dalai Lama and the closing of the border (fieldwork).

The Frontier phase ended with the Chinese aggression in 1962, giving way to the Transitional phase (G. Das, 1995). Following the conflict with China, the process of 'hastening slowly' was abandoned as it was felt that in face of an aggressive China an administrative vacuum could not be left at the border. Even so, the administration the main activities appeared to be the creation of infrastructure, and the creation of 'citizens' through investment in human resources. The apparent initial lack of stress on economic development was possibly not for the want of desire. The NEFA administration asked the National Council of Applied Economic Research to undertake a techno-economic survey of the Agency to prepare a strategy for its development (NCAER, 1967). The report noted that the exploitation of natural resources made no sense due to its distance and lack of connectivity to the markets that lay in the heart of the country.

The transition phase was primarily marked by a redoubled emphasis on education. Education was an important catalyst of social change in intended and unintended ways. The spread of education saw the creation of the first generation of young men from various tribes many of whom would go on to participate in modern electoral politics, and who gradually replaced the traditional powers. Government-sponsored primary schools were opened in the farthest reaches. The first institute of higher education, the Jawaharlal Nehru College, was opened in Pasighat in 1964. It offered the first undergraduate courses in humanities and social sciences. The first wave of education was

imparted in Assamese, the language of the regional elite of north-eastern India at that time. A Hindu monastic order, the Ramakrishna Math, was invited to establish the first English-language school in Aalo, the headquarters of Siang division. The alumni of these institutions would go on to populate the political leadership and the bureaucracy of the state in the coming decades. The head-start in education was received by some tribes due to their proximity to the earliest facilities in Pasighat and Aalo. In the 1970s and 1980s individuals who acquired tertiary and even secondary education had assured access to job opportunities in the newly expanding government. These individuals coalesced as the salaried urban middle classes.

The spread of the education system propelled the most significant socio-economic changes in form of social structuration. Access to education determined access to employment opportunities in the expanding administration, which implied joining the newly emerging salaried middle-class. Education also opened doors to political positions, which would go on to form the political and business elite. The nucleus of the urban educated elite began to take root within the village society. Lal and Gupta wrote,

> "The village elders look to the welfare of the village and the villagers have to be in touch with the officials in the development, education and engineering wings of administrative machinery at Along… The second type of outside contact is to be seen among the students reading in the colleges at Pasighat, Gauhati, Dibrugarh or Shillong. This section is ambitious and due to their contacts with big cities, the big cultural centres, they keep pace with the modern trends of development, the exact administrative hierarchy, the political aspirations in the other states of India and so on. They, being the most progressive set of local people, percolate new thoughts and ideas to the people whenever they visit their homeland. The third set of people comprises a few local personalities amassing considerable fortune, power and prestige. The last and fourth type is composed of the commoners of the interior villages. They have very rare contact with Along, not to speak of other cities. They come to Along only on very special piece of work and they are mainly concerned with the subsistence of their families. This group of people is least concerned about the major current politics or important events and are verily guided by the village elders." (1979, pp. 125–126).

With the emergence of a new elite, the traditional elites such as hunters and shamans were replaced in the social schema.

Due to the unevenness of access to higher education during this period, most smaller tribes lost out on the opportunities. The multiplier effect of education accrued to a handful of fortunate tribes. For instance, it was mentioned above that a Hindu mission school was established in Aalo. Besides, there already existed a government-run higher secondary school in Aalo. This initial advantage would be reflected in the coming decades in the over-representation of Galos in the

state administration. This also led to a growing feeling that resources were being sequestered by particular clans or tribes.

> "In the Minyong area, we could hear a popular demand of getting two administrative zones in Siang. The Minyongs tell when the British came to Siang District, they had their headquarters at Pasighat and thus the Padam, Pasis came to limelight. Again, after independence the India administration has established headquarters at Along and thus, they tell, the Gallong have been benefited more. The Minyong area… has always been in the rear" (Lal & Das Gupta, 1979, pp. 124–125).

This sense of growing inequality was felt more strongly by smaller tribes. A young Panggi intellectual wrote about the Panggis in 1977:

> It is needless to say that the countryside is rugged, steep, roadless and hostile. The above (description of the bounds of the Panggis) is not vain repetition of the physical features of the earth and a mere recounting of the two major tribes – the Minyongs and the Padams. … . It not only locates the tribes but also draws attention to the tribe constancy of the fact that geography and politics do play a part in the material, psychological and spiritual development of a tribe. If illustration of the truism in the last sentence is required, the Panggis provide it. No wonder that Panggis remain so neglected and backward as their bounds have placed them.
>
> … (The tribe) has been subjected to various oppressions in the depredations mounted on them, the constant squeezing by the mighty neighbours. It is all past now … (But) The danger has not passed away as yet. It was visible and concrete in the inter-village feuds earlier, it has to be discerned in the neglect of the tribe today. A conspiracy of silence, apathy and smug feeling that if Adis develop the Panggis naturally will do envelops the minor Panggi tribe. (Panggeng, 1977, p. 13 edited for clarity)

Even so, the idea of Development as modern lives and livelihoods took root in the minds of the tribal elite. The indigenous peoples wanted more, not less Development.

> "Among the people of the Lower Siang, the desire for improvement has been at two levels, i.e., on village level and on individual level. In any village, in course of talks, people point out how such and such person has amassed wealth and is now possessing gun, mithun etc. The recent opportunities of getting cash money through petty contracts have opened their eyes… To get a job of Political interpreter…, i.e. to get a Red Coat is a commoner's aspiration. Side by side, they are eager to procure a gun licence or a shop licence.
>
> On the village level, the village elder think of improving a village by raising homeguards, by starting a School or by improving the water supply. This is the result of a pervading tempo to have better living and to get some symbols of betterment." (Lal & Das Gupta, 1979, p. 125)

To the credit of the GOI, the socio-economic changes were enacted without violence and displacement in the Siang region. Also, to the credit of the local communities, they accepted the changes and became enthusiastic participants in a short span of time. von Fürer-Haimendorf's observation of the Apatanis, an important tribe of the Subansiri region, could hold true for the tribes of the lower and middle hills of Siang:

> "People who had not even know(n) the use of money and had spoken no language other than their own, now own shops not only in their own villages but also in the district headquarters… the leading Apa Tanis… immediately grasped the possibilities offered by the administration and made sure that their sons would be the first to acquire a good education… (who) are now the operators in the new economy. …Without abandoning their cultural traditions and religious practices, they have managed to profit from the innovations brought to them by the government and to bridge within a single generation the gap between an tribal civilization and the India of the 20th century". (von Fürer-Haimendorf, 1980)

An important point worth noting is that in the first decades of independence, the Government of India did not initiate any major resource extraction projects. As noted in Chapter Four, this was not due to lack of interest, but rather due to the remoteness of the region and lack of infrastructure. Timber extraction was the notable exception. But even this industry was limited to the foothills. The serendipitous absence of resource extraction projects in the state also potentially prevented large scale enclosure of indigenous lands.

5.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the particularities of the political and socio-economic development trajectory of the tribes of Arunachal. In the 20th century, the region underwent an accelerated evolution from a stateless "terra incognita" to a being a part of the Indian state. The different tribes that constitute the modern-day population of Arunachal arrived in the region in waves over centuries. The Adi tribes of the Siang region migrated from southern Tibet. Hemmed in by the Tibetan kingdom in the north and the Ahom kingdom in the south, the tribes existed as stateless independent village republics who nevertheless participated in networks of trade and cultural exchange. Even though the British government nominally claimed sovereignty over the region through the declaration of the Outer Line in 1873, most communities remained outside of the colonial administration. The tribes experienced extraordinarily little of the exploitation and dispossession that tribes in central parts of India underwent.

As discussed in Chapter 2, indigenous people's encounters with modernity and the State can be broadly seen as malign - characterised by violence, dispossession, and impoverishment, or benign.

In the case of the tribes of Arunachal, the encounter can be characterised as largely benign. One measure of this claim would be that in contrast to the neighbouring northeast Indian states of Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur and even Assam which have all seen armed secessionist movements at various times after 1947, there have been almost no violent or even non-violent struggles against the Indian State in Arunachal. This was in part due to the relative geographical isolation and remoteness of these communities for the greater part of the 20th century, which prevented extensive resource extraction or exploitation from taking place. In another part, the course of Development was intended by the State to be paternalistic and benign. The specific experience of, and consequences of Development on the communities of Arunachal is the key to understanding at present how and why they respond to hydropower development the way they do.

After 1947, the post-colonial Indian state implemented its mandate to develop and uplift the backward tribes in two important ways: the first was to gradually superimpose its desired political system of governance over the numerous fragmented and sovereign tribal groups. The second was to introduce the instruments of social and economic progress to the tribes, most of whom led subsistence oriented, natural resource-based lifestyles. Introduction of health and education services, and economic interventions such as introduction of wet-rice cultivation, food security measures, horticulture schemes etc. led to profound changes in the tribal communities.

The important indirect impacts of Development were: the rise of aspiration and inequality. On the one hand, the gradual introduction of social services like healthcare and education, and familiarisation with market goods led to rising aspirations. On the other hand, the spatial unevenness of the penetration of the government services sowed the seeds for increasing inequality within the tribes as well as between tribes. A new elite that grew out of the salaried and educated individuals replaced the traditional elite triumvirate of orators, shamans and hunter-warriors. While a measure of inequality and structuration were present in the traditional communities too, by and large the inequality had little impact on the lifestyle and life quality. This disparity began to grow with the emergence of a neo-urban middle class. These facets of the impact of state-led development are discussed next in Chapter 6.

6. Indigenous Lives in Arunachal today

This is the second of the two Chapters that discuss the distinctive characteristics of the indigenous communities in Arunachal today. Considering their historical experience of colonialism and Development discussed in Chapter 5, in Chapter 6 we see how the Development process that began with the arrival of the colonial government and was expanded by the postcolonial government shaped the lives of the indigenous peoples (IP) in intentional and unintentional ways. This chapter is primarily based on the empirical data collected during fieldwork conducted in summer 2012-Spring 2013 as well as my own ongoing observations as a member of the Arunachali society. Wherever possible, I have substantiated this with observations by other scholars. In this chapter, I frequently refer to the IPs as tribes, the common emic term used for self-description.

Section 6.1 introduces the two communities and villages which form the loci of my studies – the Panggis of Pongging village in the lower Siang catchment, and the Ramos of Purying village in the high mountains along the border. In the next section 6.2, I investigate the changing relationship of the communities to their land; this is especially significant in view of indigenous notions of sovereignty and territoriality. Section 6.3 describes the quotidian socio-economic lives at the two study sites, and in their communities. In this section, the consequences of the decades-long Development programme described in the previous chapter can be observed. Section 6.4 deliberates the emergent nexus of the rural economic, political and social lives. In the last section, I consider the existence and sense of inter-tribal inequality and the sense of political and economic marginality it has engendered in smaller tribes.

6.1 "The village at the Mouth of the Dam"

Pongging and Purying, the villages at the centre of this dissertation, were two among scores of small and large villages in the catchment of Siang that will be affected by the hydropower development process. They are however distinguished by the fact that unlike other villages, they lie directly upstream of proposed dams. Directly downstream of Pongging, the 85m high gravity dam of the 2700MW Lower Siang Hydroelectric Project (HEP) is proposed to be constructed. Similarly, downstream of Purying, the intake barrage of the 85MW Heo HEP is proposed, while the underground powerhouse of the Pauk HEP is to be sited on its territory. While neither village will be physically submerged, a significant part of their lands will be submerged in the backflow. Both Pongging and Purying belong to two relatively IP groups belonging to the larger Adi group. They are old villages that have been inhabited for centuries (see section 5.1 of the previous chapter). Identity drawn from membership to a clan, village, or tribe, is a basic currency for

everyday social interactions. For this reason, I shall elaborate in this section a bit about the tribes too.

In the previous chapter (section 5.3.2), I described the differentiated access education and economic opportunities within and between tribes based on the pace of the ingress of the developmental state in their region, and their physical and social proximity to administrative centres. The impacts across different groups of the population of the state have been extremely uneven, owing to the simple fact of accessibility – while some pockets at the foothills were able to take advantage of proximity to the seats of government early on, other communities further up in the hills did not get connected by roads even as late as the 1990s. For instance, the Ramos did not have contact with the Indian administration until the 1950s, and even then, they were physically distant from the administration until the late 1990s. As late as 2013, both Purying and Pongging villages had no road connectivity. While the Shi Valley itself was connected in the 2000s by road, Purying continues to have no road connectivity. The nearest roadhead is at Hiri village on the right bank of the river. A road to Pongging was finally under construction at the time of my fieldwork.

6.1.1. The Panggis of Pongging

Pongging is the southern-most village of the Panggi tribe. Today, the Panggis are one of the larger tribes of Upper Siang district, though compared to the other larger tribes of the Adi group, they are minuscule. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Pongging was founded about eight generations ago. Today, the homesteads of the village are located on a gentle spur on the confluence of the Siang and the Yamne. The population in Pongging comprises fifty households belonging to eleven clans of the Mone and Mongku moieties, who can trace their genealogy back to the first founding clans of the village. Except for a few women from other villages or other tribes who married into the village, every resident has been born and brought up here and belongs to the tribe. The two moieties being exogamous, villagers have tended to marry within the village and have formed a tightly knit community, intricately related to one another through descent and marriage. Life in the village was close-knit, with a high dependence on labour-sharing for activities such as agriculture and house construction. However, labour-sharing was slowly being supplanted by tokens of cash.

6.1.2. Purying and the Ramos

Purying is a small village of thirteen resident households, belonging to the Ramo group, lying mid-way between Tato and Mechukha, two important administrative centres in the Shi Valley. Though small in population, the social divisions and relations of the Ramos today are complex, due to their

history of micro-migration and slavery. Many Ramos belong to the Yorko clans. A significant number of Ramos are also descendants of slaves who were bought or abducted from the adjacent Subansiri valley. The residents of Purying village today belong mainly to the Kamdong clan, formerly viewed as slaves by the Pusangs, the founding clan descended from Ato Yorko's son Kotin**.** Most descendants of Pusang have, however, left the village and moved to urban settlements.

Figure 6.1 Purying seen from the footpath leading to fields above Shi River.

In the Ramo area, as in other regions of Shi Valley, since the construction of the road connecting the valley to Aalo, many villages have shifted to be closer to the road. Other villages have established satellite hamlets. A couple of villages Pauk and Harmey listed in the 1960 census have disappeared as their populations moved to other villages or nearby towns. There is also significant outmigration, which will be discussed in section 6.3 below.

6.2 Land and Identity

In Arunachal, bar about 15-20% of the land which is directly under the control of the state government, all land is under community control (personal communication with an official)[52].

[52] This is a strikingly different scenario in comparison to other regions of India with tribal populations, such as Jharkhand and Chattisgarh, and other mountain states like Himachal or Uttarakhand, where the erstwhile community lands have been long sequestered by the state.

Aside from the few urban pockets, the rest of the lands – forests, cultivated lands, rivers, and streams – are all claimed by communities. This was made possible by extensive Constitutional protections such as the Inner Line and absence of effort by the Government to sequester off community land. The Forest Department, the main agency of State-driven land acquisition in other parts of India, never succeeded in sequestering off community lands in Arunachal.

At about 80%, the demographic of the Siang region continues to be overwhelmingly rural. The rural population comprises place-based communities organised as villages that are defined primarily by kinship and descent. These village lands in turn aggregate to form larger tribal territories. For instance, the territory of Pongging is part of the Panggi tribal territory, which shares territorial boundaries with Minyong and Padam lands. Similarly, the Ramo territory abuts Memba lands to the west, Libo lands to the east. The mountain ridges that define the valley demarcate the Ramo lands from the Tagin lands to the south and Bokar lands to the north. In the Siang region, as elsewhere in Arunachal, land remains an important basis of tribal identity, but not necessarily livelihoods.

Pongging village. The territory of Pongging village is bounded by Siang River to the south and Yamne river to the east, while to the west and north, Sileng Korong and Irtum Korong demarcate Pongging lands from Sissen and Padu lands respectively. Prior to the cessation of intertribal wars in the early part of the 20th century, the homesteads used to be located on a spur of Girsum Yorbe, the hill to the west of the village. The location of the spur was easy to defend during frequent wars with the Minyongs. After the earthquake of 1950, the homesteads shifted down towards the base of Pongging Dite to the east, and thereafter, finally settling down at its current location. This coincided with the introduction of wet rice farming by the government. Previously uneconomical marshy valley that lay directly below the village and above the Siang were harnessed as wet rice fields. In the ensuing decades, most of the viable lands have already been converted to terraces of paddy fields. The village today is flanked by seven clusters of paddy fields in all directions.

Purying village. Purying lands are demarcated from the Rapum lands on the west by the Songshi Bu, and to the east from the Gapo lands by a sharp gorge. In contrast to Pongging, the village lands of Purying show almost no traces of cultivation anymore bar a few patches of maize cultivation and some kitchen garden. Elsewhere in the Ramo areas, one occasionally spots some fruit trees, but these failed orchards – remains of governmental efforts to promote horticulture - are hard to spot among the underbrush growth that has reclaimed the land. During the season in

summer, a lone old man standing by the road selling peaches to the passengers of the daily taxis is the only reminder of the failed government scheme.

Land claims of tribes and clans, and even families, were determined by ancestors' itineraries, and in some cases, the prowess of individual forebears who had supposedly cleared a patch of previously unclaimed forest[53]. It is not uncommon, especially in the higher reaches which are very sparsely populated, for vast stretches of land to be claimed as private property[54]. The boundaries of tribal territories were usually demarcated by natural features such as ridges or rivers. While in the urban areas, cadastral surveys and the creation of formal land records by the Department of Land Revenue and Settlement have begun to be common, the only records of land claims and ownership in the rural areas are oral history. Till today, only a tiny proportion of rural lands have been surveyed (personal communication from an official). Conflicting claims of ownership of land are adjudicated under traditional laws by the Gaonburas.

In some cases, differing versions of the history of the passage of ancestors through a particular region exist, though these conflicting claims did not necessarily involve dishonesty but rather divergent constructions of complex, overlapping legitimacies (Horowitz, 2002, p. 43). The Shi Valley has seen a tremendous increase in conflicting land claims since the hydropower projects started. In the Siang Valley, where settled wet rice cultivation took hold decades ago, conflicts over land ownership are relatively rarer.

Land ownership and conflicts: Views of an Arunachali Land Revenue Official

"In the Ramo area, probably only 10% of land needed (for hydropower projects) is free from disputes. This is because traditionally our boundaries used to be along the ridge of a hill or a nallah or tumpe rik-letik (the steep slopes of a swidden field). In some cases, boundaries which were marked by trees or rocks are difficult to discern.

"Also, disputes arise on land which have cultivable as well as steep slopes. Now, earlier, when people used to purchase land, they would only pay for the gentler slopes on which one could farm. The steep slopes were assumed to come with the deal. Now the conflicts are over these unusable lands, when sometimes the seller claims that he never sold the steeper slopes while the buyer thinks it came with the purchase. (Another kind of land under conflict) is the no man's land which had never been used in the earlier days; it was allowed to lie fallow as clan/ community land. Such lands are now being required by the company and these are under dispute.

"In my experience, there is never any conflict in the wet rice cultivation areas, only in the high mountains and jhum areas." (interview, 2012)

[53] This probably also indicates the wealth status of the individual in that clearing forest required possession of a metal implement, an expensive good.

[54]This practice of land ownership was completely alien to non-Arunachali administrators. One Indian Administrative Service (IAS) official vented to me during an interview, "People say, 'yeh pahad se woh pahad mera hai' (the land from this mountain till over there is mine). How can anyone even think that? What nonsense is this?" (Anon., personal communication, 5/11/12).

In the Ramo area, since the construction of the road connecting the valley to Aalo, many villages have shifted to be closer to the road. Other villages have established satellite hamlets. Some villages have disappeared due to the migration of their population to other villages or nearby towns.

In general, in the Siang region, three kinds of ownership of land and other assets are in practice; descending in scale these are: communal, clan-based, and individual. Although it is commonly believed that indigenous peoples tend to own land communally only, individuated land claims are quite common among different tribes, and predate the influence of market and state (for examples from other north-eastern states, see Fernandes & Barbora, 2008; Karlsson, 2011).

In Pongging, erstwhile swidden lands, hunting grounds and land parcels designated for extraction of timber and other forest produce, are either owned by the entire village or specific clans. Rice fields and orchards, relatively new kinds of assets, belong to male heads of households. Stretches of the rivers are identified as clan properties for fishing. Co-ownership of clan members who no longer reside in the village – e.g. those who migrated in the 1970s to found a new village Ngorlung in the plains – over land and other resources is still recognised by the residents. For instance, the Ponrung, a bat cave which was purchased by a Panyang ancestor at the founding of the village, is considered a property of all descendant households. The annual harvest of bat meat is distributed equitably among the residents of Pongging as well as Ngorlung.

In Purying and other Ramo villages, swidden lands are said to be owned by the village. When the practice was still thriving, sections of the village land were identified for cultivation in rotation. The forests were cleared off communally by all households, and then the cleared land was parcelled off to the households for cultivation. In contrast to Pongging, individuated claims on forest lands are strikingly high. Even hunting grounds in the higher reaches of the mountains have been individuated (Dhasmana, 1979).

In the recent past, there has been a general trend across the state of growth of urban centres and decline of rural population, particularly those far away from urban settlements (Aisher, 2007; T. Huber, 2012). This is usually not reflected in official data compilations, as people tend to keep themselves enrolled, to be on the electoral list which makes them eligible to vote in the local Panchayat and Assembly elections (see section 6.4 below). But generally, the villages have been gradually shrinking. In Purying many families of the Yorko clans such as the Pusangs have migrated out. Even among those who are still formally residents of the village, they tend to be gone and living in other parts of the state for long periods. Once they have left the village, they try and acquire land in an urban area and move out of the valley. In the case of Purying, at least 20% of

the 'official' population[55] had moved out to the urban settlements, and the ones in the village wished to do the same. During one of my visits to Purying, the household head of one of the two Pusang families told me that he was looking to buy a parcel of land in Mechukha.

Figure 6.2 A signboard in the Shi Valley asserting territorial sovereignty of a Ramo clan.

Despite this migration, the importance of land as an anchor of one's belonging, and identity cannot be overemphasised. Even as people express their desire to move to urban areas, they feel compelled to have an anchor in the natal village by way of a second house or through a relative. The increasing importance of electoral politics in the village life has sharpened the importance of land-based identity. As mentioned above, political capital was linked to being from a 'place' and being on the voter rolls. As a young man from the Ramo area responded to my question of whether he would prefer to shift out to Mechukha or Aalo, "(Even if I did) one will still need to have a piece of land in the village. Otherwise, where does one say one belongs to?" (personal communication, 11/10/2012). This sentiment was echoed and elaborated by another young man in Pongging. "If they take away all our lands, then we'll turn into refugees without any homesteads or fields. In the Adi way, land has weight. To be able to say that we belong to a village carries weight, even if it's only a small piece of land we own. So, even if we were to give up our land to

[55] This was based on the difference between the number of people actually resident in the village and those registered on the voter rolls.

Shaktidhara and move to Pasighat, we would still need a village to call our own." (personal communication, 02/02/2013).

Thus, place attachment, or place connection as Conde and le Billon (2017) name it, among the indigenous communities endured even though the value of land as the substrate for indigenous livelihoods had been changing, somewhere gradually and somewhere disruptively. Land and territory continued to be the basis for identity as a member of a clan and tribe, and as we shall see in section 6.4, also for political currency.

6.3 Changed Rurality, Changing Aspirations

In this section, I will discuss two significant impacts of the state-led Development programme on the villages: first, it changed the nature of rurality, and second, by improving the quality of life and demonstrating the life that was possible with access to money, it seeded 'the capacity to aspire' (Appadurai, 2004). I have discussed this previously for the Ramo areas (see M. Ete, 2017); in this section, I include my findings from the lower hills, and thus try to give a more general sense of change in the Siang catchment.

Even though the lives of the rural communities of Siang are contained within the same geographical territory that their predecessors claimed hundreds of years ago, their social, economic, and political lives have changed significantly. Decades of government interventions have altered notions of the good life. This vision of a good life and prosperity among the tribes of Arunachal has grown along the template set forth by the government's social welfare programme. Compared to the baseline at Independence, the quality of life in the villages has improved. Food security has increased due to improved agriculture and the GoI's public distribution system. Life expectancy has increased, and more and more people have access to healthcare. At the same time, rural life and livelihoods are no longer simply about a subsistence-level existence but have a strong aspirational dimension. Today the conception of a good life comprises not only basic services such as healthcare and educational opportunities but also electricity to charge mobile phones and run television. Goods such as mobile phones, televisions, and gas stoves are part of a family's consumption basket for many households in rural areas. For younger people, intangibles such as access to entertainment, and escape from the drudgery of traditional agriculture are necessities.

The changed rurality is inscribed on the landscapes in the lower and higher reaches of the Siang catchment. In the higher Siang region, the Statist Development project left its imprint on the landscape through its absence. Today, the stark landscapes of the higher mountains where Purying is located, look more pristine and undisturbed than how they used to be 50 years ago. A discerning

eye can catch traces of the failed efforts of improving agriculture– here an abandoned patch of wet rice cultivation, there a citrus tree. There are no signs of significant farming on the mountainsides. Here, agriculture has not been the economic mainstay for at least two decades. Two government interventions – the promotion of wet rice cultivation, and a rice-based food security programme called the Public Distribution System (PDS) led to the collapse of the subsistence economy. On the one hand, wet rice cultivation failed in the high mountain agro-ecosystem. On the other hand, PDS weaned people away from traditional diet, as maize and millet were stigmatised. Today, the villagers are entirely dependent on the PDS supply of food grains for their food security (See M. Ete, 2017 for a detailed discussion).

The socio-political context of the Shi Valley is characteristic of a vast swathe of the high-altitude lands of Arunachal, administratively known as 'border areas'. Such border areas are inhabited by smaller tribes (each generally less than 10,000 individuals). These pockets were the last to be incorporated into the Indian administration. According to a government report,

> "Living in relative isolation from the mainstream, even after 60 years of country's independence, the people in the remote border areas have started feeling neglected due to lack of developmental and income generating activities. … All border areas are economically weak with low agricultural yield and traditional farming is mainly subsistent, which is today compounded with increase of population, shrinking jhum cycles and decreasing productivity of land" (GoAP, BADDP report).

The self-identified elite of the community, tended to agree with the government's assessment of the economic status of their own communities and the area, and made statements like "The most backward area in West Siang district", "our people are in the Early Man stage", "our public are ignorant", "our public are innocent".

> "On a visit to the house of an official of Block Development Officer in Aalo, the ZPM from Mechukha also happened to be there. I had gone there to fetch the BPL list, socio-economic census. I commented that the entire population of the villages seemed to be on the BPL list, he responded, "if they live in the village, then they must be poor. Those who can (afford to), would leave for the town." (field notes 17/08/12).

A general sense of deprivation seemed to exist, due to the lack of access to opportunities and the absence of mobility in joining the urban middle class. The sense of lack was not the absolute poverty that one notes in the plains of India, but rather that of relative poverty, in the sense of lack of opportunities. There was no landlessness in the traditional sense, but a thwarted sense of unfulfilled aspirations. The disparity was partly in the access to services, and partly in the capacity

for accessing these services. There was a palpable discontent with the situation of the absence of development and livelihoods. During my fieldwork, there was an unfortunate incident of a middle-aged woman dying of malaria. While malaria was the proximate cause, the ultimate cause was the fact that good-quality healthcare was not immediately accessible to her. A Ramo man in his early 40s expressed his frustration to me, "We cannot live like we wish to. We cannot even go to a doctor when we want to."

The lower Siang region offered a stark contrast to this picture of rural life. Here, the changes in the landscape embodied the success of the government programme. Rice fields and orderly citrus orchards had replaced swidden fields. Here, the climate and terrain turned out to be favourable for wet rice cultivation introduced by the government in the 1960s, and gradually its higher productivity convinced the communities to adopt the technique. The landscape of Pongging looked like this: a cluster of cane-and-bamboo houses situated in the middle of a gentle terrace of land, surrounded by seven major clusters of paddy fields. Most households had more than one field scattered in different clusters. The oldest fields were the Odang cluster, located downhill of the homesteads, close to the Siang River. At least twelve families had land here. This cluster was earmarked to be entirely submerged by the project. Newer fields had been developed above the village, as well as further west towards the westerly village of Sissen.

Although only an annual crop of paddy was grown, the families produced enough rice for their needs, and even some surplus to share with relatives or sell in town. Women were the main agricultural workers who took care of preparing seedlings, transplantation, weeding, and harvesting. Men provided labour during ploughing and harvest. Those who could afford, hired wage labourers instead. Those who had salaried jobs continued with farming through sharecropping, because it was considered shameful to let land stand fallow. Most wage labourers and sharecroppers were Nepali immigrants, who came from outside the village. They lived in huts beside the fields, away from the village proper. Tilling was still done manually with hoes or with a pair of oxen by most villagers. A mechanical tiller owned by a villager was available for hire, although it was relatively expensive.[56] After the paddy harvest, women planted poppy in the dried fields. Sometime in early spring, opium was processed from the mature seed pods of the poppies.

[56] The rate for hiring the tiller, locally called Kobuta (after the brand 'Kubota' which was the first equipment introduced in the village), was INR 350 an hour in 2012-13. An average field required 3-4 days of 8 hours' tillage, while the largest fields could require up to 8 days. At INR 2800 per day, this rental was out of the reach of most households in the village. According to an informant, in 2012 season, only 10 households had hired the Kobuta.

In Pongging, paddy cultivation was supplemented with thriving kitchen gardens. Their diet also consisted of foraged forest produce, seasonal bush meat, and fish from the Yamne River and occasionally, the Siang River. The population was food-secure unlike communities in other parts of the state, and did not seek government PDS assistance. The forests were also a source for building materials such as timber, bamboo and cane and firewood. Firewood was the main fuel for cooking and space heating. Lives and livelihoods were highly dependent on their land and natural resources. Superficially, life in Pongging appeared to be self-contained and reliant on their land and natural resources for subsistence. But even here in the lower Siang region where villagers were relatively self-sufficient in agriculture, the villagers were heavily dependent on the market for other daily necessities and goods such as clothes, fast-moving consumer goods, electronics etc. and other services.

Figure 6.3 Harvesting of poppy sap for making opium.

The centrality of agriculture in the village life of Pongging ensured that the community was close-knit, with a high dependence on labour-sharing for activities such as agriculture and house construction. In contrast, in Purying where the importance of agriculture had declined drastically and subsistence was market-based, the traditional practice of labour-sharing was weakened.

Figure 6.4 A house being re-roofed through communal labour-sharing arrangement.

Healthcare and education were two of the most expensive items in the consumption basket. Pongging was not farther than two hours from Pasighat where the district hospital had some of the best facilities in Arunachal. On the other hand, an ill person in Purying must travel for an entire day to reach Aalo. Sometimes an illness in the family can wipe out its entire savings. In both Purying and Pongging, as elsewhere in the state, people were completely integrated into the cash economy as consumers. Agriculture was not a viable source of monetary income, and people struggled for other opportunities to earn cash. Unlike nearby villages in the Siang valley, commercial farming had not taken off in Pongging. The edges of the fields were littered with exotic citrus trees such as Valencias and Mausambi, from older government efforts to introduce horticulture, but the crops did not reach the market. The absence of road connectivity and resultant transportation overhead made it unprofitable to take the crops to the market.

In Pongging, the division of labour between subsistence farming and cash-based livelihoods was heavily gendered, with men shouldering the responsibility of bringing in money. In Purying, on the other hand, irrespective of sex whoever could, tried to secure wage labour employment with the Border Roads Organisation (BRO), a road construction agency of the Central Government. At least one adult from every household in the village worked as an unskilled worker with the BRO. In 2012-2013, the average monthly wages of a BRO labourer were INR 7000. People bought

rice and other essentials from the market with their wage earnings. Families did tend to small kitchen gardens which supplemented their diets with vegetables, and raised poultry, goats and pigs. In recent years, BRO labourers had also taken to renting accommodation in Mechukha town to be closer to their work sites, coming back to their villages only on the weekends. Cash-based livelihoods, and not traditional practices, were the backbone of the local economy. Aside from BRO employment, there were no other reliable enterprises that could generate steady employment.

Figure 6.5 BRO employees catching a ride on a tipper to the work-site on Monday morning.

Though government census statistics tended to categorise most rural persons as farmers, this obscured the reality that agriculture as the main economic activity has been on the decline (For a detailed discussion on uneven agrarian change in Arunachal, see Harriss-White et al., 2009). While agriculture has been in decline, the biggest job creation has been either in public administration or sectors such as construction, which are strongly linked to government spending (*Arunachal Pradesh Human Development Report 2005*, 2006). In both areas, many villagers tried to work out multiple sources of livelihoods. New enterprises have sprung up in the villages. In Pongging, two people run little sundry that sell a little bit of everything – single cigarettes, matches, biscuits, soaps and other items of regular consumption in the village. Another person butchered mithuns occasionally

and sold the meat in the village. Some mentioned selling preserved game and fish in the towns. The production of opium is perhaps the biggest source of income, particularly for women.

Figure 6.6. A prized insect, a non-traditional forest produce.

In the Ramo area, non-traditional natural resources were being tapped for the market. One person was involved in harvesting rattan for the Assamese cane-weaving market. In the summer of my visit, quite a few people were busy collecting an 'insect'[57], that was reportedly being bought up by middlemen for INR 4 lakhs per kilo. This market had been going on for at least a couple of years as of 2012 and was not on the radar of the state government. A more regular source of income was the wild meat business. Aalo, the district headquarters of West Siang was a ready market for wild meat. In the prime season, a skilled hunter could earn around INR 8000-9000 from a 3-4 days' hunt. Aside from wild meat, there had been an ongoing underground trade[58] on musk and

[57]Quick internet research indicates that the insect, Yartsa Gunbu or *Ophiocordyceps sinensis*, is a prized medicinal product in China. Apparently, middlemen from the plains of India would come periodically and buy the insects from the collectors. An Arunachali middleman reported that he was paid INR 1,20,000.00 for a kilo of the insect. Local collectors were not certain where the harvest were sold finally. The most likely transport corridor to China would be through Nepal, which also has a thriving trade in Yartsa Gunbu.

[58] As hunting of musk deer is illegal, hunters talked about their expeditions in euphemisms such as going to the 'Border' for 'jungle work'.

bear spleen since the 1960s, prized in Chinese medicine. Besides, I heard of micro-businesses such as hourly renting of carom boards in Purying, and the running of a makeshift roadside video hall at the BRO road construction camps catering to the non-Arunachali labourers.

However, the individuals themselves did not view these enterprises as legitimate employment because the income was neither regular nor substantial. The answer to the interview question of occupation was nearly always "*Kuchh bhi nahi karta hai* (Hindi for 'I do nothing')". Only wage employment, preferably a 'Sakori' or a government job, was worth reporting as employment. Government jobs were highly desired for their security and regularity of income. Without steady opportunities, livelihoods were precarious. One illness and a trip to Aalo or Pasighat for healthcare could wipe out family savings.

Earlier, in the 1980s and 1990s, individuals with secondary education were able to get employment easily at lower-level government jobs. In Pongging, some individuals were employed by the Department of Education as teachers. For the youth of Purying, like other villages in the Ramo areas close to the international border, the security organisations used to be reliable employers. The ones from Purying with government jobs were employed in the police force. Some villagers had moved away from the village to live in their places of posting, although they continued to maintain their ties with the village by either supporting their relatives monetarily. Almost all children of school-going age lived outside the villages.

Government petty contracting – infrastructure construction and supply orders – continued to be an important source of livelihoods for young men up until the 1990s. Such contracts, usually to the tune of a few lakh rupees, used to be abundant previously, and executives in field offices of government departments used to have discretionary power to hand out contracts, usually with the understanding to split the profits with the contractors. However, as the GoAP had to regulate its spending, these opportunities were drying up. Besides, due to changes in the administration of government schemes, it became harder for grassroots entrepreneurs to win such contracts.

By late 2000s, access to government employment had become harder as there were fewer openings, and more competition. Due to the meso-level failure to develop a secondary sector of the economy on the one hand, and the steadily growing educated population on the other, many young people find themselves unable to find a job. Even though in both the villages almost every young man and woman under the age of 40 had attained at least secondary education, no one had secured employment with the government in recent years. A few drew their salaries against contractual

positions in rural development schemes such as Anganwadi and ASHA workers[59]. But these time-bound opportunities with no pensions and additional benefits.

As access to primary and secondary education became widespread in recent years, the number of young people with college degrees increased exponentially. An unintended consequence of the exponential spread of education is the deskilling and alienation of young people from traditional agriculture. After years of formal education, returning to the labour-intensive traditional life of subsistence agriculture was not a viable option (For a more in-depth enquiry from elsewhere in north-eastern India, see Kikon & Karlsson, 2019). Even if they wanted to, having spent at least 15 years of their lives within the school system, they would have found themselves too de-skilled to go back to traditional farming (for a similar study from another Himalayan state in northern India, see Morarji, 2010).

Despite the high formal unemployment rate, education for children was still considered an important investment to gain them a secure job. In fact, education was probably one of the most expensive investments a family could make. The Government of Arunachal provides primary education through village schools, but they are perceived to be of inferior quality. Pongging had a village school with resident teachers. Purying had a school in a nearby village. But parents in both villages preferred private 'Mission'[60] schools which were considered to provide high-quality education, which would enable the children to pursue courses with high employability such as medicine and engineering. In Pongging, better-off households maintained another house in Pasighat or Yingkiong towns, the nearby district headquarters, where their children stayed to attend school. Those who could not afford to do so sought out relatives to host their children's stay. Similarly, all young children in Purying lived outside of the village, either in Tato or in Kaying where two schools had been established by Christian missionaries.

A middle-aged man in Pongging pointed out the shift towards a monetised economy, and the futility of a farming-based livelihood for the younger generations:

> "Think about it, nowadays, look here, even my own children do not want to farm. As long as one has money, a human being will survive. Land is no longer a necessity… Look at those folks in the town. Women earn 2-3 lakhs by selling vegetables in the

[59] Anganwadi and ASHA workers are frontline workers of government schemes on Child Development and Maternal Health respectively. These are practically not steady employments. Instead, the individuals are technically volunteers who are granted a monthly honorarium.
[60] Mission schools are education institutions run primarily by Christian missionaries.

> market[61]. These kinds of people are the ones who are thriving. Do they have farms? No. They do not have lands. They will survive on banana flowers and Rori leaves[62] if they must. And yet they have enough. They send their children to Mission schools. It is us (who make a living from farming) who are unable to send our children to Mission (schools)."

The soporific life of the village was not attractive. Not only could one not make a decent living with farming, but it marked one out as having failed. Instead, these young people aspired to join the urban middle class. A young man in Pongging, who had completed a humanities undergraduate degree a couple of years earlier, described the dilemma of the younger generations from the village who had been out of the village long enough to be alienated from the hardships of the rural life:

> "On the one hand, it's fine if the project does not come up. On the other hand, it's also good if it happens if the (compensation) rate is satisfactory. After all, we don't have vehicles (to reach the village), so every time we have to march on foot. Here, I have no desire to work (on the farm). *Lobag du tu*[63]."

There was indeed a stark generational divide in aspirations. The older people were content to live in the village, with access to a few modern amenities. Younger people on the other hand wanted more. For instance, means of physical mobility, four-wheelers or motorcycles at the least, were coveted. During state elections, it was common for political contenders to reward supporters with motorcycles. The young people wanted to move out into the more comfortable urban lives. Even when emphasising the importance of land as an anchor of belonging (section 6.2), they were struggling to migrate out to the urban settlements for better healthcare and education for their children. There they either stayed with relatives or in rented accommodations, while they sought economic opportunities such as government contracts, and established their own households.

In Pongging, almost all younger men under 35 years spent some time of the year either in Pasighat or Yingkiong. The only young head of household who had taken residence in the village was someone who had to abandon his studies after the sudden death of his father in a hunting accident, and thus became the household head by default. In Purying and other Ramo villages, the situation was similar. The completion of the road to Mechukha, and the subsequent boom of Mechukha

[61] He is referring to the market-women who do not farm themselves but buy produce from the farmers in bulk in the morning and retail their purchase in re-portioned amounts through the day.
[62] Banana flowers and Rori (*Piper pedicellatum)* a foraged leafy vegetable, were traditionally considered famine food. The speaker implies that the market women may live frugally, but secure the best education for their children.
[63] "Lobag" translates roughly to "reluctance to do something because one finds the task boring or one feels lazy." Stating 'Lobag du' (I feel Lobag) does not preclude undertaking the said activity, however the subject makes clear that s/he would rather not. He laughed sheepishly when he admitted his reluctance to work on the farm, probably aware that it was a discordant sentiment.

town had triggered a wave of outmigration for those who could afford it. However, due to the ongoing urban boom, land prices had escalated, making it difficult for newcomers to acquire property. Their foothold in the towns continued to be uncertain due to inability to find a sustainable source of income. In their attempt to move to the towns, the younger members of the village and the region led a multi-sited life, coming back occasionally to the villages. Given their precarious access to a life outside the village, younger men especially valued the possibility of assured employment as well as the windfall of compensation. The possibility of a large cash payout represented possible capital for future business investments. The same young man who confessed to disliking farm-work, said to me, "Nowadays we are dying for money. One can do some work (business) only if one has money. Without money what can one do?".

The rural life was thus lived at the uneasy intersection of needs and desires – the land and natural resources-based subsistence practices providing for the former and the monetary one providing for the latter. The subsistence economy was mostly self-contained, the aspirational one was deeply enmeshed in the wider politico-economical networks of the state and the market. The self-sufficiency granted by the former was circumscribed by the subordination to the state and the market brought on by the latter. The other side of the growing aspirations was the sense of frustration, particularly for the educated young men. Despite the "despair in encountering the inherent discipline and exclusion" of modernity, "intense hope and aspiration" (Morarji, 2010, p. 57) continued to survive. As rising aspirations and consumption needs hit a ceiling of limited livelihood avenues, politics became an alternative pathway to fulfilling these aspirations for the young men. This is discussed further in section 6.4 below.

6.4 The Economic as Political, the Political as Social

Due to the changes in livelihoods bases and aspirations described above, the last couple of decades witnessed a deep enmeshing of economic, political and social interests at a micro-level. I discuss this phenomenon in this section.

As mentioned in the previous chapter (section 5.3.2), petty government contracts for minor construction work became popular in the 1960s and 70s as a means of earning cash. They continue to be important even today. In Pongging, the villagers had devised an arrangement for undertaking government schemes collectively, so that every household had the opportunity to earn a little cash. In the years prior to my fieldwork, two such projects were implemented in the village – one was the construction of the village water supply tank, and the second was the school building

construction[64]. The villagers collectively took up the contract for the projects and the income was split between the two moieties equally – thereafter, the moieties divided the money to the households. Thus, while the Mongkus with a smaller number of households received about INR 18,000 per household, the more numerous Mone households received a smaller sum of INR 12,000 each. During my fieldwork, discussions were going on in the village about approaching the government for a new irrigation channel for one of the rice field clusters.

These instances of communal resource sharing across party lines as described above generally tended to be fewer. It was more common to channel resources to individuals through political loyalty lines. This could be done as a punitive measure for the opposition too through the withholding of funds. For instance, in Pongging, the compensation amounts for damage to agricultural lands due to floods in a previous year (unrelated to the hydropower project) were not paid out to households who had supported the MLA candidate who lost the election (Anon., interview, 03/02/2013).

Figure 6.7 Government-funded desiltation tank constructed by the Pongging community.

[64] A young man reported that he had lobbied hard to secure the contract for school building construction for himself, but political machinations led to the contract being shared among all villagers.

In recent years, there was an increase in the number of such opportunities in Purying and the larger Ramo area, due to the designation of the region as a Border Area, for which the Government of India had some special programmes. As a result, many petty schemes such as "culverts, roads, footpaths, school building, teachers' quarters, water supply, supply of basic laboratory equipment for health units, horticulture development, flood control" etc. could be secured by entrepreneurial men (field notes 17/08/12). Often, these schemes were secured by the village ASM from the MLA through advocacy and display of loyalty and ability to deliver votes, i.e. political patronage.

This means that some members of the constituency were excluded. An old-time political actor told me

> In Mechukha, there's a system for getting contracts. For instance, now the Congress candidate has won, supporters of NCP (a political party) should not expect even a two-bit job. Right after the counting (of votes) is concluded, you might as well give up any hope of doing contract work. (laughs) I supported Chije (the losing candidate).
>
> Me: then you must have gotten some contracts when he was in power?
>
> Nothing worth mentioning anyway. He didn't know how to bring in money. A little bit of BADP scheme, a little bit of MLALADS. Beyond that, he couldn't even get state schemes from the ministers, forget about any Central schemes."

Even the supporters of the MLA could not be assured of getting economic opportunities. It was difficult for the MLA to distribute contracts and resources equitably. He had at his disposal a small discretionary fund called the MLALAD(S) – MLA's Local Area Development Scheme. He needed to secure the bulk of the resources in exchange for his political support to the ruling political party in Itanagar and the influential faction within that. For a couple of decades now, the resources at the disposal of the GoAP have been shrinking too, which has led to intense competition among the legislators for resources for their own constituencies (I have discussed in Chapter 4 in some detail the financial problems of the GoAP). The MLAs who were not entrepreneurial tended to lose out.

During fieldwork in Mechukha, I was told by more than one supporter of the MLA of their dissatisfaction with how he handed out the funds. On one occasion, I overheard a supporter declare this to other supporters. After a luncheon at the MLA's residence on occasion of the Independence Day, one man announced to an assorted drunk gathering at the tea stall that "He had a chat with the MLA in which he made it clear that he wasn't coming begging for work; it was

up to the MLA to be equitable in the distribution of work. But the MLA himself should be clear that he shouldn't come begging for his support during the next elections." (field notes 17/08/12).

It is not only economic resources through government contracts that constituents expected their MLA to provide. In the past decades, educated tribe members seeking government employment have looked to their political representatives for their recommendations for jobs. In the past, such recommendations were a dependable way of securing a government job. Unfortunately, this was no longer the case, as opportunities had disappeared due to the shrinking of the job market and increasing competition (discussed in detail in the following section). During my visit to the Itanagar residence of an MLA of one of the study areas, I got to witness the ritual of recommendation-seeking. A young man belonging to his political constituency, claimed to be a political supporter and appealed to the MLA for a letter of recommendation for the position of a government teacher. The MLA chastised the young man for his lack of requisite Bachelor of Education degree, but still asked his secretary to provide a letter. The MLA knew perhaps that the piece of paper signed by him held little value in the current job market, but nonetheless he had to offer it. Unless the MLA is extremely influential in Itanagar, his recommendation is not worth much due to increasing competition even among MLAs. Besides, government employment is now formally regulated by the Arunachal Pradesh Public Service Commission.

Even if people wanted to honestly compete for a government job, the process was not simply based on meritocracy. There are insinuations that the system set up under the Arunachal Pradesh Public Service Commission was susceptible to corruption. During my stay in Mechukha, there was news that the state police department had advertised for the position of constables, and that the going rate for bribes was a few lakhs of rupees, which was being collected by a certain individual in Aalo. Many young men were going down to Aalo, but there were rumours that the hopefuls from Mechukha were being turned away from the gate itself, as the demand was already enormous (field notes, 08/2012).

Thus, access to political power had become an important resource that translated into income opportunities through access to government contracts and employment. As government resources became intricately linked to livelihoods, and as access to government resources became entangled with political power, the contestation for political power became indistinguishable from the struggle for economic opportunities for local actors. Therefore, these young people, mostly men, struggled either to gain political power themselves or to become vote-bank brokers.

Politics in Arunachal is primarily understood in its populist form of two or more contestants vying for a seat at one of the levels of government as an elected representative. It is generally unmoored from current issues, but rather the calculations are based on tribal ties, or investment of capital to purchase votes. As I saw it, everyday discussions of political machinations and betting on the right candidate and publicly throwing support behind him in the assembly election was a significant social preoccupation, at least among the ambitious young men. In fact, discussions on electoral politics seemed to dominate the daily life for many people.

In theory, the Panchayati system institution and the state legislature were supposed to be independent of each other: the state legislature was meant to make laws, while the Panchayati Raj was meant to be more closely involved in the day to day 'doing of Development', i.e. the Panchayat system was to act in tandem with the development agencies of the government for the planning and implementation of various government rural development schemes. With this in mind, in early 2000s, the 72nd and 73rd Amendment of Panchayat were enacted to decentralise the systems of power to the Panchayat Raj. In practice though, in the absence of their own financial resources, the Panchayats continued to be dependent on the State government for funds. Due to the dominance of MLAs over the distribution of government funds within their constituencies, the Panchayat system became subservient to the MLAs in practice. As such Panchayati Raj institutions were subsumed by the wider party politics, and the Panchayati units served as vote banks within the Legislative constituency.

The most basic unit of political organisation was the Gram Panchayat, the lowest tier of the Panchayati Raj; every village had at least one Gram Panchayat or formed a part thereof. Effectively though, the lowest level of influence in politics was the Anchal Samiti. The Anchal Samiti Member (ASM) was in position to aggregate critical numbers of votes, and assured these in favour of an MLA contestant in the legislative elections. In short, the ASM was a vote-bank broker. The enterprising ASM[65] could then seek funds and patronage from the Zilla Parishad Member or the Member of the Legislative Assembly, and get some development funds to his or her village. Below the ASM, the gram panchayat Gram Panchayat had little active power. The introduction of the Panchayati Raj led to the gradual marginalisation of the Kebang as well as the Gaonburas to a degree. Today, while the Kebang is the first rung of the judicial system, its importance in the village life has shrunk.

[65] This section was written in 2013-14. The statement does not hold anymore. Under the Arunachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj (Amendment) Act, 2018, the provision for ASM has been done away with. Henceforth, the Panchayati Institutions comprise Gram Panchayat and Zilla Parishad.

Within the electoral system described above, the Ramo villages were part of the 33–Mechukha (ST) Constituency –covering Shi and Yomi valleys – for the State Legislative Assembly, along with four other tribes. Along with four other Gram segments, Purying fell under the Purying-Hiri Gram Panchayat. This Gram Panchayat was part of the Anchal Samiti (AS) segment 17/12. Because of the small population in the valley, all the Ramo villages were clustered into just four Gram Panchayats, and two AS segments. These in turn were part of the 17–Mechukha-Tato Zilla Parishad segment in the Panchayat elections. Pongging, in contrast to Purying is a mid-sized village, and so it had two Gram Panchayats, that constituted the Pongging Anchal Samiti segment. The Pongging Anchal Samiti segment was part of 04-Katan Zilla Parishad segment, which in turn was part of the 40-Mariyang-Geku (ST) Constituency for the State Legislative Assembly.

Competition in elections was intense, as it meant control over financial resources for five years. This held true not only for the state elections but also for the Panchayat elections. The influence of money on elections was enabled by a distinct feature of the electoral democracy in Arunachal Pradesh, which is the extremely small size of the electorate. For comparison, in 2014, while the median electorate size of a legislative assembly was about 1,40,000 persons in neighbouring Assam, in Arunachal, it is about 10,700 persons[66]. This made the margins of winning and losing elections extremely narrow. For instance, in 2004, Tadik Chije, an Adi candidate for the 33–Mechukha (ST) Constituency, defeated P.W. Sona, a Memba, by a margin of a mere 679 votes.

The low number of voters made it possible for political aspirants to 'invest' a few lakhs in the Panchayati elections and a few crores for legislative elections. The gains to be had if one wins – control over many more crores-worth of government spending - makes it worthwhile to gamble. Panchayat elections for the position of ASM were closely fought, with candidates spending at least a couple of lakh rupees to attract voters (anon. interview, 01/02/2013). The population was extremely well-organised politically. For the poorer and weaker households who themselves did not expect government contracts, their political loyalty became a currency that could be exchanged for either continued patronage of their preferred political leader or for instant material benefits right before the elections. An elder in Mechukha recalled, "during the first election, no money was involved. Then they came with *sada tema* (tins of chewing tobacco), then boxes of milk… in the last election, families were being given money in lakhs I have heard".

> Money is an elusive factor in any election. Its role as a determinant of voting behaviour is not easy to understand. An accepted fact is that one cannot think of entering into

[66] These figures are based on constituency voter roll data from the State Election Commission in 2014.

> electoral fray in Arunachal Pradesh without sound financial background. In some of the constituencies financial involvement of each candidate is reported to be very close to one crore." (Bath, 2002)

This is not to say that voters made their choices based only on direct financial inducements. Due to the multi-tribal nature of the constituencies that the Ramos and the Panggis belong to, political cleavages along tribal, clan or smaller lineage lines played an important role. Political constituency boundaries in Arunachal were often, though not always, contiguous with tribal territorial boundaries. When not, political representatives tried to gerrymander the constituencies to align more along tribal lines. The 33-Mechukha Constituency comprised five small tribes. The Ramos, the Libos and the Bokars were the three Adi tribes. The Membas, a Buddhist tribe of Tibetan origin, and the Tagins, who migrated from the adjacent Subansiri valley, were the other two tribes. At the time of the fieldwork, there was a strong feeling among the Ramos that the Membas had benefited disproportionately from government contracts, and they had received nothing. It is another matter that the Memba supporters of the losing Memba candidate felt that they too had been sidelined. They therefore wanted an Adi candidate to be successful in the next legislative elections.

> "a tribal voter in Arunachal Pradesh behaves politically in response to the group pressures or community welfare. The voters are bound by a network of social relationships, which often get transformed into political relationships at the time of elections." (Bath, 2002, p. 118). "

The Mariyang-Geku Legislative constituency to which Pongging belongs, was also host to five tribes. These were the Padams, Panggis, Komkar, Milang and Pasis. Since 1990 when the constituency was demarcated, the candidates had been either Padam or Panggi, the two of the more populous tribes. In Pongging village, in 2012, there were three factions organised around three ASM aspirants, who in turn were loyal to different MLA aspirants. The growing importance of Panchayati elections split the village polity along party lines.

The prevalent political system was thus a bricolage of traditional practices, practices introduced by the colonial government, as well as subsequent election-based political practices (For a similar investigation from another part of north-eastern India, see Wouters, 2015). The successful transplantation of electoral democracy and Panchayati Raj led to the factionalisation of the village polity. In the absence of a wide economic base, and flight of labour from farming, and compounded with individual aspirations, government jobs and government contracts were a key to livelihoods. These in turn were in the hands of political representatives in power. Therefore,

people at the grassroots felt a strong need to have their 'own leader' in power. The idea of corporate solidarity with the phratry, the clan, and the tribe (in that order of allegiance), was shifted onto electoral politics, with the mutual obligation that came with kinship morphing into a form of neopatrimonialism wherein the 'clients' supported the 'patron' kinsman seeking political office with their loyalty and votes, and the 'patron' in turn granted favours of jobs and services (Brown, 1987, p. 103 discussed a similar situation observed in the New Guinea highlands).

In the earlier section 6.2, I had mentioned the importance of belonging and place attachment. This attachment was reinforced by political calculations, as belonging to a clan and to a related land gave one political capital. In recent years, there were attempts to formally organise the clans for political ends. For instance, the All Ato Yorko Yornyi Ao Association (AAYYAA)[67] was formed in 2009 to represent the interests of the Yorko clans.

Two Ramo villages, Yorko and Yornyi, are ensconced amidst the Mechukha valley, among the Memba villages. The immediate trigger for the formation of the clan-based organisation was the proposal for a government-funded mini-hydel project to be constructed on a stream on Yorko village lands in the Yargyap valley:

> "The final DPR was sanctioned for Yorko Mini-hydel, and the department floated tender. Some Gamlin man got the tender, and sold it to a Memba man. Then we learnt that they were going to change the name of the project to Sinjung range micro-hydel… so, this is when we got together to form the All Ato Yorko Yorni Ao Association. In the course of discussion of the Yorko mini-hydel, we learnt about the Endor project, as well as the other private companies." (anon. conversation 20/09/12)

Some Ramos were unhappy that a Memba man had profited from a project that lay on Ramo territory. This group was led by Tomo, a charismatic political leader who would be a key actor in the hydropower politics of the Shi Valley (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 8). At this point, this group of Ramos insisted that the contracts related to the project should be given to the Ramos. In order to advocate this position, a community-based organisation called All Ato Yorko Yornyi Ao Association (AAYYAA) was formed.

In the following years, AAYYAA also purportedly advocated for Ramo interests in Mechukha town. Many Ramos had moved to the urban settlement of Mechukha in the past decades. As the town was previously populated by members of the Memba tribes, the Ramos and other Adi groups felt the need for identity assertion to lay claim on resources such as land allotment in the designated

[67] The name of the organisation invokes the descent from the two important ancestors Yorko and Yorni who migrated from the Bokar lands in Yomi valley to Mechukha valley (See Section 5.1 in Chapter Five for details).

urban areas. Along with it, there was a resurgence in asserting Ramo claims on parts of the valley itself, based on traditional migration narratives.

6.5 A Note on Inter-tribal Inequalities

In the last decades, there has been growing intra-tribal economic inequality as tribal elites accumulated traditional and non-traditional wealth. However, tribe members tended not to take it into cognizance and kinship ties of clan and tribe remained strong. Aisher, an anthropologist who conducted his fieldwork among the Nyishis, another group of the Tani tribe inhabiting the valleys west of Siang region, noted

> (However) people belonging to particularly powerful or populous clans take pride in this fact, knowing that they can turn to fellow clan members in times of conflict or economic need. A strong sense of kinship and loyalty binds members of each clan… In the present day, such clan networks, particularly in semi-urban and urban settings, often influence the distribution of jobs, political power and associated wealth. (2007, p. 482).

Instead, the frustrations were vented on inter-tribal disparities. To be fair, there were some grounds for it too. A quick glance at the number of tribe members employed in the government in proportion to the size of the tribe revealed that some tribes had indeed benefited significantly. A Libo young man said to me, "Our wealthy have wealth in lakhs, your wealthy (among Galos) are wealthy in crores".

In the previous chapter, I mentioned that proximity to administrative centres gave some tribes and clans easier access to education provided by the government, while more faraway clans and tribes could not do the same. In the 1970s and 1980s tertiary and even secondary education was an assured path to job opportunities in the newly expanding government. As in the early days, employment prospects were enhanced through kinship networks. Clan and tribal connections were important resources, as government officials had significant discretion in hiring new employees. For instance, it was highly likely that the largest number of salaried individuals in Pongging found employment in the Department of Education because an important political leader used to work in the Department.

Thus, first mover advantage in terms of access to education enjoyed by some tribes, leading to entry into administrative structure, came to serve as a multiplier effect for the tribe. The number of members of a few early-bird tribes entering jobs expanded exponentially. This affected the tribal composition of the salaried workforce of the state. In this light, the smaller communities whose territories were remote and farther from the administrative headquarters were left far behind.

However, as described earlier, starting in the 1990s, government employment opportunities shrank, and other employment avenues in the private sector did not appear to absorb the young educated into the workforce. For smaller tribes, this led to a general sense of being left behind, due to a lack of access to opportunities and the absence of mobility in joining the urban middle class. In addition, the tribal elite of the smaller tribes felt that other livelihood opportunities such as government contracts were also unfairly cornered by the larger tribes.

This feeling of political and economic marginality was strong among the Ramos. Elsewhere (M. Ete, 2017), I have written about how the Ramo tribe members' perception of their deprivation is shaped to a large degree by their perception of their southern neighbours, who are seen to be more prosperous, and have access to better education and job opportunities, as well as power in the government. The topic of disparity between tribes did not come up in my conversations with the Panggis of Pongging. However, some persons commented on the personal wealth of certain Galo individuals, noting how incredibly wealthy they were.

Figure 6.8 Pongging road access being constructed in 2013 spring.

One response to the "self-perception … of marginality, powerlessness and backwardness vis-à-vis other tribes of the district and the state" (M. Ete, 2017) was the increasing demand for new

districts. Creation of a new district usually implied more government job creation as well as a flush of contracting opportunities in civil construction and supplies works. Since the district of West Siang and East Siang splintered out of the unified Siang district in 1980, the fragmentation along tribal boundary lines continued. Upper Siang, to which Pongging belonged, was carved out of East Siang in 1999; Siang was created from East Siang in 2015. At the time of fieldwork, there were rumours that a fifth district Shi-Yomi, to which the Ramos belong, was on its way. The district was finally carved out of West Siang in 2018. Thus, starting with a single district in 1947, the Siang catchment was now fragmented into five administrative districts.

6.6 Chapter Summary

The objective of this chapter was to understand the characteristics of the indigenous communities affected by the hydropower development programme. Specifically, I wanted to discuss to these characteristics in the context of their indigeneity and the broader discussion on indigenous peoples. I reported my fieldwork findings on the quotidian lives of two indigenous peoples of Siang region at the time of the inception of the hydropower projects in the areas.

The previous decades of Development for the communities of the Siang region gave a unique form to indigenous lives in Arunachal. On looking at the two study sites granularly, one notes the contrast in the impacts of decades-long state-led Development on the livelihoods practices and natural resource dependence of Arunachali communities. In Pongging, close to the foothills and Pasighat, the villagers successfully transitioned from swidden agriculture to wet rice cultivation. Settled farming is now a strong part of their identity and livelihoods, and consequently, they are heavily dependent on land and natural resources. In the more remote Shi Valley, the livelihoods were gradually unmoored from their land and natural resources. Instead, they depend on precarious wage labour for income, and the market for food security.

At the same time, a universal impact was the arousal of life aspirations that diverge significantly from the traditional subsistence lifestyle. The government's efforts to bring education and healthcare supplanted the 'traditional' ways of being with new models of living life, new measures of success, and new needs. The lives and livelihoods of the indigenous people became more complex and enmeshed with the wider global processes.

Since the Arunachali economy did not grow apace to accommodate the aspirations of the people, government employment and spending continued to represent important economic resources for communities. Gaining political power was the most certain way to control the government resources. Hence electoral politics became an important preoccupation for the ambitious local

actors. The mechanics of electoral politics only served to deepen their tribal identities by turning them into political currency (see section 6.4). Even as younger people were increasingly unmoored from the rural economic life, belongingness to a clan, village and tribe based on territory was reaffirmed as a central element of an individual's identity.

In short, while the era of development incorporated the tribes into a wider political and market system, the government policies also ensured that the indigenous peoples remained intact geographically and culturally. I will next describe and analyse in chapters 7 and 8 the perception of two communities of the proposed hydropower development, their responses and the emergent local politics.

7. Dissent and Acquiescence on the Siang

The Lower Siang Hydroelectric Project (LSHEP) is the site of one of the few known resistance mobilisations against large hydropower in Arunachal. Since 2010, Arunachali activists, particularly those from the Siang Valley, have succeeded in creating partnerships with national as well as international advocacy groups, and in gaining the attention and support of national and international media. At the time of my fieldwork in the early months of 2013, the conduct of public hearings for LSHEP had been postponed six times[68]. As of 2012, the developer company had withdrawn most of its staff from the state. The project office at Pasighat had been pared down to minimal staff, and all technical staff had been shifted to an ongoing project in neighbouring Bhutan.

Between 2008-2010, before the involvement of urban activists in the protest against LSHEP and the subsequent increased national visibility, a period of intense contestation played out at the local level. This was led by the villagers of Pongging who inhabit the land immediately upstream of the project site. Among the thirty-three villages that are likely to be affected to various degrees by the reservoir of the proposed project, Pongging lies immediately upstream of the dam site. Not only are many families of Pongging projected to lose prime agricultural lands, but several homesteads are also likely to have to shift as well. My research focused primarily on this village, and its actors, during the period between 2008-2010. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the contestations against the LSHEP were in the past by the time I arrived in Pasighat and Pongging. Hence, my data was primarily based on documents in private and government archives, and interviews and conversations.

Section 7.1 will describe the broad socio-political and economic terrain of what constitutes the local, as well as locate the project and its stakeholders in this context. In section 7.2 I will then present the determinants of local social acceptance of the project, that arise out of the socio-political and economic particularities of the local communities. In section 7.3, I will narrate the sequence of events that unfolded against this backdrop, and the roles, interests and strategies of the individuals who played the role of intermediaries in the local arena of hydropower development.

[68] Ten years later in 2022, the project was still awaiting environmental clearance, pending public hearing.

7.1 The Background

This section presents the particularities of the project and the project locality which undergird the local politics. In the following subsections, I highlight the relevant technical aspects of the project and its political and economic stakes, and the three main stakeholders, and outline their interests.

7.1.1 The project

The proposed LSHEP lies at the border of East Siang and Upper Siang districts, a few kilometres before the river Siang enters the plains of Assam and is renamed Brahmaputra. It is located at the base of a relatively densely populated valley. As detailed in Chapter 4, the present-day 2700MW project has a storied history. First conceived as a flood control project in the area in 1947, it has undergone numerous iterations (see Section 4.1). In 1983, a flood control project was proposed again in the same area by the Brahmaputra Flood Control Commission (BFCC). The proposal was abandoned due to opposition over the massive scope of submergence of urban settlements and villages in the Siang and Siyom valleys. At this time, the dam axis was proposed close to Rottung village, less than seven kilometres upstream of the present dam axis below Pongging.

In 2000, NHPC took over the Siang Lower project from the Brahmaputra Board, began survey and investigation (S&I) works, and prepared the Detailed Project Report (DPR) for a 1600MW run-of-river project[69] at the same site. In 2005, NHPC was set to execute the project, having already prepared the DPR, and initiated the design of the Rehabilitation and Resettlement Plan (NHPC communication with DC). However, disagreements grew between the Government of Arunachal Pradesh (GoAP) and NHPC over GoAP's demand for 12% free power, as well as the perceived autonomy of the latter: being a Government of India undertaking, NHPC was not answerable to GoAP. In February 2006, GoAP transferred the stewardship of LSHEP, along with four other NHPC-led mega-projects, to Shaktidhara and two other private companies.

This event was a watershed. It was the first time that GoAP asserted its sovereignty over its water resources in the face of opposition from a powerful central government. Second, it marked the start of a process of private investment-led resource exploitation and revenue generation in the state. Unlike NHPC, Shaktidhara was willing to accede to conditions favourable to GoAP. In addition to agreeing to 12% free power share to GoAP, it also consented to pay non-refundable processing fees and a refundable upfront premium on every MW of proposed capacity. Although

[69]According to the MOA, " "Project" means the Hydro Electric Project (2700MW) proposed to be established on Siang river… including complete hydroelectric power generating facility covering all components such as dam, intake works, water conductor system, power station, generating units, project roads, bridges, offices, residential facilities, store (etc.)s….".

the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was signed in February 2006, the project did not restart for another two years as Shaktidhara waited for NHPC to hand over reports, documents, and assets related to the project.

Although referred to as a run-of-river project, the LSHEP project requires the construction of an 86m high dam, with a reservoir holding 1421 Mcum at an FRL of 230msl. It will create a reservoir of 77.5 km along the Siang, and 28.5km along Siyom (as per the DPR prepared by NHPC). In effect, it is a conventional dam-toe project.

GoAP, Shaktidhara and the populations of villages affected by the project form the triad of main stakeholders. While this categorisation as a simplistic triad implies three monolithic entities in relationship with one another, the three entities were internally heterogeneous, with various actors within the entities acting and interacting with one another in diverse ways. These will be discussed in more detail below.

7.1.2 The State

Of the hundred-odd projects in the pipeline, LSHEP itself was a critical project for the GoAP. Firstly, the project was GoAP's unofficial flagship for establishing Arunachal as India's powerhouse as well as to become a credible investment destination. It was one of the first and most high-profile hydropower projects to be privatised. Secondly, its promoter Shaktidhara was one of the most experienced in hydropower development, and therefore likeliest to successfully implement the project. Besides, at 2700 MW, it singly represented about 6% of the total 40,000MW power potential earmarked for development in the 12th Plan. In the long run, the GoAP hoped to earn INR 1.314 crores per MW per annum from the sale of 12% free power from LSHEP. In the short run, the signing of the project had already provided a quick cash injection[70] for GoAP. Between 2006-2010, it received a total of INR 4132 lakhs in refundable and non-refundable payments of processing fees and upfront premiums.[71] This revenue was utilised immediately for funding backlogged government projects. At the same time, individual politicians as well as political parties were rumoured to have received monetary assistance during the 2009 legislative and parliamentary elections. The affected villages of LSHEP are spread across five legislative constituencies and villages of two more areas have impact concerns. Members of Legislative

[70]LSHEP was one of the first MOAs to be signed by the GoAP. In 2006, Shaktidhara got the project at virtually throwaways rates in comparison to the upfront premium and processing fees that other IPPs were charged later by GoAP. For instance, Shaktidhara paid INR 10,000 per MW non-refundable processing fees in 2006, compared to INR 6 lakhs per MW non-refundable upfront premium and processing fees which was charged later for capacity enhancement.

[71]7.2 million dollars on 17th of March 2010. As an idea of its significance, the annual budget of the GoAP in 2011-12 was INR 3200 crores. Of this, Rs. 2421.05 crores were direct grants from the Central Government.

Assembly (MLAs) of all five constituencies belonged to the ruling party. They simply could not afford to oppose the project.

As per the MOA, the GoAP had three main responsibilities towards the project: to facilitate the implementation process by assisting the company in obtaining necessary clearances from the concerned state and central government departments, to create a conducive climate through maintenance of "general law and order in and around Project area… protection of life of the workers" (GoAP 2006), and to make available the land required for "the site required for the construction, operation and maintenance of the project" by acquiring "private lands within the State of Arunachal Pradesh" as per Land acquisition Act 1894 and Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873, and leasing it to the company against payment of land revenue (GoAP 2006).

GoAP struggled to fulfil its responsibilities due to a few factors. First, in practice, from being a monolith, it is a composite of different agencies that are fragmented vertically and horizontally, that often have little communication and coordination. This is exemplified by the absence of task sharing within the Department of Hydropower Development (DHPD) itself. Functionally DHPD is broadly divided into two branches: the original DHPD and DHPD (Monitoring). The old DHPD is responsible for the construction and maintenance of civil and electromechanical components of small hydropower projects (under 5MW). Its functions may be grouped into two categories Civil and Electrical. The DHPD (Monitoring) wing, on the other hand, oversees the private sector-led hydropower development, generally larger in scale. While the Monitoring wing functions out of one single office in Itanagar, the old DHPD establishment has a state-wide network of subsidiary offices, with officers and staff stationed at district and sub-district levels. The district-level officials of the Electrical wing of DHPD, however, had little information about the ongoing private projects in their jurisdiction. They were neither authorised nor encouraged by their superiors to interact with the private sector companies on behalf of GoAP.

Besides the DHPD (M), disparate departments such as Forests, Land Management, Culture and Heritage, Labour and Fisheries participated in the governance of the project development. Vertically, the functions of governance were divided between the GoAP Secretariat in Itanagar and the offices of the Deputy Commissioners (DC) in Pasighat and Yingkiong. In turn, these agencies functioned through individuals – politicians, bureaucrats, and technocrats – who had varying levels of commitment to hydropower development. In fact, in the case of some technocrats and bureaucrats, their membership of the affected villages and clans created other private motivations which were contradictory to the goals of GoAP.

While the GoAP Secretariat, Itanagar, took executive decisions that determined the direction of hydropower development, and entered into agreements with the company, it was the offices of the DC located in Pasighat and Yingkiong that were at the interface between the community and GoAP and had to solve the day-to-day issues arising from hydropower development, a task for which they were ill-equipped due to lack of resources and previous experience. Besides, the frontline officials had to struggle with a lack of information about the project itself. An illustration of this is the fact that in June 2010, the district administration had still not received a copy of the Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy 2008, even though the local contestations were primarily centred on the issue of displacement and rehabilitation (Nodal Officer, Office of DC East Siang to DHPD, 02/06/2010). A few days before the scheduled public hearing, DC East Siang admitted to the Secretary GoAP of not being proficient with the issues of hydropower projects and appealed that the concerned DCs be allowed to make a study trip to a completed hydropower site elsewhere in the country. At the same time, the district administration did not have the resources to cope with the additional responsibilities of liaising for the LSHEP. In fact, on a couple of occasions, the nodal officer for hydropower even sought the assistance of the company for the purchase of portable barricades in anticipation of protests (Nodal Officer, East Siang, to Shaktidhara 19/01/2011).

7.1.3 The Company

Shaktidhara is a large Indian infrastructure development company founded in 1979, with a diverse portfolio that includes power projects, roadways, and manufacturing. It was one of the first private companies to enter the hydropower sector when the sector was privatised in the early 1990s. In 2013, it had three operational hydropower plants with a total capacity of 2400MW in the two Himalayan states of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, and many medium and large projects under development in Bhutan and Uttarakhand. Its experience made it one of the few credible companies among the scores operating in the hydropower sector in Arunachal[72]. As elaborated in Chapter Four, national and state hydropower policies had invested in hydropower low-risk and high-return. For Shaktidhara, the 2700MW LSHEP was its most ambitious and potentially profitable project. In 2011, it required an investment of Rs.20,000 crores. Due to its location at the foothills, LSHEP was likely to require minimal additional investment for ancillary infrastructure such as transportation of building materials and equipment, and power evacuation. This made it an even more attractive asset.

[72]Refer to Section 4.2 in Chapter 4 for discussion on this.

Shaktidhara entered the MoA with GoAP in 2006. In 2010, a Special Project Vehicle (SPV) called M/s. Shaktidhara Arunachal Power Ltd. Shaktidhara was constituted for the implementation of the LSHEP project. As the project developer, Shaktidhara[73] has the mandate to "undertake preliminary investigations for preparation of the Pre-feasibility Report, detailed investigation for DPR preparation, and subsequent implementation, operation and maintenance" of the project on a Build, Own, Operate and Transfer basis for a lease period of 40 years, and it must "commission the project within a period of 8 (eight) years from the date of receipt of all statutory clearances..., achieving Financial Closure and availability of land required for the project." (MoA 2006). It had the imperative to stick to its time schedule, not only because of the cost implications of time overruns, but also because permissions or clearances from the various GOI agencies to undertake project activities were time-bound and acquiring another clearance due to non-completion of activities was difficult. It also increased the risk of the MoA being scrapped by the government due to non-performance. As a private company, it was motivated to stick to the implementation schedule and keep its overheads low to maximise profit. The day-to-day operation of the project was managed autonomously by the local office.

The project office, located in Pasighat[74] was staffed at the upper management level by retired senior military personnel[75]. These managers gained a reputation among the local population and the technocrats in Itanagar of having a '*fauji*' or military attitude. By this, it was meant that the senior managers were disdainful of 'civilians' whom they saw as lazy at best and corrupt at worst. In a conversation with one such manager, I found this perception to be true. The retired military officer said to me with evident disgust, "I am not working because I want to, but because I have to. I don't have savings like the civil servants. Here (in Arunachal) even a junior engineer has apartment buildings. How do you think they manage it?" In the early days, the company management did not pursue a public relations policy of appeasement towards other stakeholders. The workforce came to be non-Arunachali, especially in the early days. Although junior technical staff had been hired from among Arunachalis, but many left the company for government jobs. As most work packages for survey and investigation were sub-contracted to consulting firms from outside of Arunachal, the staff at the field sites were mainly non-Arunachalis. In addition to the workforce, there arose

[73]Regarding the nomenclature of the company, no distinction is made by the stakeholders while referring to the parent or subsidiary company or the SPV, and instead they are all addressed as Shaktidhara. Hence, in this dissertation, I adopt this convention and refer to the company as Shaktidhara as well.

[74]Shaktidhara took over the NHPC project office in Pasighat. It is a sprawling campus in the affluent Mirbuk area. In 2013 when I visited the office, the green leafy campus was surrounded by unscalable concrete walls on all sides, with a single gate where the entry of visitors was controlled.

[75]Military personnel are sought after as managers in the Indian private sector as they are perceived to be hard-working, disciplined, and well-experienced in personnel management.

an assortment of individuals accrued from among the residents of Pasighat, who came to be the local faces of Shaktidhara. It is unclear how these individuals came to associate with Shaktidhara, as there seems to have been no formal hiring process. It appears that the individuals were introduced to a certain Shaktidhara official through casual socialising. Unfortunately, these individuals were not considered respectable pillars of the society by other members of the Pasighat community or the villagers. They were thought to have unlimited access to the company and have benefitted from its largesse in the forms of contracts. Their presence appeared to have been detrimental to Shaktidhara's public relations.

In the initial days, Shaktidhara did not have a strategy for engagement with the affected community. It conducted its interaction with the affected community on a need-to basis, and primarily through the DC office. Also absent was a Corporate Social Responsibility strategy; its funds for community welfare activities were haphazardly distributed on a first-come-first-serve basis. Thus, a majority of recipients were enterprising individuals and organisations based in Pasighat who had no affiliation to any project-affected village. Later, it did undertake far-reaching CSR activities such as health camps in the project-affected villages, and the establishment of an Industrial Training Institute at Rottung which started offering courses for skill development of Arunachali youth in trades such as electrician, diesel mechanic and welder.

7.1.4 The affected communities

The upstream and downstream communities of LSHEP to be affected by the project form the third major stakeholder group. When GoAP and Shaktidhara signed the MOA, the interest of this group was acknowledged, in that the project had to be developed "in the most environment, eco, and people friendly manner", and the only role anticipated for them was that of "oustees from the project/project affected families" (Article 8.2, MoA). That communities were the owners of a significant portion of land required for the project was overlooked.

As per the EIA report commissioned by Shaktidhara, 112 villages with 6392 households came under the '10km radius' zone of influence, while 32 villages with 2334 households were 'directly affected due to the various components like dam, colony, camp areas, submergence etc.' (CISMHE undated). This criterion has been strongly criticised by environmentalists and human rights activists as the impacts of riverine regime change on lives and livelihoods are not contained to an arbitrarily defined ten-kilometre radius. Many upstream and downstream groups in Arunachal and Assam who apprehend project impacts but have not been recognised as 'project-affected' are also resisting the project. These social movements constitute altogether a different angle of resource

politics, which is beyond the scope of this research (the downstream concerns are explored at length in (Baruah, 2012; Mahanta, 2010)).

For this research, I limited my fieldwork to the villages formally identified as affected. These fell under eight administrative circles in four districts and comprised a heterogeneous group of numerous clans from the Galo tribe and Panggi, Pasi and Minyong subtribes of the Adi group. Among these, Pongging village was purposively chosen for detailed study due to its proximity to the dam.

The economy of these villages is predominantly agrarian. The landscape is dominated by wet rice fields, a result of the decades-long governmental initiative to promote settled agriculture through wet rice cultivation and horticulture. Rice cultivation is oriented primarily to subsistence and not for the market, although in bumper years farmers sell their surplus rice in the nearby towns. Several affected villages in the Siang district have adopted commercial cultivation of fruits and spices to varying degrees in the past two decades. Communities claim ownership of all lands, except for a few pockets of reserved forests belonging to the Forest Department, GoAP. Three forms of ownership are recognised – individual, clan, and village. Traditionally, lands used for swidden cultivation, as well as grazing grounds for Mithuns and hunting grounds were communally owned. With the advent of settled agriculture, individual ownership is increasing. While the swidden fields and hunting grounds are located higher up the mountains, the productive wet rice fields and the orchards tend to lie closer to the valley floor.

Submergence of the productive valley lands under the reservoir of the project, displacement of homesteads, and the risk of further land loss due to reservoir-induced landslides were central concerns for the affected communities. By the measure of submergence impact, a popular criterion for assessing the negative impact of hydropower projects, LSHEP's submergence zone of 51.51sqkm at FRL is along one of the most densely settled sections of the Siang-Siyom valleys as well as any other river valley in Arunachal at 28 persons/km^2 to a general density of 17 persons/km^2 (Census 2011). However, due to topographical variations through the length of the valleys, there is a wide variation of specific consequences for different villages. For instance, although Pessing lies at the tail-end of the reservoir, a larger acreage of its rice fields is at risk of submergence, as compared to Eyi and Biru cluster of villages which is in the middle. Within a village too, different households would experience differential degrees of submergence impacts due to the altitudinal location of their land assets.

On the other hand, many community members saw economic opportunities in the presence of a hydropower development company. In the early 2000s when the project was headed by NHPC, some members of the closest villages began to align themselves into interest groups to negotiate on behalf of the affected communities. One called Lower Siang Project Coordination Committee (LSPCC) had been constituted by 'all the native elite group and representatives of Pangin-Boleng circle', (Minutes of Meeting, LSPCC, 9/11/2000) with a view to 'coordinate (between) the Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh/NHPC and Local people… relating to Lower Siang Project at Rottung'. Another styled as Host Villages Association representing the local communities upstream of the proposed dam axis (namely Rottung, Sissen, Kallek and Babuk[76]) offered conditional support to the company. In one communique to NHPC, it asserted that unless an amicable solution regarding certain financial matters is reached, the people would be 'compelled to exhibit non-co-operative attitude towards this project in the interest of the people of the affected area'. The multiplicity of rival interest groups competing to represent the 'local people' can be gauged from this assertion of the above-mentioned LSPCC that it "was the genuine representative of the interests of the native people likely to be affected by the project, no other organisation or union or committee would be allowed to interfere in the matter".

Affected landowners were aware of the impacts but saw it as a trade-off for potential economic gains. Take for example this message from a landowner from Sissen village written to NHPC,

> "… many of my inherited landed properties are under the coverage of your project… considering the national interest I dare not claim monetary compensation for my lands.
>
> That, my claim is that I am to be given the contracts of construction works under your project which are likely to be started in near future." *(Anon. to NHPC, undated, original in English, edited by the author for clarity)*

When an interaction with a company did not turn out to be advantageous, landowners could withdraw their support. For instance, when Shaktidhara restarted investigations at an alternative site near Bodak village downstream of Rottung, which would later be finalised as the dam axis, villagers of Bodak who owned the land at the site where S&I was conducted wrote to the East Siang DC:

[76]These are upstream villages in East Siang district inhabited by Minyongs, one of the larger Adi sub-groups, which had a headstart in terms of access to education and government employment. The tribe has a significant proportion of its population that can be designated as intelligentsia.

> "..the NHPC… had carried out survey works at the aforesaid site for construction of a dam for the last few years. But the landowners were harassed and deprived off of getting any benefit…
>
> Experienced with the activities of the aforesaid earlier party ie (NHPC) we have decided not to allow the M/s. Shaktidhara Venture to undertake the project works at Eling Sine (Bodak) until a proper and unanimous decision is made in between both the parties" *(various to DC, East Siang, 10/3/2008, original in English, edited by the author for clarity, emphasis author's)*

This excerpt illuminates two broader features of the local politics: one, that the communities withheld support as a bargaining tactic, and two, that besides inheriting the project, Shaktidhara also inherited the baggage of the communities' experiences and perceptions of its predecessors (interview with a company official 09/02/2012).

At the end of the spectrum were firmly non-negotiatory groups such as Siyom-Sirit Bango and Siang Bachao Andolan. These groups represented the communities at the tail-end of the reservoirs. They came into existence in 2010, once the company initiated the process to conduct public hearings.

The diversity of attitudes to the project was likely due to the relative proximity of a village to the project sites, and resultant access to the information and economic opportunities. At first, only the villages in immediate proximity to the S&I sites learned about the project and its various aspects. For instance, given the continuous presence of water resource development agencies in the Rottung area, the people of Rottung were familiarised with the scope and purpose of the project early on. In the absence of formal information dissemination on the part of GoAP and Shaktidhara, information percolated slowly through the communities via social networks. Communities located farthest from the project site learned about the project and its impacts only towards the end of the S&I phase as the Impact Assessment Studies and cadastral surveys got underway.

Even then, within the tail-end communities too, groups in favour of negotiating with project developers existed side by side with groups opposed to the project. The calculus of costs and benefits for the affected communities was a complex one. This will be explored in greater detail in the next section, from the perspective of Pongging village.

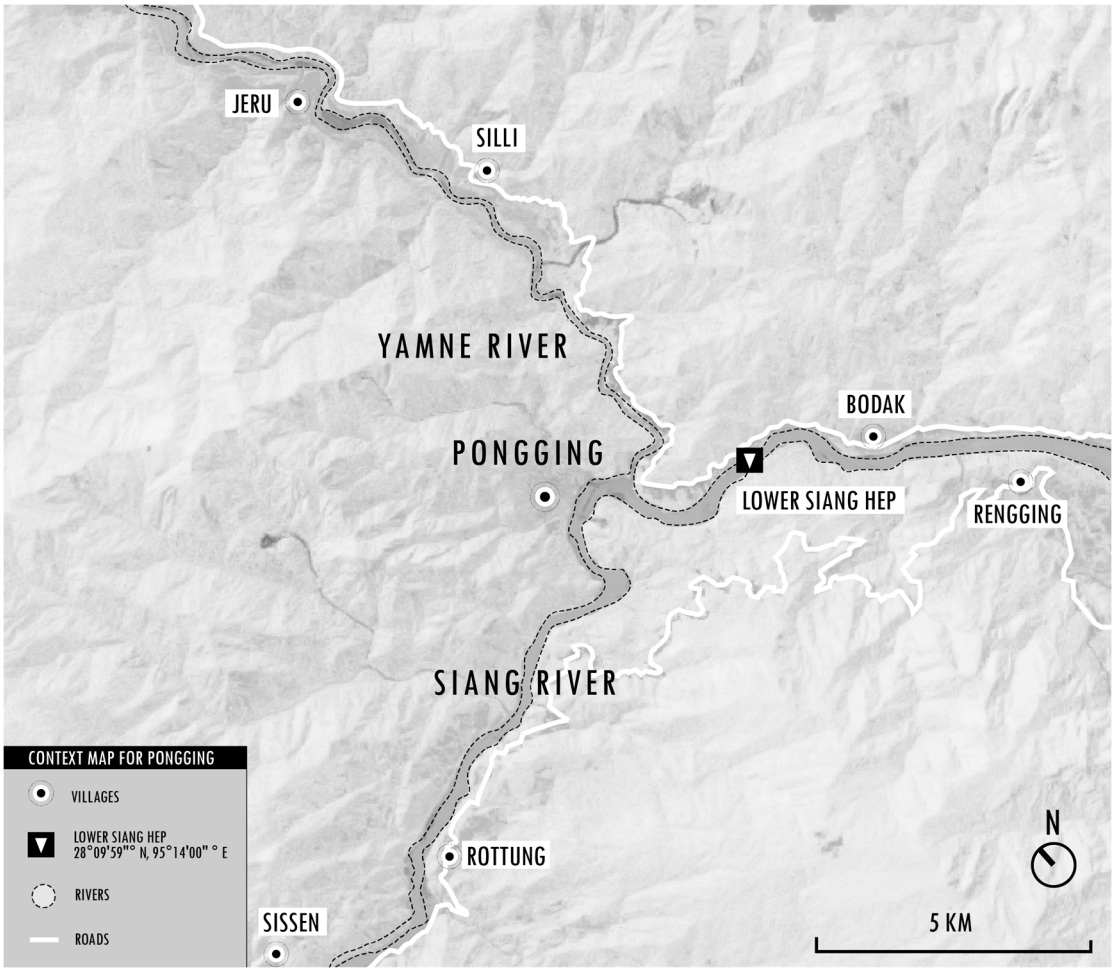

Figure 7.1 The villages in the immediate vicinity of LSHEP (Map by Sumant Goyal)

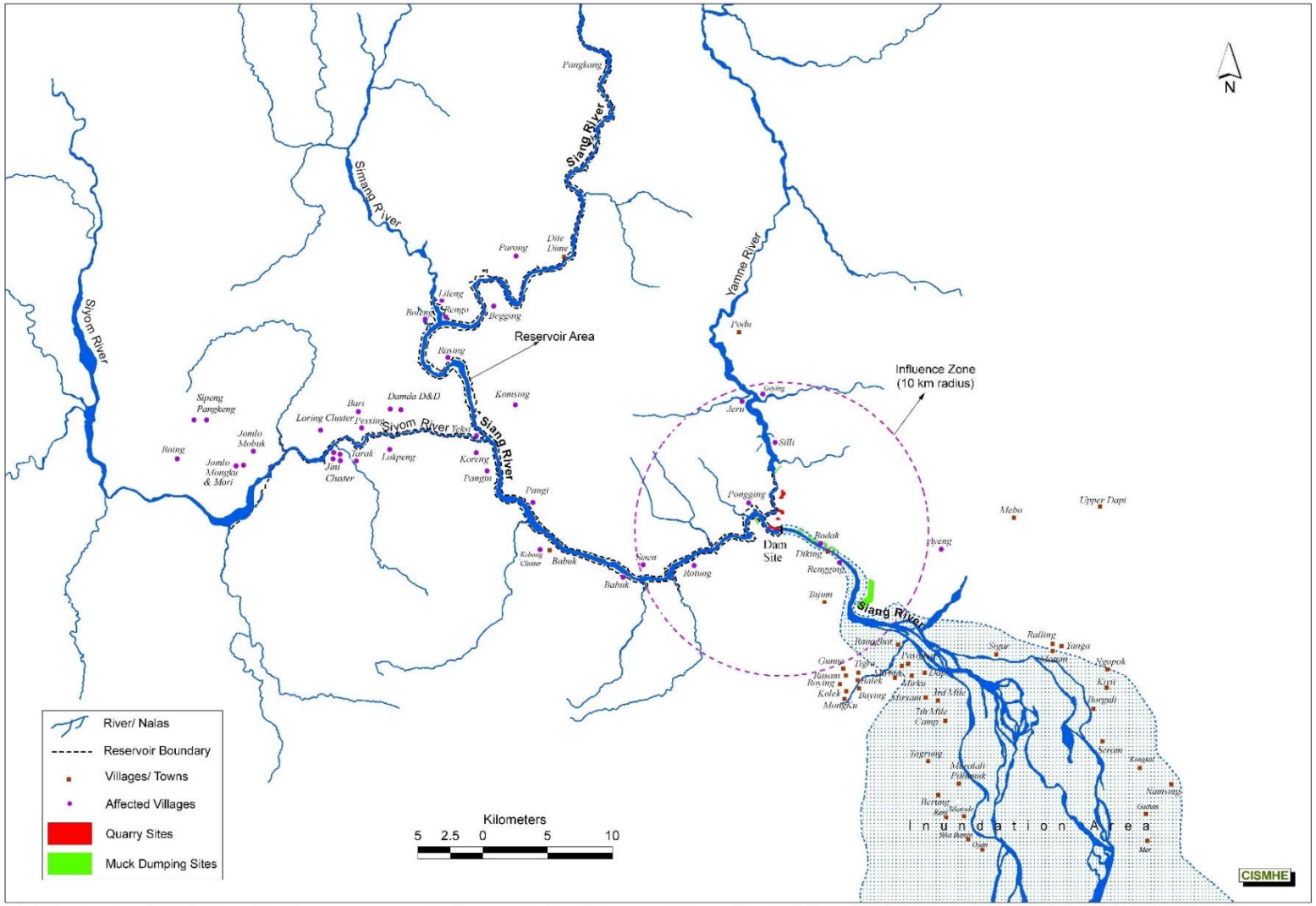

Figure 7.2. Map showing the scale of impact of the LSHEP (CISMHE)

7.2 Social acceptance of the project

This section identifies the main determinants of the social acceptance of the project among the population of Pongging village. While the social acceptance of the project directly influenced the local politics, it was simultaneously the object of and produced through local politics. Social acceptance was influenced by factors such as perceived impacts and impact mitigation measures of the project, perceptions of the company and the government and perception of the process. In the following sub-sections, the formation of these perceptions and their dynamism will be described.

The perception of impacts and impact mitigation measures was widely variable in the community, as the specificity of livelihood bases and strategies of the households and individuals differentially refracted their perceptions of the project impacts and mitigation measures. The perception of the company and the process was near-unanimously marred by a lack of trust. For instance, as per the Environmental Impact Assessment, the agricultural lands of only 19 households will be affected. However, due to distrust in the company (which will also be discussed below), it was widely believed that the entire village will be displaced.

Social acceptance among the villagers of Pongging fluctuated over time and across gender and age dimensions. I conducted my fieldwork in early 2013, almost three years after the last significant involvement of villagers in the process. By this period, the perceptions of various aspects of the project had sedimented and crystallised into hardened positions.

7.2.1 Perception of impacts of the project

This sub-section reports what and how various community members learnt about the impact and mitigation measures, and how they perceived these issues. It brings to light the diversity of perceptions spanning from negative to positive, and points out that community members were not simply in opposition to the project, but their dissent or consent was conditional.

The proposed submergence of productive lands was the primary issue of concern for the villagers. The Full Reservoir Level (FRL) marker at 230 msl was constructed just below the lowest homestead of the village. At this FRL line, the Odang cluster, one of the oldest wet rice fields of the village, would be submerged. Rice fields owned by nineteen households lay in the Odang. One household had its fields only in this cluster. While the other cluster at Seram was supposedly above the submergence, it was feared that these fields would be affected too. Aside from the direct submergence as declared by the company, there was also a fear of further land loss due to the secondary impacts of the reservoir, such as landslides and backflow. Pongging villagers lived with constant reminders of the force of natural disasters. On the right bank of the Siang right across the village was a landslide triggered by the 1950 earthquake. Below the village was a flat bank of fields

laid over with sand by the floods of 2010. The perceived scale of impacts was compounded by a profound distrust of the intentions of the Company (see sub-section below), and that the real FRL actually lay much higher above the village.

The fear of submergence triggered not anxiety for livelihoods and quality of life, but for identity and attachment to land.

> "They say that if the company builds the dam, then Arunachal will *develop*. But even if it were to *develop*, if the Adi lands and hills and valleys are swallowed up is of no *value*. If we no longer have land to live off, then we will be doomed to wander around like birds and animals. Today we look down upon the poor of the *Aying* land (or plains people as *Magoniya*[1]. If this dam is built, then the people of Arunachal will turn into *Magoniya*."
>
> Middle-aged woman, farmer. (original in Adi-Panggi, words in Italic used as loan-words. It shows the seepage of development discourse in every life).

Figure 7.3 The Odang rice field cluster beside the Siang River, set to be submerged by the LSHEP.

[1]Magoniya is a loanword from Assamese. It is a derogatory word for 'beggar'.

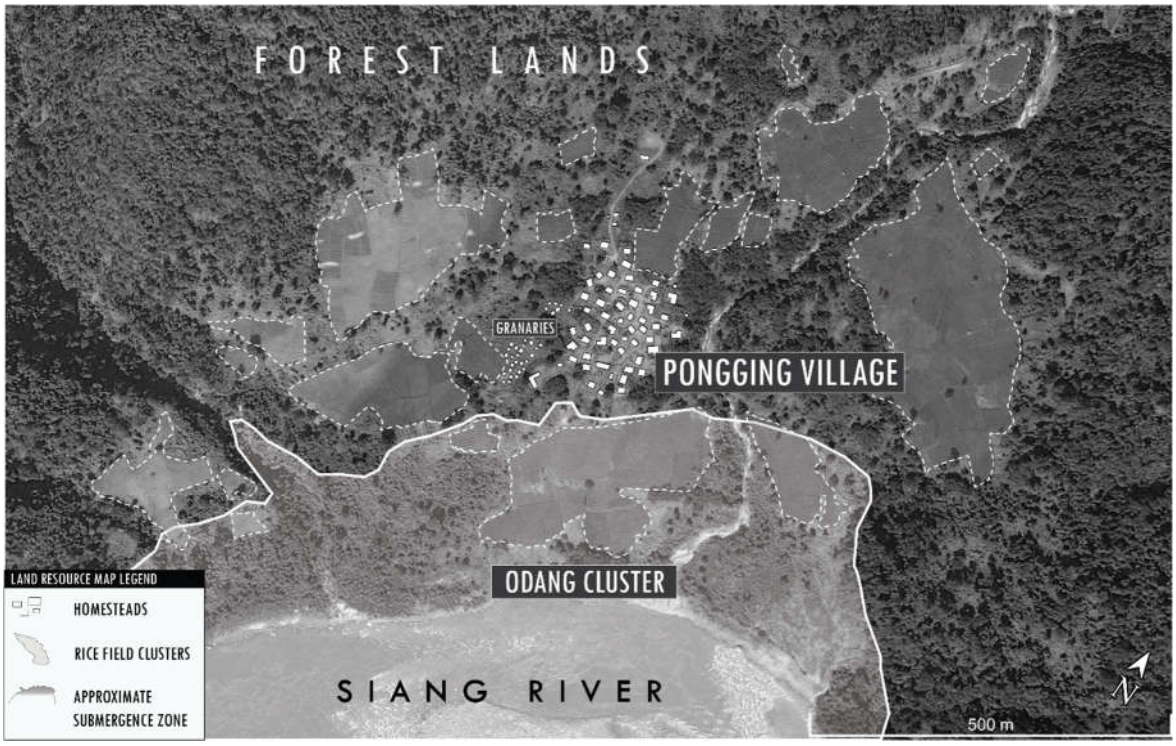

Figure 7.4 The approximate submergence impact of the proposed LSHEP on Pongging lands as per official FRL (Graphic by Sumant Goyal)

Another respondent identified the initial negative response to the project as a primeval reaction to a threat to one's land.

> "When it was all new, I saw that if the project came up here, then the first victim would have been this village. Because our fields, land, houses – all would have gone under water. Now every man loves his land. We have been born here, (every chapter of our life) has happened here. No one can stand the thought of seeing one's land and one's village go under water. So, it became a *sentimental* matter."
>
> Middle-aged man, a government employee.

The older women in general viewed the submergence of the village lands as the erasure of their self-hood. Again and again, respondents affirmed emotively the intrinsic value of the bond with the natal land.

> "It is our birthplace, and we don't want to shift from this place. I wish my dead body to be buried in my land where I was born. I wish also every bone of my body to be disposed of here in my village land."
>
> Old Woman in her 70s.

> "We hate to let them do it. That is because we have been born and brought up by our parents here. This is our birthplace, how can this be replaced? Even if they want to rehabilitate us, where will they find a place for our village?"
>
> Middle-aged woman 40s.

Here it must be noted that while the urban activists have emphasised the cultural significance of the Siang Aane (Mother Siang) at the centre of their discourse against the project, the villagers' concerns focussed on submergence and land loss. In none of my many conversations did anyone bring up the cultural or emotional value of the river in their lives.

Even when the possible benefits of the project in the form of job and contract opportunities began to emerge, the women as a constituency were consistent in their negative perception of the project. This could have to do with their disinterest in the employment opportunities and cash opportunities of petty contracts. I got to gauge their abhorrence of the project first-hand during my initial visit when the older women suspected me of being a company sympathiser or an employee[2] and refused to interact with me. One conveyed through my research assistant that "those who support this dam will be dealt with an iron hand by the villagers and those who give misinformation to the (government/company) will get killed by us." Even after about a year since the company had left the area, the reminder of the project through my presence caused them considerable distress.

While the menfolk also shared the concerns of livelihood loss due to submergence, they were much more ambivalent. The ambivalence towards the project was especially pronounced among the younger men, who had been struggling to migrate out to either Pasighat or Yingkiong (see Chapter 6.3). The men tended to weigh the loss of productive land assets against gains such as access to job opportunities, an increase in the standard of living, better quality of electricity supply and so on. In fact, many persons had already enjoyed a brief period of salaried employment with Shaktidhara during the S&I period. The proposed project represented employment opportunities for them, especially if they could secure an agreement with the company for job reservation. A couple of young men were studying to be technicians and engineers. They hoped that if the project went ahead, they would not have to worry about chasing scarce government jobs, as it would ensure good jobs for them.

[2] To be fair to the womenfolk, the menfolk also suspected at first that I was visiting the village on behalf of the Company. I had to spend a considerable amount of my time explaining my motivation to visit the village and the topic of my research. I found that the men were more amenable to changing their minds than the women.

This tug of contradictory desires and anxieties marked the perceptions and evaluation of the impacts of the project. I was told again and again, "Of course we want development, who doesn't want development?". On the other hand, the upcoming project made them fear that they would be dispossessed of their productive lands. The anxiety of loss was compounded by the uncertainty of mitigation measures.

7.2.2 Perception of mitigation measures of the project

Related to the community perceptions of the impacts, the first formal measures for impact mitigation of development projects were announced by GoAP in 2008-09. Two main aspects of the Rehabilitation and Resettlement (R&R) Policy were of interest to the community. The first was the compensation for loss of land and resettlement, the second was the ancillary economic opportunities from the project. As with the perception of impacts, mitigation measures were assessed differently by different actors.

In its earliest iteration, the provisions of the State R&R Policy were rejected outright by the community members as being unrealistically low.

> "In the beginning, we were given booklets of R&R Policy. It's made by the GoP and (compensation) will be given according to it. We read it, it said that only Rs.1.75 lakhs for one hectare. Calculation based on that ratio for our fields gave us a figure of 4-5 thousand rupees. That is, 10,000 – 15,000 at the maximum (per field). That's too little! Per hectare 1.75 lakhs, that too for WRC – that's too meagre! See, no way can our WRC field be 1 hectare in size[3]. They are small fragmented fields." (Interview, middle-aged man)

> "I bought some land in Pasighat this year, 350 Rupees for a square meter. Now the government has made a rule, 150 rupees (for a square meter). Who's going to sell land for that amount! At the local level, one buys at 350 Rupees. The government is trying to force 150 Rupees (per sqm) on us. At least, offer 500 or 400 Rupees (per sqm). Then we'll give our lands. When such a big company wants the land, how can we give it away for only 150 Rupees?" (Interview, Young man)

A few older members were apprehensive of monetary compensation being a sustainable source of livelihood for their community, due to a lack of financial management skills.

> "if the government agrees to the compensation rate demanded by us, things could be fine. With the compensation money, one can move from here to anywhere, buy land, and build a house. Some can enjoy life. But some could turn beggars too… because you know how we Adis are: we might not have any money, but (whenever we get some) we want to squander a few hundred [laughs]. We know nothing about saving … That's

[3]As discussed in Chapter Four, the government reacted to this concern by declaring that while the figure of 1.75 lakhs per hectare was supposed to be a baseline, and communities were at liberty to negotiate better rates in cooperation with a land board that would be constituted under the chairpersonship of the Deputy Commissioner.

> why however much compensation money we may get, our people will never make a success of themselves" (Man in his late 50s)

Men and women had differing attitudes to money, and its capacity to sustain livelihoods. Women had a pertinent insight into the inadequacy of resettlement measures, and considered satisfactory rehabilitation impossible.

> "If (the dam) is built, we will no longer have a place to live on, and to survive off. If we are shifted to a 'Nyibo Dolu' (a stranger's village), firewood won't be free anymore, 'erung-ekkam' (forest produce) won't be freely available anymore.
>
> Here in one's own village, everything we need is for free. Here we can fetch water or gather firewood whenever we want. There (at a resettlement site) water will regulated to a few hours. We won't even get ekkam leaves[4] to wrap our food with. Everything we need will have to be purchased." (Interview, old woman)

The matter of shifting[5] the village to another part of the village land was discussed with the company as well as the government. Some people were amenable to displacement if they were to be resettled on their own lands. The historical shifting of the village over different locations was invoked as a precedent for the possibility of moving the settlement to another part of the village lands. They said that the village had more than enough land above the FRL where they could resettle.

The older men thought that the community should be rehabilitated together, and that it was feasible to resettle within the village lands.

> "The FRL is going to be just below the Mosup (the community hall), they say. So the entire village will have to shift. There is enough land… Even over there (to the east of the village) there's a lot of flat land, although it does not appear to be so. There was some talk of levelling some of the land, but Shaktidhara didn't do anything." (Interview, middle-aged man)

Importantly, they wanted the resettlement process to be finished before the public hearing could be allowed to go ahead. To them, the public hearing marked the end of the negotiations, as they felt they would lose all leverage. A middle-aged man said, "The public leaders who came here (to convince us) said Pongging would turn into a heaven. So, we said that show us first.". The widely

[4] *Phrynium pubinerve* is a commonly available plant with big ovoid leaves with everyday use, mainly for packing food stuff.

[5] The details of resettlement seemed to have come up right from the beginning. The ex-CM Apang seemed to have proposed that the village could be shifted en masse to the plains below Pasighat where he owned a large tea estate among other pieces of land. However, this idea was rejected by the MLA of the area, as he did not want an important chunk of his vote bank to be shifted to another constituency.

shared opinion was that as the project was inevitable seeing that the government supported it, an adequate compensation could have been an acceptable solution. As the government continued to modify the provisions responsively, the differences in the attitudes in the community came to the fore.

Despite the dissatisfaction and disagreements with the precise terms of the R&R Policy, the principle of compensation for loss of land was received positively by the men. An oft-repeated statement was "If we were offered good compensation, then why on earth would we refuse". However, the diverse expectations of 'how' and 'how much' of compensation rendered the local politics complex.

Heterogeneity marked the community perceptions of the impacts of the project. This was due to the diversity of livelihood strategies of different households and individuals. For instance, a female farmer who depended solely on agriculture perceived loss of agricultural land more negatively than a younger male whose primary source of income was petty government contract work. The most preferred outcome was that the project be scrapped. However, this preference was tempered by ambivalence.

> Even today, people say, when Pasighat[6] used to be the capital (of the state), there were many of our people who became *nyigom-babu* (government officials). After we gave away the capital to Itanagar, our people do not get chance anymore. If Shaktidhara builds the project, yes our fields will be lost, and yes we will be submerged … But at least the kids who are studying in *Nyipak* (outside of Arunachal) can come back to jobs after finishing their studies. Even though I may not have lands (nothing to gain from compensation package) I say that our children will have to have salaried jobs." (Interview, middle-aged man)

A young woman, born in Pongging and married to another Pongging native, admitted to a degree of conflicted attitude:

> "I can't say (about the impacts of the dam)… I don't know, if we say no just like that, what if something good in the future could have come up. Or if we agree (to the project) just like that, will we regret that we should have stood firm on our dissent." (Interview, young married woman in mid-20s).

A middle-aged woman, the primary farmer of the family with all her children in school and college, echoed this ambivalence,

[6] Pasighat is the oldest town in Arunachal. Settled in 1911, it was the de-facto seat of the frontier administration of the colonial government. As a result, members of IPs from the neighbouring areas got early access to education and employment opportunities.

> "even if there were to be (positive outcomes), ignorant people that we are, we are yet to know. Even if you say if the Company works here, you will get these benefits, you will become rich, and many other things, we have not seen (the outcomes), so we don't know, do we? Perhaps instead, we may become impoverished. thus we think...right?
>
> But, about unseen things in future, we might repent that we shouldn't have driven (them) away.. or feel good that we did drive (them) away. The heart has two divided opinions about this."

Even so, the outcome for social acceptance was strongly influenced by the perceptions of the intents of the other actors, as well as the process.

7.2.3 Perception of the process

This sub-section describes the perception of a breach of sovereignty over their lands, felt by the community members in face of the coercion from the government. Also, there was little belief in the government, as it was felt that the government would benefit the company's interest over that of the community.

As early as February 2008, a junior government official suggested that a meeting be held between the company and the affected communities at the earliest before any survey was conducted. He argued that the village heads needed to be informed in detail of the proposed project, and that the company "should make the villages aware of the terms and conditions made with the state government on the issue." (SDO, Minutes of Meeting, 18/02/2008). But this was not followed up until June, perhaps due to the interruption of the Panchayat elections in 2008.

As mentioned above in section 7.1, all the lands in the zone of influence of the project, including the lands that would have been submerged were partly owned by the community, and partly by individuals. The villagers therefore questioned the authority of GoAP to allow the private company to develop the project. Thus, the decision was viewed as a transgression of village sovereignty, and thus illegitimate.

> "The MLA came to the village and said, we don't want Shaktidhara here, we don't want to have any business with them. He said this in the village, so we believed him. Later it turns out that he had contested in the election with money he got from them. That angered us… this is not his land, so he ought to have asked us first before signing the *MOA*, he ought to have remembered us." (Interview, middle-aged man)

However, the village economy was largely dependent on state patronage for funds: outright rebellion was out of the question. The pipeline of political loyalty through which resources flew down to the village also became the chain for coercion. As one actor from the faction supporting the MLA said, "If we say anything, then our MLA gets in trouble with the Chief Minister (CM).

That's why we have to keep quiet." However, resentment against GoAP simmered right below the surface. One day, in the course of an interview with a village elder, he mentioned that the mothers of Pongging believe that it was their curse that had caused the helicopter accident of April 2011 in which the CM Dorjee Khandu was killed: the women had raged that whoever had brought suffering upon their village should suffer equally. I countered that it was the previous CM who had signed the MOA, not Dorjee Khandu. To that, he said, "That may be so, but it was Khandu who accepted the money from the company in exchange for the *MOA*."

When the villagers started to disrupt the S&I works of the company at the dam axis site in 2008 (discussed in section 7.3), the GoAP recruited the area's MLA to persuade the villagers to let the company carry on with its work. The GoAP also asked other MLAs, the MP, and the Deputy Commissioners of two districts. Faced with the overwhelming campaign to convince them, the villagers agreed to conditional consent based on the fulfilment of their demands.

At the same time, the GoAP's attempts at persuasion cannot be dismissed only as coercion. Through the early years, under the leadership of the CM Dorjee Khandu, the government was responsive to the concerns of impoverishment due to the project. For instance, the CM instituted amendments to the R&R Policy when the villagers declared the land compensation rates to be too low (see Chapter 4). Provisions for the creation of local area development funds were introduced. The community members were encouraged to form a pressure group of landowners to negotiate for better compensation rates (discussed in section 7.3). It would appear that except for the scrapping of the project, almost every other concession was put on the table by the GoAP.

However, scepticism abounded regarding the effectiveness of these measures, or indeed the GoAP's sincerity, to secure the best deal for the communities. Villagers believed that GoAP was allied more closely with the interests of the company than that of the villagers. Consider this conversation between a village leader and me:

> Man: Who do you think would pay better compensation – NHPC or the private company?
>
> Me: NHPC as a govt. company probably would not have much money to spare.
>
> Man: But a private company can manipulate the DC to reduce the compensation rates.

> Me: But then, the DC can't decide by himself. You or other committee members[7] can always object.
>
> Man: But you see, there's a protocol of a meeting. The DC is the senior-most. If he says something, it won't be easy for me (as a villager) to object to it.

Indeed, his doubt that the GoAP would not champion the villagers' interests was borne out by a later event. In 2012, the DC Upper Siang proposed land rates at Rs.150 per sqm of wet rice cultivation. This was considerably lower than what the villagers had demanded in their memorandum.

The distrust in the commitment of GoAP also stemmed from the viewpoint that the functionaries of GoAP and its various branches were corruptible. A young leader articulated the community's reluctance to involve the GoAP in its dealings with the company:

> "(GoAP's efforts to accommodate the community's demands) are also fine. But nowadays, you cannot trust anyone. For instance, suppose (the company) sends money to the DC for the local development fund. The company will send ten rupees, and the village will receive fifty paisa[8]. I had said to Shaktidhara, when it comes to money, it must be handled face-to-face. All those who are affected must be given their dues. Nothing should be sent to the magistrate. Nothing should have to come via processing from the DC office. I saw the papers (related to the administration of rehabilitation and compensation). The magistrate was to be involved and all that. The process was okay as such. But nowadays, no one should be trusted. I shouldn't be trusted either. You shouldn't be trusted too…. Everybody knows this nowadays. The world has changed, there is so much corruption now." (edited for clarity)

The longer the negotiations over finding an agreeable compensation rate dragged on, the more the villagers began to suspect that GoAP and Shaktidhara actually had no intentions of providing R&R. These fears were multiplied by information from anti-project activists and opposition political party workers that the government had no intentions to fulfil its R&R promises.

> There was talk of special package, some job contracts etc. To everything, they used to say 'public hearing ka baad' (after public hearing). After public hearing, they are going to give us zilch! They are going to get platoons after platoons of army-CRPF (for security) and work, and we shall not even receive one rupee. That's what we think. That's how things turned out in Bhakra dam, we heard. There's protests there now too. That's how we will end up too. (Interview, middle-aged man)

The event of the public hearing thus came to signify to the villagers an inflection point at which they would lose leverage for negotiation. They therefore wanted all elements of the resettlement to

[7] A committee of representatives of the affected villages was constituted by the government to recommend compensation rates.
[8] A rupee is 100 paise.

be completed prior to the conduct of the public hearing. On the other hand, the company was reluctant to expend any resources on R&R before the project received all necessary clearances from the governments, of which environmental clearance was only one. This then became a point of contention between the company and the community. The impasse over the resettlement of the village, before the public hearing could not be resolved. The youth leader quoted above was clearly exasperated with the verbal reassurances, "bakte rehta hai. Banaao, dikhaao. (They only blather, they should put something on the ground and show)."

7.2.4 Perception of Shaktidhara

Regardless of the diversity of perceptions of the impacts and impact mitigation measures, there existed a consensus that Shaktidhara was untrustworthy. Almost every conversation about the project was liberally peppered with the statement *'Bulu yapdu na'* ('They lie'). One of the factors for this was the fact that the early days of the project takeover by Shaktidhara were marked by a lack of information-sharing: the entry of Shaktidhara into the Arunachali hydropower sector, and its takeover of LSHEP from NHPC transpired under so much secrecy that even the MLAs of the concerned areas claimed to have been in the dark of the fact (private communication with multiple political leaders). The opacity and lack of communication were allowed to continue in the absence of outreach on the part of the company. This was a crucial oversight, as the information gap was filled by the community members from an assortment of sources. For instance, Dibang, an educated and respected member of the village, recollected:

> "(In the early days) someone said to us that Shaktidhara company are not the good sort. This guy was from Dhanbad... He was a traveller. Maybe a businessman? Perhaps the company made a dam there (at his place) also. He said to us that 'At first they would speak many sweet words, but later it all turns sour. Later, they don't keep a single promise they made'. So that really scared us. 'All this talk of giving us this benefit or that opportunity, all this is a lie' we thought. This had a psychological effect on us." (Conversation 23/03/2013).

The lack of trust would be compounded later by a misunderstanding over the FRL fixation (see section 7.2.2), which led the villagers to suspect that the company had misled them regarding the correct extent of land loss by lying about the FRL, in order to avoid paying more compensation.

The crisis of trust was aggravated by Shaktidhara's choice of intermediaries: it hired as 'community coordinators' and 'social mobilisers' certain individuals who, although belonging to the village[9], were seen as undeserving of the responsibility as they were not landowners in the village anymore. These individuals had settled in Pasighat: they had not inherited any lands in the village. Not only

[9]It was unclear exactly how these individuals were identified. The community members think that these individuals probably presented themselves as legitimate representatives of the community.

that, but they also lacked authority and respectability among the villagers as they were seen to have not secured stable means of income in the town, and were only 'on the lookout for where they could score the next free meal'. To make matters worse, they were apparently dishonest in their dealings.

> "They would go take money from Mr. Bezbaruah, claiming that they had conducted Kebangs with the villagers. If suppose the villagers here would slaughter a Mithun for an event, they would say that it was them who hosted the slaughter and that the villagers were turning pro-dam. This is how they lied and got money from the Aying people (Plains people, or the Shaktidhara officials) in the name of the Pongging villagers. Of course, the Aying don't know anything. That's what enraged the people here.

Further, many villagers believed that Shaktidhara had used underhand tactics such as bribery of the village authorities[10] and "distributing money for free" to the villagers to fracture the unanimous opposition to the project. This also led to widespread resentment against it. Another middle-aged man shared with me,

> "This Bezbaruah, he sneakily divided our people. 'If you turn pro-project, I'll give you money.' That's how he broke up the village. That's how the village got divided into pro- and anti- groups. He would invite the pro-people (to the office) and give them money."

The perception of inducement with money is corroborated by the individual testimonies, like the one below from another male, aged mid-40s, from the village:

> "If I had been like others, I could have made off with a lot of their money, because they gave me a chance. For instance, I was one of the first employees, they didn't know others in Pongging. At that time no person from the village even used to step into their office…. Villagers avoided the office unless they had to communicate something. So what happened is, one day, Mohanty Sir called me. He said to me, '(Person), however much we may explain in words, these villagers just don't seem to understand. So, if you agree, let's do this: to show to them, we can lease your land for six months to make a camp for our employees. Also, if you have your eyes on a piece of land anywhere in the area, let us know. We'll buy it for you, we'll put a house, a granary, we'll connect it to Public Health Engineering (PHE) water supply, get electricity line. We'll do this under six months.' I had already had a piece of land in mind and I told him about it too.
>
> I suppose if I had agreed, he would have gotten it done too. It's just that I began to wonder if I would end up being the one who sold out Pongging. What if I would be the only one to benefit like this, then I would end up being remembered as a betrayer. That scared me.

[10]Shaktidhara officials were adamant that the payment of honorarium to the village authorities was done for the services rendered during the process of land survey. Further, the remunerations were decided in accordance with government remuneration rules.

Another person who was associated with the anti-project movement stated that he had been offered money, and a choice of employment either with the government or the company itself[11].

Overall, Shaktidhara had very little trust of the community to begin with, and the subsequent strategy decisions of some of its managers only eroded whatever little goodwill it had. That individuals unaffected by the project should benefit from the patronage of the company while the villagers of Pongging who stood to lose everything got nothing, was perceived as a grave injustice.

> "I have been observing them right from the time I worked with them till the time they left. They were trying to get things done for free or as cheap as possible. Their first aim itself turned out to be a mistake. See, they thought that it would be enough to give money to the state government after signing this *MOU-MOA*. They thought the state government would manage. But that didn't happen. Then they thought, they could manage by paying off these intellectual groups from the near abouts of the affected areas. The rest of the illiterates didn't matter. Satisfying one or two knowledgeable ones from the affected villages should serve the purpose. "

The sense of injustice was aggravated by the perception that the company and its employees thought it unnecessary to engage directly with the villagers, especially in the early days. The Shaktidhara office at Pasighat itself emanated a sense of alienation and lack of respect. The office compound looked like a fortress with its high walls, with one entry point that was controlled by a security guard. The villagers felt that they did not have easy access to the company officials. On the other hand, as the Shaktidhara officials were living in rented apartments in different parts of the town in buildings owned by the wealthier sections of the citizenry, this section of the society gained access and friendship through proximity. The Pongging villagers felt that they were undermined.

> "People who don't have one square inch of affected land were made into leaders in Shaktidhara. They would take money from Shaktidhara and claim that they will mobilise (the villagers) … they'd underestimate the villagers and arrive here to distribute money - one thousand here, two thousand there. Those people think that the villagers would be persuaded by that kind of money, because (they think) this place is so backward, the people are so illiterate. They underestimate us and do things. That's why I can't stand the sight (of them)." (Interview, young man)

> "The company suggested that they would pay us 30,000 (rupees) for shifting houses. It would cost way more than 30,000 to dismantle the houses and shift all the stuff. Just because we are *gaolia*[12] we are not going to leap up to grab 30,000. 30,000 is like 300 nowadays." (interview, young man)

[11] The fact that one of his colleagues from the protest group is now an employee of Shaktidhara lends credence to his claim.

[12] Assamese word, literally 'of the village', connotes simple-minded.

7.2.5 Summary

The social acceptance of LSHEP was fractured and marked by changeability over time. While the community response to the project and its implications in its earliest configuration was homogenous, over the subsequent years, different members acquired differentiated opinions and perceptions of the project. This was mainly based on the latter concessions offered by the company as well as the government policies. Possibilities and potential for greater gains from the project opened over in course of time, as the government and the company added more incentives to the table, in response to the protest.

While there was a community-wide consensus on the negative impacts of the project on land resources, this consensus disintegrated on the matter of the trade-off between loss of land and alternative gains such as employment and business opportunities, as well as adequate compensation. The divergences in the perceptions of different actors and groups hinged on the belief that impacts can be mitigated, and assets can be substituted. While the younger men felt that the compensation in the form of cash was a satisfactory substitution for land, others believed that the land was irreplaceable, as it was directly related to their sense of selfhood and being.

Through interviews with a random cross-section of members of the village, two points became clear: one, that the knowledge and information about the project and its potential impacts on the community were extremely variable across different segments of the village population, and secondly, the information flow and thus the opinions regarding the project even among individuals have changed drastically over time. The LSHEP had a long history in the region, and so by the time Shaktidhara took over the project, communities had already opinions about it.

While individual and factional positions had crystallised over years to create a wide spectrum spanning the non-negotiable negative to ambivalent, the opinion on the intent and ability of the government and the company was certainly homogenous. Perception of the company was characterised by profound distrust and legitimacy deficit. The government machinery was seen as corrupt. Therefore, villagers wanted the process of rehabilitation and compensation to be conducted before the public hearing was allowed. Distrust of the company and the government became the fulcrum on which the lasting outcomes of the events hinged.

7.3 The Local Politics in Pongging

This section narrates chronologically the key events that unfolded over the period of 2008-2010. From 2008-2010, the village of Pongging was at the centre stage of the contestation over LSHEP.

The following sub-sections discuss the different iterations of the local politics surrounding LSHEP, with shifting moral as well as physical locus, as well as different sets of actors emerging as central

at different points in time. The first phase of local contestations was concentrated at the downstream area from the dam axis, in particular the village of Pongging. During this phase the conventional leaders of the community – the politically active seniors led the contestation. In the beginning, there was a coalition of eight proximate villages, but by 2009, Pongging villagers were alone in resisting the project. In the period immediately following the state elections of 2009, the senior village leadership found themselves less and less able to continue resisting due to political compulsions, thus marking a phase of acquiescence of the village leadership. The brief third phase was marked by the emergence of a youth-led direct-action phase.

7.3.1 Ascendant resistance

The first phase of community engagement with hydropower development after the takeover by Shaktidhara began in 2008. This sub-section is about the period from 2008 to the end of 2009. This period lasted about a year and a half, bookended by the Panchayat elections in May 2008 and Legislative Assembly elections in October 2009. During this period, the villagers of Pongging presented a united front of resistance against the project. Its leaders formed alliances with other downstream villages who were opposed to the project. Pongging villagers took charge of mobilising the neighbouring villages. The leaders communicated their dissent to other stakeholders, such as the GoAP and the managers of the company.

Until 2008, a couple of years after LSHEP was transferred to Shaktidhara, the villagers of Pongging and other nearby villages had been inactive in the hydropower arena. Living so close to Rottung, the hub of hydropower S&I activities under BFCC and then NHPC, the villagers of Pongging had been aware of the LSHEP to some extent or the other. Nevertheless, they had been unconcerned about it as the dam axis was supposed to be upstream of their village. Being downstream of the reservoir, they did not anticipate significant impacts. However, as S&I progressed at the Alternative Site-I about 5 km aerially downstream of the village, questions regarding the consequences of the shift of the dam axis arose. In April 2006, leaders of five downstream villages gathered in Bodak and unanimously decided to oppose the project (Kebang decision, 2008). A community-based organisation (CBO) called the Dam Affected Area Committee was constituted for this purpose. However, due to a lack of activities at the dam axis site, in the period following the transfer of the project till NHPC handed over project DPR and other assets to Shaktidhara, the CBO remained inactive.

After two years of dormancy following the inactivity of Shaktidhara, the community in Pongging was jolted into action in April 2008, as project staff once again appeared at the dam axis site and started S&I activities, reawakening anxieties. The fear was further compounded by the complete absence of information from either GoAP or Shaktidhara. This vacuum was filled by other sources

who were antagonistic to either the project or the company or both. For instance, the sitting MP of the region, who belonged to the opposition party, informed the villagers that he was going to raise the issue of the destructive impacts of hydropower development on the local communities (Anon. Interview 02/02/2013). Similarly, one villager reported an interaction with a non-Arunachali travelling salesman in which he informed of the negative experiences of communities with this company in other parts of the country (see Section 7.1.5.).

On 10th September 2008, Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) leaders, Gaonburas as well as other notables of the villages of Pongging, Bodak, Silli, Jeru and Sissen held a Kebang[13] in Pongging, and all, but Sissen elders, unanimously decided to oppose the construction of the project at the Bodak axis. The outcome of this Kebang was the birth of a community-based organisation (CBO) styled as Project Affected Area (Lower Siang Project) or PAA(LSP). The ex-Anchal Samiti Member (ASM) of Pongging was nominated to head the organisation. This was in recognition of in part the larger scale of impact on Pongging, and in part the ex-ASM's social capital in the community.

> "The Kebang decided that we had to be 'anti'(dam). Next they had to decide who should lead. So they turned to me, 'it would be best if you took the portfolio'. I tried to refuse, saying that leadership of seven villages would be difficult. Besides this would go against the government agreement. So I tried to refuse, but they did not accept (my refusal). So, for three consecutive years, I was the anti-dam president. We formed an organisation called Lower Siang Affected People Action Committee[14], that I led." (Sayang, interview)

Sayang was a local politician with fifteen years' experience as an Anchal Samiti Member (ASM) [15] of Pongging. He was well-respected in the area for his oratory and leadership. One of the first persons from Pongging to have graduated from college, he had come back to the village as a teacher. Soon after he resigned from his government job to join the Panchayati system as an ASM (refer to section 6.4 in Chapter 6). In 2008, the Panchayat seats came under the 33% women's reservation lottery. Sayang could not contest in these elections. He tried to prop up a female relative as a proxy candidate, but she was defeated by the candidate supported by Bijoy, the then MLA. It is a testimony to his personal authority and leadership skills that despite not being in power, he was asked to lead the PAA(LSP). The political rifts however did not spill over to the working of PAA(LSP). The entire population of Pongging threw its support and cooperation behind the

[13] As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, Kebang has multiple meanings: it ay to the population of a village, or a gathering, in the sense of 'the public'. It is generally used to denote the formal assembly of village elders for the purpose of discussion of an issue.

[14] This name is the second iteration of the PAA(LSP).

[15] When the Panchayati Raj system was introduced in Arunachal, many of the first generation educated youths, like Sayang, in the state found themselves being thrust into the role of a village leaders.

leaders of PAA(LSP). At the supra-local level, Sayang was successful in stitching up an alliance of upstream and downstream villages, as well as urban citizens.

At this first Kebang, although, "the members present had decided to oppose the project in their area as they did not wish to lose their ancestral livelihood assets like rice fields, forests…", they did not reject the project in its entirety, saying that "the project should be built upstream at the old Rottung area rather than in the vicinity of the Siang-Yamne confluence, since the representatives of the upstream villages such as Rottung, Babuk, Sissen etc. had expressed support for the project". Moreover,

> - " it was also concluded that the Shaktidhara company people who have built houses in the land of the Bodak people to do survey **will also not do any work for the time being** or till the time that our final decision is not taken though **later on it might be possible to work**. And, the Kebang also decided that the MLA of the project affected area may find it necessary to lead our movement with vigour." (Kebang decision 10/09/2008, translated from Adi, emphasis author's)

Their objection to the survey and investigation (S&I) activities and socio-economic survey of the company was time-bound and conditional to reaching a mutually agreeable decision. Until then, it demanded that the company suspend its work.

However, instead of engaging with PAA(LSP), Shaktidhara approached the DC East Siang, and then the Government Secretariat in Itanagar to "take up the matter with concerned quarter to persuading the local people to allow us to do the project work" (Shaktidhara to Sec Power GoAP 17/11/2008). Shaktidhara said that it was "imperative that the works are continued without any such disruption". The DC in turn approached the MLA of the area to "use your good offices to persuade the people of your constituency not (to) oppose the project and allow the company to resume the activity at site." (DC East Siang to MLA Mebo Constituency 6/10/2008). Thus, the company and the district administration missed an early opportunity to engage directly with the community members, and instead enlisted the help of political leaders to convince the communities to allow survey works to go on.

In the meantime, Shaktidhara did not suspend S&I activities. This turned out to be a counterproductive strategy. The villagers interpreted the continuing of S&I as intransigence on the part of the company, and PAA(LSP) members started disrupting survey works at Bodak. From November 2008 into the summer of 2009, villagers mainly from Pongging, and Silli and Bodak hindered the project work by not allowing technicians to carry out activities, and by not cooperating for the socio-economic data survey (Shaktidhara to Sec Power 2009). As the company continued

to disregard the directive of PAA(LSP) to suspend works and treated the threats of the villagers as an administrative matter for the GoAP, community members began to escalate their actions, gradually shifting to threats of violence. Pongging villagers continued to spearhead the action against S&I activities and escalated their opposition strategy: in early April, they "manhandled some of the workers of (Shaktidhara)'s survey agency", seized their equipment and instructed them to leave the work site (Shaktidhara to DC, 4/4/2009). The district police and administration intervened and convinced the villagers to return the equipment (Senior Superintendent of Police to Director General of Police, 16/05/2009). Within a week, however, as soon as the company restarted its work, the villagers beat "some of (Shaktidhara)'s site engineers & staff and took away costly survey equipment with them" (Shaktidhara to DC, East Siang 11/04/09).

At the same time, the coalition of villages was fluctuating as the intra-community consensus in many villages disintegrated. Villagers in Silli and Jeru who realised that their lands would be minimally affected lost interest in the protests. Others like the landowners of the dam axis site at Bodak village had arrived at a bipartite lease agreement with Shaktidhara for the use of their land at the project site. The standing of PAA(LSP) was seriously fractured when some members broke away to form a pro-project group called Host Village Welfare Association (Gen Sec. HVWALSP 2009).[16] The shifting moods and the impatience of Sayang were evident in the Kebang summon for the second gathering on the 22nd of April in Pongging, in which he warned "If today we cannot unitedly work to speak to Shaktidhara Company or to exert to stop (the project), tomorrow when your villages, your forests and lands are swallowed by the dam, it will be too late to try. Don't say then that you were not informed." (Kebang Notice, 12/04/09, translated from Adi).

At this Kebang, the original CBO Project Affected Area (Lower Siang Project) or PAA(SLP) was restyled as Lower Siang Project Affected People's Action Committee (LSPAPAC) to gain recognition as stakeholders: first, to gain the attention of GoAP, Itanagar, second, to reinforce the legitimacy of LSPAPAC by expanding its network to include a larger radius of villages such as Sibum and Padu as well as urban professionals from Pasighat, and thirdly, to garner support for its objectives from a wide range of actors beyond local level by reaching out to the media (Echo of Arunachal 2009, Telegraph 2009). At the local level, LSPAPAC discouraged its community members from participating in Shaktidhara activities (LSPAPAC 04/05/2009). Bitton, one of the few employees of the company from Pongging, was asked to leave the company at the threat of having his house in the village destroyed. This punishment would have been tantamount to

[16] One of the main mobilisers was a person who had been previously a part of the 'Office of the Affected Area', formed in 2001 to negotiate with NHPC. By most accounts this person was not an important actor at the village level. Others alleged that those associated with this organisation had been 'bought' by the company, meaning that they gained financially in exchange for giving voice to the company point of view.

excommunication. In the third Kebang held on the 30th of May, this ban was made more stringent by adding that any villager found working for Shaktidhara would be fined INR 15,000 (LSPAPAC Kebang decision, 30/05/2009).

The Minutes of the meeting sent to the Chief Secretary pointed out that:

> Shaktidhara "conducted their survey works **without the prior consent** from the local people (Landowners). The people of these areas have been residing here since time immemorial and the major portion of their lands and other properties lies near the proposed dam. So, such a construction of Dam would damage and submerge the lands various other properties of the people.
>
> 3) … the public leaders and Govt. officials of this state who has invited or signed MOU with Shaktidhara Company for construction of Dam over Siang, near Pongging and Bodak village, **should have discussed the matter with the project affected villagers** firstly and after that the decision of the construction of dam should have (been decided). It is the people of this area who are affected and **signing MOU without concerning the affected people is also against the greater interest of the villagers** residing near the proposed dam." (LSPAPAC Notice to CS, 30/04/2009, original in English, edited for clarity, emphasis author's)

This lack of consultation and prior consent were the points of contention for the community members, and to protest this, they had decided to "stop the field works of the Lower Siang project and shall issue notice to (Shaktidhara) not to start their survey works till further clarification."

Up until May 2009, the district administration did not appoint a point-person to handle the various issues arising out of the hydropower project. The first nodal officer was appointed on the 21st of June 2009. Also, up until June 2009, the government of AP seems to have been unclear regarding the location of the dam axis.

In early June 2009, the DC-East Siang[17] convened a meeting of the GBs, ASMs from affected villages. At this meeting, the DC pointed out that "So long as MOA between the Govt. Of Arunachal Pradesh and Shaktidhara is in force, the administration will not allow anyone disturbing the progress of the project and such cases will be viewed as violation of law and order." (HVWA, 2009). It became clear to the villagers that to achieve their objectives, they needed to jump the administrative hierarchy by bypassing the district administration and address the GoAP directly which had been party to the MOA.

[17]It may be noted that the DC at this time belonged to the same tribe as the Pongging villagers. Further, he had roots in Pongging in that his family had migrated from Pongging to the plains below Pasighat in the 1970s. The administrative matters were complicated by the fact that the villages of Pongging, Jeru and Silli were under the Mariyang EAC of the Upper Siang Deputy Commissioner's office, which was located in Yingkiong, a town much further away than Pasighat.

On the 20th of June, a few members of LSPAPAC travelled to Itanagar, and met the Chief Secretary, and gave him the memorandum for the Chief Minister, GoAP, asking for the project to be cancelled (LSPAPAC to CM, 20/06/2009). In this second communique, LSPAPAC argued:

> " 1. Firstly (GoAP) signed the Memorandum of Agreement with (Shaktidhara) to build a dam … **mainly in our area affecting us without consulting us**. The said callous attitude of (GoAP) has hurt our sentiment because from ancient times we use to reside on top of the mountains. As time progressed GoAP taught us the value of cultivation and with that we picked up cultivation and since the plain area are near the river bank we developed the plain area into cultivation fields and as time passed these cultivation fields became our main source of sustenance. Since plain land was scarce there was only limited land to feed the entire village population. Now this mega project envisages such a scheme where we lose our entire cultivable land, which will render us in the mouth of poverty and deprivation. The GoAP talks about rehabilitation but a plain reading of the rehabilitation scheme of the GoAP clearly indicates that is just an eye wash. 1.7 lakhs for 2 hectares of land will not even buy a one bigha[18] of land in Pasighat township[19]…. GoAP is bent on making the population of this affected area into urban slum dwellers.
>
> 2. Secondly, (upfront premium) will be adjusted with the free power of the State Government in the first year of commercial operation implying thereby that after completion of the project GoAP will sell the power to the people of Arunachal… and there will be no free power to the people of Arunachal Pradesh.
>
> 3. … In the event of failure of the Dam in view of Article 11 (Force Majeure) of the Memorandum of Agreement.. where **neither party takes any liability for any act of god (natural disaster)**, the extensive damage to the land, vegetation, life and property is main cause of concern and the damage caused thereof will be the end of the era of the tribes inhabiting the Siang belt."

This document expanded the critique of the project by questioning the legitimacy of the process of MOA, the contents of the MOA as well as the R&R Policy of the GoAP[20]. First, it held GoAP squarely responsible for historically bringing change to the livelihoods of the community and bringing them to the valley lands, and then endangering their livelihoods. Secondly, it pointed out the inadequacy of the R&R Policy, and casts doubt on the intent of the GoAP to rehabilitate affected people. Thirdly, it pointed out the shortcomings of the GoAP-Shaktidhara MOA, namely the lack of accountability under the force majeure article, and the unfeasibility of providing free power to the people of Arunachal under the MOA. In short, the LSPAPAC critique provided a rounded critique against the project and urged "the GoAP to withdraw Shaktidhara from Lower

[18] A bigha is a unit of area measurement popularly used in South Asia. Its conversion rate to hectare is flexible across different regions. It can range anywhere between .15 to .66 hectares. In Arunachal, a Bigha is considered to be .25 hectares.

[19] In 2011, the rate of about a half hectare of land on the outskirts of Pasighat was INR 20 lakhs. A prime location within the town cost INR 25-30 lakhs for 0.05 hectares.

[20] The State R&R Policy had been announced in September 2008, but the details of the policy trickled down to the village slowly.

Siang Project of East Siang District at the earliest in the interest of the people without delay." Unlike the previous communiques directed at the company, this message did not indicate room for negotiation anymore. Further, the memorandum was copied to the Prime Minister's Office and the National Human Rights Commission. It played on the politics of risk and countered the project with rational critique.[21]

While the LSPAPAC had sent off the first Memorandum to the CM, the company continued to carry out its investigations. This incensed the community members:

> "Lower Siang Project Affected People Action Committee executive office bearers and members have submitted our memorandum to the Hon'ble Chief Minister… expressing our disagreement for the proposed dam survey works for immediate withdrawal. In the (interim), M/s Jaiprakash Associates Ltd, Pasighat **surreptitiously sent their many … employees to the project site to start work behind our back**.
>
> … as knowing very well that we have genuine concerns over the proposed dam and we have submitted our memorandum to the Hon'ble Chief Minister… **they ought not to have tried to bulldoze forcefully into our land in our absence**. This very act of their amounts not only to i**nsult of our tribal sentiments** but also shows total disdain of our tribal feelings." (LSPAPAC Notice, 26/06/09, original in English, edited for clarity, emphasis author's)

It asked the company "to remove all the deployed labourers… from the dam site immediate within 3 days or else we will be forced to remove them from our land."

However, Shaktidhara did not heed the moratorium. On 30th June, Pongging villagers launched a more severe attack on the camp sites of the company than the previous times. This time, not only did they seize the equipment but also partially destroyed shelters on the sites. In addition, the young men from Pongging left the Shaktidhara field staff with threats to life, although they were not harmed. When the Circle Officer, Mebo, met the villagers to enquire into the situation, he was informed that they would "prevent and stop any activity till a solution is arrived at." (DC East Siang WT message, 30/06/09). These strategies and actions were steered by the senior members of the four villages, and the youth – young men from the village who were studying in colleges nearby – participated and acted as enforcers of the decisions taken by the older members of the Kebang. The DC arranged through the district police office to provide security at the dam site "to avoid any untoward incidents by the people of Pongging and adjoining villages" and requested the President of LSPAPAC to "not to take law in their own hands and create and future problem till decision is being taken… by Hon'ble Member of Parliament and Chief Engineer (Monitoring)

[21]At this point the arguments are technical. The community groups did not seem to know that the project capacity had been increased to 2700MW.

Department of Hydro Power" (DC East Siang to multiple, including President LSPAPAC, 1/07/09).

By the time the Member of Parliament (MP) visited in the middle of July 2009, the mood in the village had become impatient with the process as well as other actors. The unresponsiveness of the GoAP and Shaktidhara had hardened the villagers' negative perceptions of the project. As per the accounts of the villagers, the visit of the MP did not go well. In a break from convention when visiting dignitaries are hosted with a formal reception consisting of women's Ponung (a traditional line dance) and elaborate speeches, the MP was not offered one. The young men locked up the Mosup, the traditional meeting hall, and prevented him from formally addressing the entire village (Anon. 02/2013). Even then, the MP managed to convey to a few individuals that the large hydro project was important for the GoAP, and that he himself would ensure that the affected families were rehabilitated as per GoAP's policy. In addition, he promised to extend a grant of INR 5,00,000 to each household of Pongging from his own funds.[22]

For the villagers, the visit of the MP did not offer any change in status quo. The terms of the R&R Policy that they had criticised in their memorandum to the CM, remained the same. The LSPAPAC, which represented the community at the meeting, reiterated the same arguments made in the memorandum to the Chief Minister, this time in much harsher tones "the GoAP Rehabilitation and Resettlement scheme is just eyewash. If the Government were serious… the minimum (number of affected) families to qualify to get the benefit of rehabilitation and resettlement ought not to have been twenty. It makes a mockery of our scheduled tribe land. The kind of houses to be given in compensation is laughable." LSPAPAC called for the "immediate withdrawal of Lower Siang Hydro Electric Project" (LSPAPAC Memorandum to MP, 12/07/2009). The MP could not persuade the affected villagers to allow the S&I activities. Instead, the meeting concluded by advising Shaktidhara to minimise its presence and activities at the field sites.

Following this, the DC wrote to the GoAP Secretariat seeking advice on whether to allow the company to carry on S&I or to ask it to suspend activities in order "to avoid anticipated law and order problem in the area." (DC, East Siang, 21/07/2009, 3/08/2009).

On its part, the GoAP did not approach the communities with a proactive strategy, even though its functionaries closer to the grassroots advised it otherwise. For instance, an official had astutely shared with the CS that "One of the reasons cited by the anti-dam people is that they have not been consulted and taken into confidence when the agreement was signed between the State

[22]This was reported by a villager. It is possible that the MP had meant the Area Development Funds, and not his personal monies.

Government and the Shaktidhara … unless the people are convinced and taken into confidence by the power developers, not to speak of construction of Dam but carrying out of survey and investigation would be very difficult." (DC East Siang to CS, 03/08/2009). To this end, his opinion, as well as that of the DC of Upper Siang (DC Upper Siang to CS, 20/07/2009), was that a visit of the 'anti-dam activists' to a few Mega Hydel Projects in the country be facilitated.

On whether Shaktidhara should be allowed to carry out the S&I or not, the advice of the DHPD was "they should be neither asked to carry out the Survey & Investigation nor they should be asked to suspend their activities. Because it is the responsibility of the developer to appraise and convince the people of the area about the benefits from the proposed Project and also about the RR plan. (It) should also be suggested to engage local educated youths as PRO's which seems to have been not done by the M/s Shaktidhara Arunachal Power Ltd." (11th September 2009). As for the feeling among the 'people of the project area' of not having been consulted, that 'higher authorities' should have a meeting with them and explain to them the policy imperatives. This was perhaps the first time that the legitimate concerns of the community were acknowledged. However, the CE also indicated that the fears were unsubstantiated as long as the land survey was not conducted.

In September 2009, the company wanted to start a cadastral survey. The cadastral survey was to generate information on the amount and nature of land that would be affected directly by the project, either due to acquisition for project components or due to submergence. The company pointed out that a representative of the administration would give its activities legitimacy by providing "authority and authenticity of the administration" (Shaktidhara to DC, East Siang 11/09/2009), thus implicitly acknowledging that it lacked the legitimacy itself. It offered to pay per diem to the various government functionaries involved in the activity. It did not have a strategy to engage the community members. Around this time, these conflicts were framed by the company officials as a law-and-order situation, and a lack of security measures, and the district administration was urged to provide adequate security measures.

With the onset of the state Assembly elections, scheduled for October 2009, the issue of hydropower was temporarily moved to the back burner. During the period leading up to the elections and till the formation of the government in early December, relative calm prevailed in the area, as community members got involved in the ritual of politicking and electioneering. During this period, Shaktidhara initiated direct contact with the residents of Pongging. At the end of the year, more than a year after the survey and investigation works started, the first interaction between the company and the community members was finally scheduled for the 20th of December 2009. The formation of the new state government in Itanagar brought the first phase of the local politics to a close.

7.3.2 Ascendant acquiescence

This sub-section pursues the events from the end of 2009 till April 2010. By this period, the MLA, from the same tribe, and having a majority following in the village, acting together with the Chief Minister, convinced another leadership faction to enter into negotiation with the company. The second period is characterised by the disintegration of the village-wide consensus, as political rivalries and loyalties took precedence. It was a relatively short phase of four months, which started after the end of the state Assembly elections. By this time, Shaktidhara had two senior staff members from Arunachal tribes. This could probably explain the breakthrough that the company had in its relationship with the community.

For the re-elected Chief Minister of Arunachal, hydropower development was the centrepiece of his development plan for Arunachal (see Chapter 4), and the LSHEP was one of the flagship projects. The villagers of Pongging had allowed the company to carry on its cadastral survey. But no other S&I works were allowed. Soon after the elections, the Chief Minister delegated three MLAs from the region to try again to persuade the Pongging villagers. These MLAs represented the constituencies that would be affected by LSHEP. The delegation of MLAs arrived in the village in January 2010.

> "Khandu sahab sent Bijoy[23], Tapang Taloh and Alo Libang. They came on 18th of January 2009 (sic, 2010). They came and spoke in the community hall "Our target is Pongging. You don't have to ally with Rengging, Rottung, Silli, Jeru. The development will not reach till there. Only Pongging can understand Pongging's problems. Pongging will submerge the most, so Pongging will get the most compensation. The more property that will submerge, the more the compensation will be. And if the dam does get constructed, every single house will get jobs." (Conversation with Sayang)

Here it is important to note two points. The first is that Sayang, the ex-ASM of Pongging had supported the MLA candidate who had contested against Bijoy in the Assembly elections in 2004 as well as 2009, i.e. Sayang was from the opposition party in local parlance. As mentioned above, Sayang's proxy candidate had lost the election to Aina, the present ASM. Aina was the wife of Dibang, considered to be Bijoy the MLA's main worker in Pongging. Dibang was a government employee and therefore was not an overt political actor. Because of this, he also did not participate actively in the early days of the movement against the LSHEP[24]. So, the reservation of the ASM position was ideal as his wife could be propped up as a proxy candidate. The second important point to keep in mind is that Bijoy had been an MLA from the opposition bench during the 2004-

[23]He represented Geku-Mariyang constituency, under which Pongging falls.

[24] During my conversations with Dibang, he remained inscrutable for the most part. Citing his employment with the government, he insisted that he was not at liberty to voice his opinions. Occasionally however, he would let a few lines slip.

2009 term. Before the 2009 elections, he resigned from the Assembly and joined the INC, the party led by Mr. Khandu, the Chief Minister. He won the contest. It was rumoured that his election was supported by a generous financial donation from Mr. Khandu. This created a perception of quid pro quo among the villagers regarding his support for the LSHEP.

Bijoy, the MLA of the constituency was instrumental in changing the position of his political supporters on the matter of LSHEP.

> "We had informed the MLA that this dam should not come up, because this dam would cause losses for us. So, we did say to the MLA sa'ab, that he should also exert pressure, and pursue the matter with the Government that the dam must not be there… We gave him information copy (of our decisions) too.
>
> At that time, he was the elected representative of Geku Mariyang, and because of this he did not say that the dam should be allowed. Neither did he say that it should not be allowed. 'Do discuss this amongst yourselves what you feel about it. But if you do take the right decision, then you will end up being wealthy. And if you take the wrong decision, you will end up poor. You will remain just the way you are now.' We don't know with what intention he said that (he laughs)."
>
> In the beginning, he did not try to coerce us. He said, I will support whatever decision you take. But your decision must be the correct one. He said neither yes, nor no, and did not try to give us directions that we should oppose, or support (the project). He was trying to maintain neutrality. (Conversation with Dibang).

The delegation of three MLAs convinced the protesting villagers to travel to Itanagar and meet the CM personally. Within a month, a delegation of ten people from Pongging led by Aina, the ASM, left for Itanagar. All the households contributed money to raise INR 5000 to sponsor the trip. Significantly, Sayang, the leader of LSPAPAC, was excluded from this delegation. The objective of the delegation was to seek a moratorium on the project from the CM himself, and to demand for an INR 500 crores rehabilitation package for Pongging village. The MLA obtained an audience with the CM for the Pongging delegation. According to one of the villagers who was at the meeting, the CM stressed on the importance of the hydropower sector for the future of the state. He persuaded them to let the project go ahead. He assured them that a new settlement site would be prepared for them. Additional sops like a micro-hydro plant for the village would be obtained from Shaktidhara, he promised. He also expressed an interest to visit the village to understand the concerns of the village first-hand. The CM promised to visit Pongging in April 2010, and asked the villagers to prepare a landing field for a helicopter.

On their return, the delegates convened a Kebang on the 22nd of February with the objective of "formation of fresh committee meant for Pongging village in regard to Shaktidhara issues"

(Minutes of Meeting, 22/02/2010). The new interest group assembled under the leadership of the ASM comprised the same members as LSPAPAC. Called the Lower Siang Dam Project Affected Action Committee of Pongging Village (LSDPAACPV), it positioned itself as "a mediator between the company and the people of Pongging" for the purpose of protecting the right of the dam-affected people as well as all villagers in general, and to create oneness and unity among them. Aina was the head of LSDPAACPV. Sayang was left out again from the first iteration of the leadership of the LSDPAACPV. It was only a week later that, probably on the advice of the MLA, that Sayang's name was included in the group.

Sayang responded to the side-lining by lashing out in a way which would diminish his authority even more. As he saw it, he found himself in a disadvantageous position as the face of the anti-dam faction, when his political opponents had switched positions to be in the good books of the Chief Minister. He launched a new group called Project Affected Land Owner Committee (PALOC), making counterclaims to represent the interests of the people (Submission of PALOC to Chief Minister, 11/03/2010). In this submission, he wrote that he had resigned from the anti-dam LSPAPAC to form PALOC, which "would be pro-dam".

> "That day (when the delegation held a meeting in Pongging to report on their meeting with the Chief Minister), I said, 'Sayang did not beg to become the anti-dam president out of choice. You villagers asked me to. You all are my limbs (my support), but today my limbs have been broken. So Sayang will no more be the anti-dam president'. In anger I also went to Itanagar to meet the Chief Minister. (Interview 02/03/2013)

This volte-face appears to have been facilitated by the company office in Pasighat. A week later after the launch of PALOC, Sayang called for an area-level meeting as a show of strength as well as to gain legitimacy (Invitation for meeting 17/03/2010). In this invitation, he proposed launching yet another iteration of the community group called Project Affected Welfare Committee to replace LSPAPAC and the short-lived PALOC which he had declared only a week back. However, his declaration to form a 'pro-dam' Committee only weakened his standing among the community members. The legitimacy of the newly proclaimed group was rejected by LSDPAACPV. Moreover, some villagers thought he had been won over by the company with bribes. One middle-aged man who had actively participated in all iterations of the village committees said,

> "He did not lead any violent protest. During his time, protests were peacefully held. The only thing he led in were the demands for Pongging village, and compensation for asi-among (land and water or property). When he became pro-dam, then all the villagers became angry, "How could he, the anti-dam President, become pro-dam?" The villagers heard about him that he had taken money in lakhs and was biking around in Pasighat. The villagers were enraged further because of his act of taking money (from the project proponent)."

This statement indicates that people differentiate between acquiescence and compromise demonstrated by Aina, the ASM and Dibang, her husband, under coercion from the MLA, and what was seen as an enthusiastic embrace of the company by Sayang, for which he is thought to have gained materially.

In the meantime, as advised by the CM and the MLA, LSDPAACPV sent a formal submission of demands to the General Manager of the company in Pasighat. The submission included immediate, middle-term and long-term benefits and rehabilitation measures for the villagers. Immediate benefits included "construction of road from Reklat to Pongging village with bridge over river Yamne.., construction of approach road from Pongging to proposed Micro-Hydel Project on Sille River,… basic infrastructure such as Mobile Tower…", middle-term benefits included employment opportunities and allotment of contract work of Shaktidhara Company within Pongging area to for the local people of Pongging village. They also demanded that the development of land for the resettlement of Pongging village be done as soon as possible. Long-term measures included special compensation package worth INR 500 crores and a 'share provision', a royalty-like profit sharing mechanism, for which an MOA had to be signed by the company with the villagers (LSDPAACPV submission to company, 22/02/2010).

In exchange, it permitted Shaktidhara to send its S&I team to set up camp in the village on the 8th of March, 2010, to commence the survey for indication of Full Reservoir Level (FRL). The marking of FRL was a preliminary step towards estimating the full extent of land submergence. This could then allow the conduct of the cadastral survey of properties which was needed as the basis for calculating compensation amounts for the respective landowners. Therefore, from the point of view of the community, the FRL was a critical parameter of the project. The FRL marking of LSHEP had been carried out in other villages in both West Siang and East Siang. Pongging was the only village that had resisted this so far.

In early March 2010 the company started survey work for FRL marking and cadastral survey in Pongging. The S&I team made two sets of measurements at Pongging. The first marking came at a level just below the current location of the village homesteads, close to the old spring. With this marking, a significant chunk of the agricultural fields would have been submerged, but the homesteads would not have been affected. The second marking however was located much higher than the position of the highest house. At the second FRL level, the entire village would have been displaced. A middle-aged woman said to me in 2013, "They say that the water will not submerge the village, that it will not even come up till the Mosup (the granaries). They are lying, though we don't have proof."

Although the company insisted that the first measurement was the FRL itself, the suspicion that the real FRL was the one above the village grew in the minds of the community members. This suspicion was reinforced by the comments of some members of the technical team, who belonged to Arunachali tribes and conveyed to the villagers that the company was trying to mislead the villagers.[25]

The villagers held another Kebang to discuss the concern regarding FRL on 18th of April 2010. The discussion went thus:

> "After doing such survey investigation work it is seen that FRL Mark of the dam was found just at the vicinity of Pongging village which is a great threat or detrimental for the future existence of the village. Besides, it is also obvious from survey work that the major portions of arable land, WRC fields, cultivable and uncultivable land of the village are completely submerged under water. So, keeping all these things in mind, it was unanimously decided by all the people of Pongging village that no further survey investigation works shall be operated within Pongging area till complete and final solution comes out between the Company and the people of Pongging Village." (edited for clarity).

At the same time, the leaders of LSDPAACPV were also fast losing patience with the company for "the aloof behaviour of the officers working in Shaktidhara Company by not respecting the mandate of the people" (LSDPAACPV, Minutes of Meeting, 18/04/2010). They wanted that "the officers of the Company should work in close coordination or consultation with the committee members of the village before taking any constructive (sic, concrete?) decision."

This group was critically reviewing their position in terms of the costs and benefits to the people. The villagers reviewed the R&R Policy of the state and found unsatisfactory. They drafted an alternative rate list for compensation. While the state R&R Policy offered INR 1.75 lakhs per hectare, the villagers suggested a much larger amount of Rs.20 lakhs per Bigha, or INR 120 lakhs per hectare. (Demand for compensation, 20/04/2010).

During this process, Aina and her team lost the trust of many community members. Firstly, instead of getting a moratorium on the LSHEP, the team had conceded to even more activities by the company on the village lands. Secondly, many villagers were upset that the ten delegates had accepted the cash gift of INR 1,00,000 from the CM[26] and had distributed it amongst themselves.

[25] In early 2013 when I was carrying out my fieldwork in Pasighat, the Shaktidhara field office in Pasighat was being run with a skeletal staff, as most of the employees had been shifted to Bhutan where the projects were running more smoothly. The remaining staff who remained were unable to explain satisfactorily why two measurements were taken. But the likelihood is that the second measurement was for the area to be earmarked for CAT (Catchment Area Treatment) zone.

[26] It appears to have been a common practice during the time of Dorjee Khandu as CM to hand out cash gifts to visitors as well as to host villages when he went on official tours, in a manner of direct cash transfers. This is a common custom among the politicians of the state. Visitors from their constituencies are offered a token amount as 'chai-pani',

The villagers had contributed money through donations from each household to finance the trip of the representatives from the village to the capital. They viewed the CM's cash gift as a bribe that the representatives had accepted. Discontent began to simmer against the leaders.

According to Sayang, the spillover of electoral politics into the struggle against the project because of the MLA and his supporters, weakened the movement.

> It was after the visit of the three MLAs that change came (over the village). That is, things got politically motivated. See, Bijoy's men are a majority here, because he is the sitting MLA. We in the opposition are a minority. We the minority were anti(dam), and the majority INC supporters turned around to support the dam project.

7.3.3 Youth-led resistance and some violent events

The next phase in the local politics was marked by the youth-led agitations that culminated in the firing incident of the 25th of May 2010, which gained notoriety and brought national and international media attention to the village and the valley. The younger men from the village who were studying in the nearby college at Pasighat, or at the state university in Itanagar were dissatisfied with the acquiescence of the older leaders.

Through the previous phases, the youth of Pongging had been marginal to the local politics of hydropower in Pongging. Off and on, they had acted as enforcers of the decisions of the Kebang. But in general, they had not taken an active leadership role in the local politics. This changed in the period leading up to the first public hearing. In February 2010, the LSHEP acquired Techno-Economic Clearance from the Central Electricity Authority, meaning that it could proceed to the public hearing phase to acquire Environmental Clearance. The Arunachal Pradesh Pollution Control Board commenced the process for the conduct of public hearings. In anticipation of the public hearings, student activists belonging to the influential students' unions of the region - ADiSU (Adi Students' Union), East Siang District Students' Union and others organised a dharna or a sit-in on 10th March 2010 at the office of the Deputy Commissioner, East Siang district, in protest of the LSHEP. The college-going youth from Pongging also took part in the dharna. This was the first known action by the students' organisations against the LSHEP.

On the 11th of April 2010, the college-going youth of the project-affected villages held a meeting in Pasighat and formed an organisation, the Lower Siang Dam Project Affected Youth Association (LSDPAYA). LSDPAYA was formally headquartered in Pongging, and Kaling, a young college

(literal translation being 'tea-and-water' but meaning sundry hand-out) to cover the costs of their travels etc. When leaders and dignitaries visit their constituencies, they also hand out Chai-pani.

student from Pongging was the President[27]. For the next couple of months, the youth group from Pongging allied with a consortium of other student organisations and anti-dam groups and participated in a widespread and grassroots campaign in the villages of the three districts which were to be affected by LSHEP. This information-sharing and opinion-building campaign was perhaps the first of its kind in the area, conducted by any organisation. They invited resource persons such as experts from other parts of the country. Buoyed up by the support of a wider network, the Pongging youths sporadically continued to threaten company staff at the Bodak worksite (LSDPAYA to Shaktidhara, 20/04/2010).

Their objective at this point appears to have been to force Shaktidhara to stop all work in the area. On the 12th of April, the group sent a notice to the company that it should stop survey works in the area by 15th of April, and if anything untoward happened to its workers, the company would be responsible. On the 16th of April, a group of young men destroyed the company camp in Pongging. On the 20th of April, the group announced the launch of Clean Out Mission, and demanded that the company should clear out its camps and remove all equipment from the entire area, including other villages by 23rd of April (Shaktidhara communication with DC 22/04/2010). The company did not comply with this request.

In a show of strength, the group called for a Bandh[28] on the 28th of April, 2010 (LSPDAYA communication to Shaktidhara 24/04/2010). The district administration at Pasighat responded to the bandh call by deploying officials on magistrate duty at various locations considered to be vulnerable (Order from Office of DC, East Siang 26/04/2010). This was an implicit acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the LSPDAYA, and the gravity of its threat. According to a complaint registered by a Shaktidhara official with the office of the Police on 30th of April, a group of people led by one of the youth leaders visited the work site camp and threatened the Shaktidhara workers with violence and forced them to leave the camp. They also destroyed property at the camp. At that time, police personnel had been stationed at the camp for the security of the workers.

It is important to note that the older village leaders of the village, who had created a mediating organisation called LSDPAACPV in January did not actively dissuade the youth group as well as

[27] This was also the time when actors from beyond the currently active regions started taking up more central role. One such key actor was Tapang, from an upstream village of Pangin. He had already been active in All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union, traditionally a launchpad for ambitious young men seeking to enter state electoral politics. He claims to have instigated the youth of Pongging to take up the protest. This is plausible, given that he had connections with the other student unions, and these became active around the same time. On the 9th of March, 2010, a group of Students' Unions (AdiSu, AAPSU, ESDSU and PBSU) had staged a dharna in front of the office of the DC, East Siang. The company officials also consider him to be a key player. However, Kaling denied that Tapang was a moving force behind the actions of LSDPAYA.

[28] A Bandh is a popular means of registering dissent. It involves a call for shutting down all regular business, including transport and government offices, for the day. The purpose is to inflict inconvenience to the general public, and thereby get the government to bow down to their will.

the other villagers from participating in the new round of conflicts. During our conversation, some of the elders admitted to approving of the actions of the youth. As they themselves were unable to freely resist the project due to political obligations to the MLA, instead they tacitly supported to young people by keeping quiet. Moreover, at least a couple of village elders actively supported the youth group.

The East Siang district administration called for a meeting of senior citizens etc. as well as the identified leaders of Pongging. I could not find any documentation regarding the outcome of the meeting, but evidently, the youth leaders were not dissuaded by the intervention of the administration. The company continued to maintain its camps in other areas such as Bodak. Periodically, members of LSDPAYA continued to threaten the company workers to leave (Shaktidhara complaint to Police, East Siang 07/05/2010).

Around the same time at the end of April 2010, the APSPCB announced that the public hearings for the environmental clearance for the LSHEP. Three hearings were to take place at the end of May 2010 at three locations upstream of the LSHEP. The announcement of public hearings animated a new set of actors, besides the local agitators living the proximity of the project. They will be discussed in the next section.

On the 11th of May, LSDPAYA asked the company once again to clear out its camps and remove equipment before 20th of May, as the youth would undertake a Clean Out Mission (LSDPAYA communication to Shaktidhara 11/05/2010). Another bandh call had been announced for the 15th of May, 2010. LSDPAYA sent out a circular in Adi language to the residents of Pongging, Silli and Bodak, inviting those who did not want to lose their land and water to participate in the bandh, and join the effort to drive out Shaktidhara on the 25th of May (Communication from LSDPAYA to villagers, undated).

The company management in Pasighat was increasingly frustrated at the threats from LSDPAYA, and the inability of the district administration to put an end to the disruptions to its work. It wrote to Itanagar:

> "… they still continue to threaten, intimidate and use force against our workers at will. Our project has suffered immensely on account of disruptions created by various groups in the area.
>
> Your kind attention is also drawn to (section of MoA) which states that Government of Arunachal Pradesh would make arrangements for General Law and Order in and around the project site for security of properties of the project and protection of the workers. However, various groups are continuing to disrupt our work, threaten and bring harm to our workers with impunity.

> Many of our workers have left the project site, sending a signal of lack of safety and prevalence of insecure environment in the project area." (Communication from Shaktidhara to Director General of Police, Arunachal, 12/05/2010).

This communication illuminates two points – that to the company officials, the threats from the youth were a law-and-order concern. Secondly, they did not seem to recognise that underlying the threats of the youth that the company should vacate the sites was a demand for recognition of sovereignty. The more the company refused to acknowledge the sovereignty of the local community over their land and resources, the more it irked the villagers. The youth organisation was especially determined to demonstrate the earnestness of their demands by driving the company away.

In the days preceding the bandh, the leaders of LSDPAYA invited anti-dam activists from Itanagar. As the public hearings had been announced for the end of the month, urban and political activists were also organising protests in other locations such as Pasighat and Pangin. On the 24th of May, a group of these activists arrived at Pongging for an awareness campaign. Some of them were members of opposition political parties who were critical of the GoAP's hydropower development policy and approach. At this visit, the villagers were shown a documentary on the impacts of hydropower construction. The group of visitors spoke to the village residents about the pros and cons of the project.[29]

On the 25th of May, the day of the Bandh/ Clean out Mission, the villagers intended to destroy the Shaktidhara camp located in the lands of Bodak village. The district administration of East Siang "in apprehension of breach of law and order, and to deter any untoward incident, … issued prohibitory orders u/s 144 Cr PC in the area w.e.f. 25th May 2010." Police personnel were positioned on the road leading from Pongging to Bodak, to deter the villagers from proceeding to the Shaktidhara camp.

Depending on whether one reads the report in the media or the report from the administration, either extreme restraint was maintained by the security forces in the face of provocation from the community, or terrible atrocities were committed on the local community.

The report from the DC says:

> "However, on 26th May 2010, a mob of about 100 plus men, women, boys and girls, moved from Pongging village, gathered at Reklat area in East Siang district and started to advance towards the Project camp and drilling sites near Bodak village with clear intentions to intimidate project workers and to vandalize the site. The mob was armed

[29] An interesting feature of the anti-dam mobilisation in Arunachal is that the activities of campaigning pick up primarily around the time a public hearing is scheduled. The strategy of contestation therefore seems to be largely focussed on thwarting public hearings.

> with lethal weapons like daos, spears and lathis. The police immediately put up a barricade of lady police personnel upfront and CRP personnel as second layer with cane shields. The agitated mob was explained by the duty magistrates that the DM (District Magistrate) has issued prohibitory orders u/s 144 Cr PC (Penal Code) and that no one is allowed to gather or carry arms to which the mob retorted that no one could dictate what should or should not be done by them. Seeing the mob resort to aggressive behavior, the duty magistrate gave them 5 (five) minutes to disperse off. But instead of heeding to the orders the mob turned more violent and started pelting stones and mud gravels at the police and the magistrates. Maintaining utmost restraint, the police stood as barricade without resorting to force. All of a sudden the mob began to assault the police personnel and tried to overrun the barricade. Finding no other options, the duty magistrates ordered use of minimum force to disperse the mob. Taking orders, the police used mild caning and later on used smoke shells… Somehow the situation was brought under control. Terming the incident as 'lathi-charge and firing'[30] is taking the … too far. Contrary to the reports appearing in newspapers, no firing, I reiterate no firing, was resorted to."

The agitators of 26th May not only breached the orders so promulgated but also manhandled police personnel and attempted to overrun the barricade of police personnel several times in response to which the magistrates and police used some amount of force to restrain them.

Media reports portrayed the event as a wilful suppression of democratic protest.

> "In a bizarre turn of events, the CRPF resorted to lathi charge and blank firing injuring at least four people in Pongging as villagers protested against construction of 2700 MW Lower Siang Hydro Electric Project by Shaktidhara. According to reports reaching here, 57-year-old woman O. P. and O. G. 59 were severely injured and admitted to District General Hospital Pasighat. The CRPF further threw tear gas at the protestors in an effort to disperse them.
>
> Pongging village is set to be displaced by Lower Siang Hydro Electric Project. Many of the aggrieved villagers demanded resignation of MLA Bijoy P. and CM Dorjee Khandu.
>
> In a questionable statement, East Siang district administration on May 23 had warned the people that strong action would be taken against anti dam protestors if they take law into their hands. The 2700 MW project has been in news for quite some time for all the wrong reasons. Even as the people of the area protested, the power developers and state government did nothing to address the concern.
>
> ("Four injured at Pongging as CRPF open fire at protestors," 2010)

The villagers themselves remembered a more nuanced set of events. One man mentioned that the police showed a lot of restraint. He attributed it to the fact that the Deputy Commissioner was

[30]Lathi-charge is literally 'charge with sticks'. It is a form of crowd control used by police forces wherein they beat the crowds with their cane sticks. Lathi-charge is an evocative shorthand for violent suppression of democratic dissent. Lathi charges are relatively rare occurrences in Arunachal compared to other regions of the country.

'one's own', i.e. he was from the same tribe (Interview with middle-aged man)[31]. A woman who was at the event said that some members of the police patrol on the day had said to her that they were there only on orders, and were not seeking confrontation. The eyewitness accounts of the injuries that occurred aligned with the official report of the DC. Even one of the victims averred that it was an accident, and the police had not acted out of malice.

Even though many villagers were unhappy with the capitulation of Aina and other senior leaders, not everybody participated at the 26th May protest voluntarily and enthusiastically. The youth group had issued a notice in the village that every member of the community should participate in the Clean Drive Mission, and non-participation would attract a fine. A middle-aged woman reported that the youth group issued a notice that non-participation on that day would be met with fines, i.e. seizure of traditional valuables such as Peki (Tibetan brass utensils).

> "I was personally unwell and unable to go, having been bedridden for more than three months. But the villagers said that one must go and those who did not go would be penalised.... even if we went there, there was not much we could do, yet I went personally because it is important to show one's face/presence/solidarity... But, then, the thing was there was nothing we could do to show our strength there..." (middle-aged man)

[31] Based on government communication records, it does appear that the frontline government officials like the DC treated the issue with much more seriousness and tried to convey a nuanced assessment of the discontents of the local communities. However, the advice of the frontline officials did not seem to have resulted in a change in strategy.

Figure 7.5. The stand-off between Pongging villagers and the police forces on the 26th of May 2011 (credit: Appu Gapak)

Not everybody participated. Sayang was resolute in his pro-dam position and did not participate in the event. He was visited by members of the youth mission who seized his Peki as punishment. Aina and her husband were out of the village, ostensibly on some official work, although Aina's sister took part in the protest. The youth leaders themselves could not participate. They were supposed to have arrived from Pasighat and joined the villagers but were detained at a checkpoint on the way to Pongging.

Figure 7.6. One of the injured, moments after the incident (credit: Appu Gapak)

A pertinent question is: What was the response of the organisation of elders during the conflict phase led by the youth organisation? Some elders seem to have wisely kept themselves scarce, but nothing suggests that apart from Sayang, anyone tried to actively dissuade the youth group from getting into a straightforward conflict situation with the police on the 26th of May. In the normal course of matters in the village, it would have been the prerogative of the elders to dissuade the youth group from their proposed action which was likely to lead to conflict with the administration. So, one can guess that the elders privately approved of the youths' action. As such, their communication to Shaktidhara on the 18th April 2010 indicates that the elders were feeling frustrated by the perceived lack of responsiveness from the company to their negotiation effort.

In the wake of the bandh on the 25th May, 2010, the divisions within the village were widened even further. Sayang made a press statement condemning the actions of the youth, as well as the reportage in the media. The youth group on the other hand, in a complaint of human rights abuse to a leading women's rights group of the state, made the counterclaim that:

> His statement regarding Blank firing, Lati-Charge is unfounded and fabricated, because he was not at the spot while clean drive mission was taken place… moreover Sayang who was the president of "Anti dam movement", now taking huge amount of money from Shaktidhara company, President of Pro-Dam movement who claimed that 27 out of total 47 households of Pongging village did not take part in the protest on May 26th, The claim is totally misleading. (LSPDAYA to APWWS, a state-level womens' organisation, 01/06/2010)

However, the cut-and-dried language of pro- and anti-dam conceals the fact that the youth leaders were also open to negotiations. Early on in our conversation, Kaling claimed that he was opposed the project unconditionally. He said he was convinced that the company would not be able to successfully rehabilitate and compensate for Pongging's losses. At the same time, one of the villagers had told me that

> Day before also, (Kaling) told us at his house... ' Accept if the Shaktidhara returns'. To me in particular, (he said) 'father, you must not disagree. Hum dekhega (I shall see), meaning he will take care of the concerns in this matter… See, JK (a road construction company) has constructed roads, much better for vehicles to ply, doubles lanes...That is what the son is advocating.. the return of the Shaktidhara will develop the village.. vehicles will come, electricity will come.. there would be no need for (fire)wood anymore, gas will come.. Therefore, when Shaktidhara comes back, I will also agree, easily, only on condition that they will have to pay compensation... (Middle aged man, Interview)

When I pressed him regarding what the Pongging villager had told me, Kaling acknowledged that he would be open to negotiating with the company. His condition to the company was that any and all funds for compensation should be directly handed over to the affected individuals and households directly. The resources should in no way be channelised through the government. He felt that if the government were involved in the process of disbursement of compensation resources, it would be siphoned off due to corruption. He said, "100 rupaiya ka 10 paise milega (out of 100 rupees, we would receive only 10 paise)".

At the same time, Kaling also looked down upon the tactics of the company. He called it the divide-and-rule policy through baiting through money. He gave many instances of the company giving "free money" to the Panchayat leaders, to the GBs, as well as to the "public". Kaling distinguished himself from others by emphasising his "cleanness", that is, he had never taken money from the

company. He alleged that company officials had offered him money and jobs on multiple occasions.

7.3.4 The Aftermath

After the police firing incident, the LSHEP attracted national and international media attention. At the same time, As the S&I phase of project development ended and the activities shifted towards acquiring governmental clearances, the setting of contestation shifted away from the project site to the offices and courts. The arena of action shifted to Itanagar and Delhi, and the strategies of contestation became more media-based. The village groups became peripheral.

By the end of 2010, newer advocacy groups consisting of urban professionals with Siang heritage, were coming to the forefront of the contestation against the LSHEP. Groups such as Forum for Siang Dialogue comprising Itanagar-based journalists and activists, Siang People's Forum comprising urban intellectuals etc. came to the forefront of the contestation. They were also savvy of newer tools of protests, such as information sharing through online forums and social media groups, writing letters of dissent to the relevant agencies, and creating online campaigns on platforms such as change.org or avaaz.org. These activists were familiar with the wider national and global discourses on large dams and hydropower, and were capable of tapping into the transnational networks. Their discourse aligned with the contemporary activist narrative of indigeneity and environment.

Away from the limelight of the media and the controversies swirling around the project after the violent events of May, the older community leaders under the LSDAAPV continued with their negotiation. Their second communication to the Chief Minister is by far the most eloquent and elaborate document of their fears, concerns as well as an acknowledgement of the impossible situation the villagers found themselves in in the face of the government's unrelenting support for the LSHEP:

> "With lots of anxiety and distress we the resident of Pongging village are constrained to call upon your Hon'ble self, laying bare our innermost fear and anxiety regarding the future of our children, family, clan members, land, water, flora, fauna and lifestyle including our culture and age old traditions in view of the upcoming Lower Siang Hydro Electric Project which is threatening to engulf and devour all the above.
>
> With such trepidation and being simple villagers, we have no way to fight the might of the Government and as such, you. Hence, in our collective wisdom we have decided that though unwilling, we will give our co-operation to the Government of Arunachal Pradesh but provided our certain conditions are fulfilled to our SATISFACTION (edited for clarity)" (LSPAACPV communication to CM, 15/07/2010)

Not only did they make explicit their apprehensions and what was at stake, they admitted that they had come to the negotiation table under duress, considering the futility of their opposition. The conditions put forth by them highlight their concerns. Demands for "resettlement of all the villagers… at least one year ahead of uprooting with already constructed dwelling house which has been approved by the inhabitants" and "cultivating fields like barren land, WRC field with water channel etc." spoke of their concern of immediate displacement and disorientation. At the same time, they also wished to secure longer-term prospects through negotiation for "equity shareholding of 3% by all the named villagers of present Pongging village… their respective shares to be inherited by their legal heirs" (LSPAACPV communication to CM, 15/07/2010).

The preceding incidents of public protests led the Chief Minister to convene a consultative meeting. In September 2010, opponents and proponents of LSHEP from the communities and the MLAs from the concerned constituencies gathered in Itanagar for the meeting. Representatives from Pongging were also invited. According to those who attended the meeting, the Chief Minister was attentive to the issues of raised by the community members. In the meeting the Chief Minister was reported to have made a case for the importance of the project for the larger good of the state, for its exchequer, thus signalling that the project would not be cancelled. The anti-dam activist groups felt that the participants for the consultative meeting had been handpicked to ensure that the real dissenting voices would not be heard.

One important outcome of the consultative meeting with the Chief Minister was the formation of the Land Owners' Union (LOU), a new platform for all villages affected by the LSHEP. The objective of the formation of LOU was stated in the agenda set for the first meeting – it was declared that the various land-owning clans from all the villages affected by LSHEP were to discuss and come to a consensus on the rates of compensation to be demanded. The list of invitees to the first consultation was extensive, and representative, to be fair. At this meeting, the attendees attempted to put a monetary value to assets, down to orange saplings. The villagers had created their own rate list, which pegged the values of the resources on the higher side.

However, the LOU did not gain legitimacy among the affected communities. The formation of LOU was led by individuals who were considered key supporters of Shaktidhara. One of them was in fact even thought to have been in the pay of Shaktidhara. Therefore, when he took the lead on the formation of LOU, this was treated with suspicion, that it was not an independent CBO, but was compromised through a conflict of interest with Shaktidhara interference. Moreover, these individuals were considered to lack personal legitimacy as they did not command the respect of their own village communities and were not landowners themselves. One villager in Pongging said,

"The mediators chosen by the company only work for money. If I give them money, they will work for me. Why should we listen to them?"

7.3.5 Summary

The local politics of hydropower centred at Pongging evolved in three distinct phases. At the start, it was a local issue concerning the villages immediately upstream and downstream of the newly proposed axis for the dam. The communities staged a direct resistance against the activities of the company, demanding that the project development at the new axis be cancelled. The second phase was marked by acquiescence. The GoAP intervened in the community-company conflict and concentrated its conciliatory efforts on Pongging. It did so primarily through the MLA of the Geku-Mariyang constituency to which Pongging belongs. A segment of the village leadership aligned with the MLA submitted to the pressure and agreed to negotiate with the company for a benefit package. This phase was followed by the emergence of the youth at the helm of renewed resistance, this time marked by violent conflicts. At the same time, other supra-local actors entered the contestations against the large dams. The third phase culminated in a set of violent events focussed on the proposed public hearing for the LSHEP. One of the events involved the Pongging villagers.

The first phase was triggered by the start of the S&I works at the new location between the villages off Pongging and Bodak. This phase was driven by fear of dispossession and displacement due to submergence. The anxieties were compounded by the absence of information and communication coming from the company. For the company, the matter was between the GoAP and the community. The MLA was instrumental in motivating the community members in the early phase to contest the project.

In the second phase, the pre-existing political fragmentation in the village politics emerged as fractures in the united resistance that the Pongging community had put up in the first phase. Through the mediation of the MLA, the state government was able to get a section of the Pongging leadership to begin negotiating with the company. However, another section of the leadership from the other political camp was excluded. This triggered the local political rivalries to spill out into the domain of hydropower. Although the Aina-led group tried to actively negotiate for a favourable rehabilitation and resettlement outcome for the villagers instead of simply being coerced into a silent acquiescence, this effort did not yield tangible outcomes. At the same time, some villagers considered it a failure of leadership that the Aina-led delegation could not halt the project and instead had agreed to negotiate with the company. Moreover, the persisting distrust in the community against the company received a further boost due to the FRL measurement fiasco. The simmering discontent among the villagers against the hydropower project and the senior leadership created the conditions for youth leaders to open a new offensive against the company.

The brief period when the youth leaders filled in the gap left by the withdrawal of the senior leaders formed the third phase in the local politics. The kick-off of the process of the conduct of public hearings shifted matters to a different gear. Mobilisation of anti-dam activists at a supra-local level allowed the youths of Pongging to tap into the strength of a widerr alliance. On the one hand, the college-going youth of Pongging harnessed the disapproval of many villagers against the coercion of the MLAs, on the other hand, they allied with the growing supra-local anti-dam movement in the district and thus amplified their action. At this time, the aim of the youth group seems to have been to force the company to cancel all activities and abandon the project. This phase culminated in a set of violent events, which brought LSHEP national and international media attention.

In the aftermath of the violent events of May 2010, the political arena shifted away from the local to Itanagar and Delhi, and the villagers of Pongging became marginal to the debate.

7.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented the findings from the site of the LSHEP. The high-profile efforts of latter-day CBOs such as Siang Bachao Andolan, Forum for Siang Dialogue focussed the attention of the media on the LSHEP especially after the violent events of May 2010. My research looked at the period preceding this inflection point before the discourse around LSHEP became similar to those surrounding other well-known resistances against large dams and hydropower projects. For this, I opted to look at the local politics that unfolded in the community of Pongging village.

The LSHEP was a legacy project of the Government of India that had undergone many iterations on the drawing board over the decades. In the 1980s, there had been a popular outcry against the proposed multipurpose dam, which had led to its cancellation. The LSHEP was the newest iteration, drastically scaled down in its engineering scope. Thus, when Shaktidhara took over the project from NHPC in 2007, it was a familiar idea. However, the proposed change of dam axis from upstream of the Siang-Yamne confluence to downstream created new project-affected communities who had to grapple with their new status and the possibility of displacement and dispossession.

Seen through the socio-environmental justice lens, all three elements - distributional, procedural as well as recognition – emerged central to the local politics at different points. In the first phase, the leaders of Pongging saw the costs and benefits of hydropower development as a distributional issue. Submergence of productive land and the threat to their livelihoods were foremost on their minds. As more information regarding the mitigation measures in terms of land compensation and business opportunities began to reach the villagers, the community perceptions about the impact of the project got more diverse. While some continued to view the impacts negatively, others began

to evaluate the impacts against potential benefits. There was a strong gendered element to this, as older women held on to their negative perception of the project. For many of them, it was not only a matter of livelihoods but also identity and belonging. The heterogeneity of individual responses to hydropower development in the area turned out to be a political resource for the local elites, in their struggle for power at the local level.

However, even as perceptions of the impact and mitigation measures became more heterogeneous, the collective lack of trust in the company only grew. The company saw the contentions only as a matter of conveying technical information such as the height of the Full Reservoir Level and submergence areas. Even here, the company failed to identify effective messengers. The poorly chosen representatives from the local communities only contributed to the growing trust and legitimacy deficit. This led the people of Pongging to lose trust in the fairness of the outcomes of the negotiation process, as they believed that both the state and the company were not acting in the best interests of the community.

Faced with the refusal of the state and the company to recognise their sovereignty claims, the villagers resorted to escalating acts of violence. However, the company continued to judge these as a law-and-order issue to be handled by the state agencies, and the state considered it a matter of adequate compensation and rehabilitation.

In hindsight, it becomes clear that the company and the state actors missed numerous opportunities to establish communication with the Pongging community. As described in section 7.3, in the early days of resistance by the Pongging community, a district official who happened to belong to the Panggi tribe had alerted the GoAP that without retroactively acknowledging the sovereignty of the villagers over their territory and what happened on their lands, the project activities could not move forward. However, neither the GoAP nor the company took heed at that time.

The local politics of hydropower in Lower Siang was marked by the strong influence of state-level politics. The elite of the village were simultaneously conduits of communication as amplifiers of the community sentiments, and transmitters of political pressure from above. This phase is marked by information gaps, an absence of communication, as well as a dynamic alliance formation among the local communities.

The youth group was able to mobilise the villagers relatively easily because the larger community was dissatisfied with the older leadership for deferring to the MLA and starting the negotiation with the company. Further, as the trust deficit against the company over the two different FRL markings that were carried out also increased the discontent against the situation. Therefore, by the time the young men offered an alternative response to the company, many of the community

members felt that their concerns were being given a voice. At the same time, the unity of the villagers was extracted through social coercion, with threats of ex-communication.

8. Conflict and Cooperation in the Shi Valley

The second study site was located in the Shi River valley that runs close to the international boundary with China. The case of the Shi Valley was representative of the wider community responses to hydropower development in Arunachal. The three-project cascade which I chose as the locus of my fieldwork was one of the several large hydropower projects proposed in the Shi and the adjacent Yomi valleys. In the summer of 2012, when I arrived in the Shi Valley, the Survey and Investigation (S&I) work of Endor Energy, the Independent Power Producer (IPP) implementing the three projects, had been stalled for more than a year due to local conflicts. It was easy to misread this piece of information as evidence of community resistance to hydropower development.

However, as my fieldwork progressed, it became clear that although there were frequent conflicts with the company, this did not imply a community rejection of the projects themselves. Instead, community-company conflicts were usually a manifestation of underlying intra-community conflicts. In this regard, the following case is a typical instance of the vast number of hydropower projects in Arunachal that have been received favourably by the host communities, in a departure from the dominant media narrative of 'resistance struggles'. At the same time, local conflicts between communities and project companies were frequent occurrence. This case study explores this particular dynamic of coexistence of cooperation and conflicts.

In Section 8.1. I provide contextual information about the projects themselves (8.1.1), the stakeholders (8.1.2, 8.1.3 and 8.1.4), and discuss the social acceptance of the projects (8.1.5). Section 8.2 describes in detail the unfolding processes, the defining events through the actions of the central actors of the local politics of hydropower development in the valley. The initial phase of the community-company interactions was defined by cooperation. The emergence of distributive conflicts within the community eventually led to protracted conflicts with the company. In 8.3, I touch briefly upon the events that took place after I exited the field. Section 8.4 summarises the findings.

8.1 Background

The Shi Valley is located in the Mechukha circle of the Mechukha sub-division of West Siang district[32], less than 50 km from the northern international border with Tibet China. The reach of the Shi is a short 20 km stretch of river flowing between the two settlements of Bumjipanga and Tato. Till Bumjipanga, the river is known as Yargyapchu, in the Memba language. At Tato, the Shi

[32] This was the status in 2012-13 when I conducted my fieldwork. In 2018, the Mechukha and Tato sub-divisions of the West Siang district were carved out into a new district called Shi Yomi after the two rivers that flow through it.

joins the Yomi river to be known downstream as Siyom, an important tributary of the Siang. The valley is sparsely populated by the Ramos, with the population distributed among 10 villages – Gapo, Meying, Padusa, Lipusi, Hiri, Purying, Rapum, Chengrung, Rego, and Karte.

The three projects at the heart of this part of the study were located mainly on the traditional lands of the Ramos[33]. The Ramos are one of the three small tribes that live along the Shi-Yargyapchu River. To their west, the land in the Yargyap Valley traditionally belongs to the Memba tribe. The Libos are the neighbours to the east. The Bokars, an affinal tribe of the Ramos, live along the Yomi River. Hydropower projects were planned in the territories of all the four tribes.

The patterns of local responses to hydropower development in the Shi Valley is best understood in the context of the social and economic status of the people in the valley. Ramo territory belongs to the higher altitude lands described in Chapters 5 and 6. These border areas lying close to the international border were characterised by low state presence. There was a noticeable scarcity of markers of Development such as roads, and access to social welfare services such as education and healthcare. For many decades, this was primarily due to the absence of transport infrastructure in the sub-division. Until 1994, the valley was cut off from the rest of the state due to lack of road infrastructure. Aalo, the district headquarters, was at a distance of three days' foot-march up to the nearest road head at Kaying and another long bus ride from there. Since 2004, after Mechukha was finally connected by road, it takes about an eight-hour car ride to cover the 180 km between the two towns.

The consequence of the comparatively low state penetration was that the population scored poorly on conventional Development indicators such as life expectancy, literacy and per capita income compared to other tribes in the lower reaches of the Siang catchment. Since the past few decades, a feeling of being relatively poorer than the southern tribes was growing (see Chapter 6.5 for the relevant discussion). This was coupled with lack of livelihood opportunities. The MLA representing the area characterised it thus: "my constituency is very remote and poor. We are devoid of basic necessity. Still most of the villages do not have electricity, road connectivity, health service facility and educational facility." (Published on State portal September 2012).

8.1.1. The hydropower projects

The three projects - Tato-I (186MW), Heo (240MW) and Pauk (145MW) – at the heart of the local politics of the Ramo area in Shi Valley were part of a single cascade design, being developed by Endor Energy. Besides the three-project cascade, three more projects were assigned to two other

[33] There are two Ramo villages Yorko and Yorni in the Mechukha valley upstream of Bumjipanga. These two villages were not part of my fieldwork.

IPPs on the Shi. Cumulatively, these projects affected all ten Ramo villages in the Shi Valley. The Endor cascade projects were named after three eponymous villages in the valley, presumably the nearest villages on the topographical maps that were used to identify potential projects. In reality, once the stretches of river were properly assigned to the various projects, the Pauk project lay between Chengrung and Purying villages, Heo lay between Purying and Meying villages, and Tato-I between Meying and Heyo villages. Later on, the mismatch between the name of the project and the location became a point of contestation between the communities and the company. These three projects were part of a long list identified by the CEA in 2003 for the preparation of feasibility reports as part of the 50,000 MW Initiative. At that time, they were not included in the final list of recommended projects owing to high tariffs, due to their remote location. However, when the hydro-rush swept the state in 2007, the projects became part of many mid-sized projects that the Government of Arunachal Pradesh (GoAP) signed over to private companies.

The three projects were planned as a cascade to generate power, using the same stream of water consecutively. The Pauk project, which lay upstream-most, was designed as the master plant that would store the water for daily peaking power generation. The other two plants downstream – Heo and Tato-I were to utilise its tail-water consequently for their respective needs. In terms of design, the tailwater level for the Pauk project was planned at 1400 m, which was to be immediately diverted by a dam into the head race tunnel for the Heo project. Thus, the two lower plants did not need significant storage of their own. The barrages in case of the lower projects were only to divert the incoming water into the intake of the penstock. All three were classified as run-of-river schemes – in simplified terms, the storage was only designed for diurnal variation, and the river water was diverted with a barrage into the head race tunnel which delivered it to a powerhouse a few kilometres downstream, and this created the necessary gradient difference to produce energy.

Due to the steep topography of the valley, the storage dam of the Pauk, even at 110m high, was planned to submerge an area of 34.1 Ha only at Full Reservoir Level. The diversion dam for Heo was 15m high, while Tato-I had a 9m weir. The projected submergence areas were 8.4 Ha and 3.0 Ha respectively. Thus, the three power projects had significantly lower submergence footprints compared to similar-sized projects in gentler topographies. The cumulative land requirements of all project components, including quarries, muck disposal sites, access roads etc., were 91.7 Ha for Pauk, 55.7 Ha for Heo, and 50 Ha for Tato-I. Importantly, it was claimed that no villages will be displaced, although due to its proximity to the Pauk power station and the Heo intake, Purying village was proposed for relocation.

Most of these affected lands belonged to members of the Ramo tribe. The Tato-I project which was the last one of the cascade, was to only affect some customary lands of a handful of families

of some Libo clans of Tato and Heo villages, while all three projects would have had impact significant amounts of lands of Ramo villages all the way up to Rego. For my research, I focused on the dynamics of contestation among the Ramos.

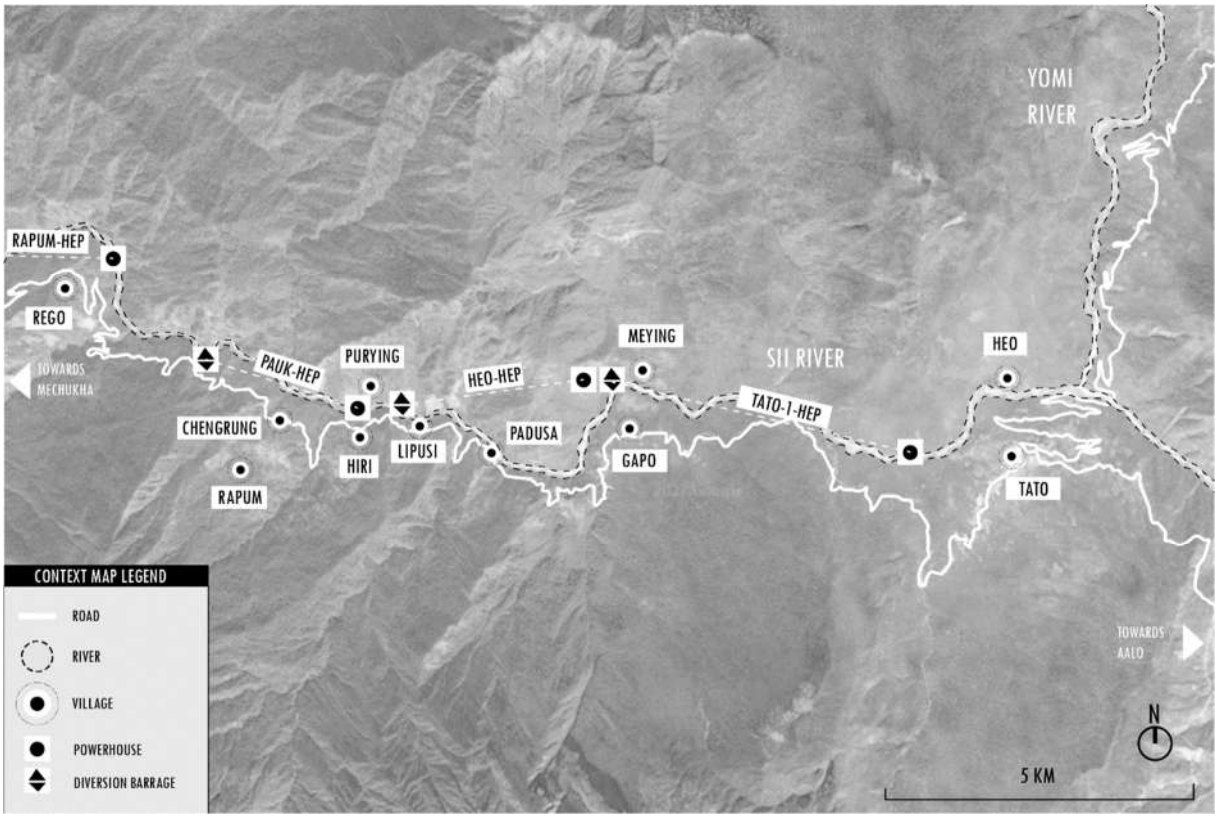

Figure 8.1 The Shi Valley and the proposed hydropower projects (Map by Sumant Goyal)

8.1.2. The Community

According to the 2011 census, the Ramo population in the valley was less than 1000 persons. Tribe leaders estimated that the total population including emigrants was probably closer to 5000. The villages had been undergoing slow depopulation for years now, so much so that a couple of them such as Hermey and Pak named in the first census published in 1966 did not exist on the ground anymore. Many people left the villages for salaried government employment. In the first wave, most such jobs were with the security department of the GoAP, or in the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), a paramilitary force of the Government of India (GOI). They relocated to other parts of Arunachal and settled down where their jobs took them. Others migrated to nearby urban settlements of Tato and Mechukha, and sometimes farther to Aalo, to access better economic opportunities and life quality. A few emigrants still exercised their adult franchise from their natal village, but many did not vote in their natal villages anymore.

The administration labelled all residents of this valley as members of one scheduled tribe - the Ramos[34]. But this label obscured the complexity[35] encompassed in this relatively small population. The near about 30 Ramo clans could be clustered into three distinct groups of clans, which were distinguished by their narratives of descent and arrival in the valley. The first group was a phratry of about ten clans, who traced their descent from one ancestor, Ato Yorko (See Chapter 6.1for a detailed discussion). Going forward, I refer to this group as the Yorko clans[36]. The second group comprised descendants of ex-slaves of the Yorko clans. A significant number of Ramos were descendants of slaves who were bought or abducted from the adjacent Subansiri valley. In the 1950s, the newly arrived government of India had officially ordered the liberation of these slaves. After liberation, some continued to live under the Yorko clan names of their ex-masters. Others reverted to using their Tagin clan names – of these, some returned to Subansiri valley, and others settled down in Mechukha town, joining the urban population. A handful of clans, e.g. the Kamdongs of Purying and the Mosings of Gapo, continued to live in the villages. The third group comprised a heterogenous mix of clans with diverse origins. The Hangongs of Gapo claimed descent from Ato Yorko's sister, Yormi. The Padus of Padusa supposedly earlier settlers, who were later outnumbered by the Yorko descendants. The main villages of Rego, Rapum and Purying were inhabited by a mix of Yorko descendants and ex-slaves, while the Gapo and Meying were populated by minor non-Yorko clans.

This minute fracturing of the tribe gave rise to very narrow definitions of interest groups. According to a senior government official, "there's no central authority among them. Every clan has its own leaders. There is no one figure who holds everyone in their grip." (7/10/2012). The term 'community' held multiple connotations and shifts between these connotations fluidly based on the context - it could refer to the village community, the community based on clan allegiances, as well as the unit of political action.

Most census villages in the Shi Valley were tiny agglomerates of houses perched on the side of the Aalo-Mechukha road. The main road between Aalo, the district headquarters, and Mechukha, the subdivisional headquarters, ran parallel along the right bank of the Shi river. Purying was one of the two Ramo villages on the left bank of Shi river. To reach the road, one undertook an hour's

[34] In recent years, as the dynamics of state-level politics began to reward larger political conglomerations, the Ramos assumed membership of the larger Adi group.

[35] The heterogeneity was compounded by the flux in identity. For instance, the Padus of Padusa, previously classified as Ramos, attempted to formally establish kinship with the Padu clan of the Galo tribe and the Padung clan of Adi-tribe, based on migration and genealogical histories rather than geographical proximities.

[36] Related to the Yorko clans was the Yornyi clan. The Yornyi clan claimed descent from Yorko's brother. They live mainly in the two villages of Yorko and Yornyi in the Mechukha valley. For this reason, the Yornyis had little to do with the hydropower politics in Shi valley.

steep walk to Hiri, over a footbridge across the Shi. Hiri was a settlement of people who migrated from Purying when the road formation was completed here in the 1990s. Among the nine villages slated to be affected by the Endor projects, I chose Purying village as the focus of my study for the following reasons. First, due to its location in between the power plant of the Pauk project, and the intake barrage of the Heo project, a relatively large proportion of Purying's lands were to be affected. Second, it was one of the larger settlements in the valley. While thirteen households was miniscule by outside standards, by the benchmark of the valley, in relation to the other Ramo villages, Purying was in fact one of the biggest agglomerations.

The Ramos, like most other tribal groups of the Siang catchment, were swidden farmers. Aside from two villages settled in the Mechukha Valley further west, all ten Ramo villages were located in the Shi Valley. The main Ramo lands thus stretched from Gapo village on the right bank and Meying village on the left bank of the Shi river to Karte village in the west, at the downstream edge of Mechukha valley.

As per government statistics, the valley scored low on many indicators of Development and suffered from extreme poverty. For instance, almost the entire resident population was listed as BPL (Below Poverty Line). Government statistics can be unreliable in Arunachal, as the BPL list can be manipulated by politicians to redirect government resources towards their supporters. Therefore, I quizzed a Panchayat leader from the region settled in Aalo about the validity of the BPL percentage of Shi Valley. He answered that this was likely to be true, as those who were not poor would take the first chance to move out of the village. This thus goes to link the emigrants and the social stratification.

Overall, there was a pervading self-perception of underdevelopment and of having been failed by the state. One of the wealthier elites, said to me, "Why do we want hydropower (projects)? Our area is such that even *civilisation* has not reached it. We can't even provide education to our children. At least we will be able to do that if we get money." (Anon. 8/10/12).)

When the various companies started setting up offices in the area and initiated their investigation works, the educated youth grabbed this opportunity to gain employment with the company. They were careful to base their demand for employment on the location of the company. For instance, in one case, a young man put together a signature campaign from his villagers advocating that as the project was in the land of this particular village, therefore the position of the Public Relations Officer should be reserved for someone from the village. It is worth noting that in most cases, the local youth hired for salaried positions in the company were employed as Public Relations Officers. Two reasons were evident: firstly, the company needed local faces to represent the company in the

area, and due to their familiarity with the language and culture, local youth were expected to succeed at the job. The primary task of the Public Relations Officers in the area appeared to be to accompany the technical staff, most of whom were not from Arunachal, and to resolve any potential conflict. Secondly, most local educated youth did not have qualifications beyond a general arts degree. This makes them unemployable in the technical positions which were much more abundant in an engineering project such as hydropower development. So, hiring them as Public Relations Officers was the easiest way of employing local youths.

8.1.3. The State

In the Shi Valley, the State was literally a distant presence until very recently. As late as 1954, the valley had had little contact with the Indian administration (see Chapter 6). Until the mid-1990s when the administrative centre at Tato was finally connected by road, the Shi Valley remained physically isolated from the rest of the state. Kaying, the nearest roadhead to the district headquarters, was at least three days' foot-march away.

During the time of my fieldwork, the Ramo villages were administratively parts of the Mechukha circle, under the Mechukha sub-division of West Siang district. The nearest administrative centre was Mechukha town, where the office of the Additional District Commissioner (ADC) was located, the ADC being the highest official of the District Administration (DA) in the circle. The immediate task of day-to-day administration of the sub-division lay with the ADC. In addition, the ADC also acted as a judicial magistrate. The individual presiding as ADC Mechukha during the period of my fieldwork was an individual on the verge of retirement. Biding time until his retirement, he was also perceived by the locals as ineffective, lacking authority as well as the will to govern.

While many government offices were based in Mechukha, the sub-division headquarters and in Tato, the circle headquarters, there was no visible presence of a regular State in the 50 kilometres stretching out between these two urbanised settlements. The usual indicators of State presence in the Arunachali rural area such as buildings for Primary Health Centres, or schools, were strikingly scarce in the Ramo area. There were no metal signboards that announced government-sponsored road construction or agricultural schemes.

On paper, all the major line departments of the government, including the Rural Development Department, and various Engineering Departments were represented. However, even though the Mechukha town has been connected to Aalo town, the district headquarters of West Siang since 2004-5, there appeared to be a high degree of absenteeism among government employees. Many government officials preferred functioning in absentia from Aalo, the district headquarters. All this made most government-related paperwork require a trip to Aalo for the residents of the area. The

government itself admitted that in the border areas, "Lack of basic facilities has adversely affect(ed) implementation of Government's plans and programmes as crucial functionaries do not want to serve in these areas" (*Border Area Development Programme in Arunachal Pradesh*, n.d.). Small symbols of governance such as the workers who were employed on contractual basis under development schemes of the government in rural areas on health, education, communication etc. remained obscured from eyes.

The presence of the Indian State in the border outpost of Mechukha was mainly manifested through the activities of the military, paramilitary and other Central agencies like Border Road Organisation (BRO). Their sprawling camps and convoys that traversed the narrow roads along hillsides every day carrying men and materials were the most visible signs of State activities. The works of the state government on the other hand were less obvious to the eye.

The first line of the justice system was the Kebang (for details, see chapter 5). The Kebang was usually engaged by the District Administration (DA) to resolve cases of local land disputes. Every village had at least one Gaonbura who was a member of the Kebang. The Gaonbura from Purying was from the Kamdong clan. When a party was dissatisfied with the Kebang decision, they could appeal against its judgement in the regular court. At the time of fieldwork, one of the most respected Gaonburas among the Ramos was Duyor Komi, who was born into a slave family before independence, but rose to prominence in the Ramo society as one of the first Gaonburas of the tribe.

Regarding hydropower development, the formal task of the DA was to assist the potential hydropower developer in land acquisition, and to administer the Rehabilitation and Resettlement plan (23/05/2011 Notification for Tato-II Survey). Informally, the DA was also expected to facilitate the conduct of public hearings. What was more, due to the specificities of Arunachal, such as absence of land records and the ownership of land by communities, as well as the inter- and intra-community land disputes, the DA was asked to play a much more complex role in the process.

Community members tended to suspect that government functionaries had underhand agreements with hydropower companies. It was rumoured that the previous Deputy Commissioner of West Siang had received kickbacks from the private companies in exchange for expediting the public hearing process for some large hydropower projects downstream of Shi. The suspicion of possible corruption extended to the state government and the Central government too. "Our problem is that the Central and the state governments do not move without *chai paani* …. They (in Delhi and Itanagar) suck out the juicy marrow, and all we get here is the dry bones." (conversation with community leader, 13/10/2012).

8.1.4. The Company

Endor Energy, the IPP and developer of the cascade projects, was a young French energy company. It was listed on the French stock exchange since 2005 and had hydropower assets in Brazil and Indonesia. It entered the Indian energy markets in 2005 with biomass plants in southern India. In 2007 when it entered an MOA with GoAP, it was a new entrant in the Indian market as well as the energy infrastructure sector, having only gained hydropower concessions in Brazil previously. Incidentally, it was the only foreign direct investor as well as the only foreign IPP in Arunachal. Officially, it was supposed to have gained the concessions in Arunachal through competitive bidding. However, it was rumoured that the company secured the patronage of an important politician from the district[37], after being introduced to the politician by a broker.

When the company initiated field-level activities for preparing the Detailed Project Report, the upper management of the company was entirely composed of expat French citizens, although many technical workers were hired from among the Arunachali graduates. Being publicly traded in Paris, Endor's leadership appeared to have been sensitive to issues of reputation risks and the need to earn a social license to operate. However, from subsequent events, it was evident that the field operatives, though perhaps well-intentioned, were not well-equipped to deal with the complexities of the local arena. Endor initially set up its field office in the administrative centre of Tato, which was considered a stronghold of the Libo tribe. Due to pressure from the Ramo clans, it moved its main field office to Mechukha. During the period of my fieldwork, the company maintained four offices in Arunachal – a head office in Delhi to liaison with the Central Ministries and agencies, one in Itanagar to liaise with the state-level agencies, a third in Aalo, the district headquarters, and one more in Mechukha.

Partly due to the rumours that the company paid huge sums of money as a bribe to the GoAP for the projects, and partly due to the functioning of the management in the early days (discussed in section 8.2.1), it was perceived to have large amounts of resources. Community members hoped that it would provide the social services that the government has failed to do in the past many decades. One local leader put it thus, "we have given up on the government. It's not going to be able to do anything for us. If something has to happen, it will be through the company."

At the same time, many community members viewed the company and its intent with suspicion. They held the company responsible for the lack of trust. "When the MOA was signed in 2007, it should have created awareness about the project right then, which it didn't do. Since it's a French

[37] This rumour was reinforced on at least one occasion by a senior official in another IPP, who took a phone call from an Endor official in the middle of a conversation with me, and said to me '(Politician's name)'s man' implying that the caller was close to the said politician.

company, its main problem was the language barrier." (Community leader, 12/10/2012) The management did not appear to have given much consideration to public image exercises such as CSR activities or to the intricacies of the social and tribal relations in the area, and was content to let benefits trickle down in the form of contracts and real estate rental to whoever came in contact with them first. Even those who wanted the company to resume work, were suspicious of the good intentions of the company in the long term.

Experiences of neighbouring communities added to the general mistrust of private companies. In 2011, the management of another small company investigating a project in the valley, exited suddenly, when it ran out of money. Their local employees and contractors had not been paid for a few months. At another site, where community members had been assured monetary compensation before the successful conduct of the public hearing, the actual disbursement of money had been indefinitely stalled.

According to a government official, the confusion regarding the apparent foot-dragging in payment of compensation by the companies in the Libo area was created by an erstwhile DC of West Siang: in order to expedite the process of public hearing, and for some kickbacks from the companies, the DC supposedly assured the local communities that he would ensure that the compensation would be paid out within two months of the public hearing. Unfortunately, this is not the standard practice for companies, which need to wait for many government clearances before making the heavy investment in compensation payments, according to a company executive.

The disappointment of the Libos with the compensation award process[38] had a strong impact in creating distrust of the companies in the region. I overheard a leading figure of the Libos telling some of the Ramo leaders that the public hearing was the main bargaining chip that the Ramos had:

> "Take it in written – (after the public hearing was conducted) DSC (an IPP) left, Shaktidhara left. No one has any need for you (the people) after the hearing. Get your agreement written by the DC. And don't let (the Indian company official) or someone sign. Those guys will leave. You need the signature of someone who sits in the Delhi Office. The DSC manager made a reputation for himself by getting the public hearing conducted and then left." (field notes, 1/10/2012)

That is why some Ramo individuals proposed that the public hearing should be postponed until an Agreement was in hand. Further, community leaders expressed anxiety regarding the public

[38] According to project developers, they were waiting for the Environmental Clearance for the projects to come through. This would ensure that the project could go into the project construction phase. Then it would make sense to disburse land compensation payment.

hearing process, saying they were unsure of its significance – what did it mean for their own negotiating power once they had allowed the public hearing to be conducted?

> "We should put our demands on the table, and get the Agreement, then the hearing can go on. Otherwise, once the hearing is done, the Company could run away. Even sell the project to some other company. And here we'll be left with bloodshed. Also, the Agreement should be signed by the French Director, and not any Babu-Baya[39]." (Community leader during a meeting of Core Committee, 2/10/2012)

8.1.5. Social acceptance of the projects

Despite the concerns regarding the intentions of the State and the company, in general, the three hydropower projects had overwhelming support among the tribe members in the valley. I did encounter a handful of individuals who were unhappy with the presence of the projects. They framed their concerns in terms of the rise of social conflicts. They felt that "after the arrival of the company, fights between brothers have begun." The 2012 incident of the murder of two men of Tagur, a downstream Libo village, by their cousin, was held up as an instance of deteriorating social cohesion. The local understanding was that although the land conflict that led to the murder was inter-generational, the recent upheaval over lucrative compensation amounts was the immediate trigger for the murder. However, the project-sceptics did not go so far as to actively agitate against the projects. Even among sections of the community who were sceptical of the company or were ambivalent about the promised outcomes, there was consensus that hydropower development represents an important economic possibility.

Community members who evaluated the projects positively believed that the projects would be vehicles for 'Development' in their border region. For many reasons discussed in Chapter 6, people strongly felt that Development was absent in the valley.

> "With this (hydropower development) our people will become developed. The reason why we are not developed is because we do not have money (income). That is why we cannot give good education (to our children). Sometimes because of lack of money, our people even lose their lives (due to inability to get medical care)." (A Libo man in Tato).

Against this baseline of absence of Development, the community calculus of the costs and benefits of the projects emerged as net-positive. The costs were perceived as low, and the benefits as many. The issue of displacement, traditionally a contentious impact of large dams, was almost non-existent here. The projects had low submergence and low land requirements. At the same time, the Ramo rural life depended less and less on the surrounding natural resources (see Chapter 6).

[39] Babu-Baya in this context is a derisive way of referring to the Indian company officials, who were perceived to have no real authority.

Therefore, the enclosure of community lands did not pose an existential threat to the Ramos. Further, the compensation rates set by the GoAP were also seen as generous. Thus, land acquisition was seen not as dispossession but as a trade-off, and a profitable one at that. Again and again, I heard many Ramos and their neighbours talk disparagingly of the lands marked for acquisition as places where "even bears and monkeys didn't dare to go", and "even the *yapoms* (malevolent spirits of the jungle) couldn't fly to". This then suggested a general view that the compensation amount was actually good money for bad land.

Yet, this should not be read as if the Ramos were not attached to their lands. Having a piece of land to one's name was vital to one's identity. But this did not imply that they had to be physically based in place. As described in the previous chapter, many young people were willing to move out of the villages to urban areas, but were held back by the lack of opportunities. As only a part of their land was to be acquired for the project, the rest of their land would still exist as a marker of their belonging and identity. This was assessed positively by project-affected individuals.

Even for community members who did not expect to benefit from a land compensation deal, the potential job creation was an attractive possibility. Opportunities for employment in the area were scarce. The BRO was the only provider of employment in the area, but it was unable to absorb everyone. Besides direct employment, there were opportunities for petty contracts and rental of real estate. One community leader explained it thus:

> "What the public are interested in: it's enough to get some labour jobs, right? Nowadays, GREF jobs are also difficult to come by. So, if the (company) work continues, there will be opportunities for labour. That's the first. Then, those whose lands will be affected, they will of course get compensation. Plus, those with some education, the literate ones, they would of course want desk jobs. There are no (income) sources in the state. Timber used to be an option but that has also been banned… So, that's what people would like – that the home hearth is kept burning somehow." (Jikom, interview)

Figure 8.2 Ramo villagers executing a community contract for transport of survey equipment.

Community members were generally aware of the negative impacts of large infrastructure projects. Even though they had not experienced an infrastructure project of such a scale or technical complexity previously, and they had no frame of reference for a hydropower project, extensive contact with company workers conducting the S&I work transferred information to the community members. In general, community members were aware of the common immediate impacts of hydropower development, such as land submergence and in-migration of people from outside and its implications on their lives. The Ramos had the benefit of the hindsight afforded to them by the fact that hydropower development projects were rolled out in the downstream area belonging to their Libo neighbours.

Some community leaders told me that the large-scale population influx of workers from outside the area and the state was a grave threat to their identity. However, they considered this risk as manageable through negotiations with the company regarding the expatriation of its workers at the end of the construction phase. Similarly, a few of the local elites professed to have apprehensions about the long-term environmental impacts of the projects. "We want the company to do awareness, as we don't understand the exact impacts. Even if we read the book (Environmental Impact Assessment Reports), we can't understand it. After all, we are not environmentalists." (conversation with an area Panchayat leader, 9/10/2012). However, beyond professing these concerns, they did not take further action.

Despite the high social acceptance of hydropower projects in the area, the work of Endor Energy stalled for more than a year because of local conflicts. How did this come about? I shall elaborate on this in subsequent sections.

8.2 The Local Politics of Hydropower Development in Shi Valley

In the following subsections, I describe the key processes and events that constituted the local politics of hydropower development in the Shi Valley. In doing so, I explore the interplay of the motivations of the main actors, the intra-community dynamics, and its repercussions on community-company interactions. This reveals the claims that underlie the numerous contestations.

Broadly, three distinct phases could be discerned, and each phase was defined by a cluster of events and processes. The first phase coincided with the period when Endor, the IPP, launched its S&I work in the valley and built contact with some community members; the middle phase was marked by the emergence of multiple conflicts, and the third phase when the state administration started to try and manage the conflicts. I was in the field during the third phase only. So, the first two phases were reconstructed through data from interviews and documents produced by the company and the community members.

These phases coincided with the project preparation part of hydropower development. Although the MOA for the three-project cascade had been signed in the middle of 2007, the exploratory work on the ground was started only in 2008[40]. The preparatory phase of project development had two aspects – the first was the technical S&I work for preparing the Detailed Project Report (DPR), and the second was the social survey for preparing the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report. While the S&I activities were directly supervised by Endor employees, the EIA preparation was the responsibility of the Centre for Inter-disciplinary Studies of Mountain & Hill Environment *(CISMHE),* University of Delhi, that came on board as a consultant. Due to the absence of a land registration system in Arunachal Pradesh, identification of land ownership became an issue that tended to hinder the S&I works.

8.2.1. Cooperation with the Company (2007-2010)

The early period, starting with the arrival of the company in the valley, till late 2010, was marked primarily by cooperation from the communities. From September 2007 till January 2009, the hydrological data collection carried on without any trouble. During this phase, the higher decision-

[40] Work on the projects was held up due to a potential conflict in water availability due to the allotment of another project upstream of the cascade to another company in December 2007. Ultimately, the allotment to the second company was cancelled.

making positions in the field team were occupied by French/European expats while middle management executives, such as the site engineer and the geologist, were of Indian origin. As a matter of policy, the company hired liberally from among the local communities. This section is primarily based on interviews with ex-employees of Endor, and the information was triangulated with accounts of community members, as well as documents.

As mentioned above, the exploratory work started after September 2008[41]. The fieldwork was primarily handled by two Indian employees of Endor, a hydrologist and an electrical engineer. They were both 'non-tribals', i.e. they did not belong to any of the Arunachal Pradesh Scheduled Tribes and thus perceived as outsiders. But Mohan, the electrical engineer, had grown up in Aalo, and was thus somewhat familiar with the social mores of the concerned communities. Mohan was hired in September 2007 primarily because the company wanted to "hire someone who knew his way around in Arunachal", and his upbringing gave him the requisite profile. Both officials were based at the field office in Aalo. A few Arunachali engineering graduates were also hired, but they left when they found employment with the GoAP. This field team reported directly to the Delhi office, where a French expatriate led the management.

The collection of hydrological data was the first activity launched at the site. The first local employees to be hired, Doi and Takar, were from Purying village and belonged to ex-slave clans. As discussed in Chapters 5.1 and 6.1.2, the present-day Ramo society is socially stratified into Yorko clans, Yorko-affiliated clans and ex-slave clans. Doi and Takar belonged to the Kamdong and Dumak clans, who were settled in Purying. According to Mohan, Doi and Takar were hired only because they had the necessary literacy and numeracy to carry out measurements required for the hydrological studies. No consideration was given to their clan affiliation at all. The field officials began to depend on them when hiring additional labourers for site work. One fortuitous association with the company turned into a source of employment for many members of the ex-slave clans. The hiring policy was incredibly lax, as the company viewed hiring from the local population a means to build community relations.

> In the beginning, it was us Kamdongs who ran (the work of the company). Starting from October 2007 till 2010, the Kamdongs did all the work. Doi and Takar were hired by the Endor Engineer who was looking for 8th-pass persons to do the survey work.
>
> All additional hiring as and when required was done through us. We recruited more people little by little. In 2010, when we started drilling work, we here were 24 employees

[41] In September 2007, the GoAP signed an MOA with another IPP for the Rapum HEP. The catchment for this project happened to overlap with the Pauk project, leading to a protracted negotiation with the government to resolve this conflict. It was finally resolved in September 2008.

> and all were Kamdongs. We recruited within the clan among brothers. We would do the surveys and clear the forests for D&D. We used to guide them to the site. (conversation with a Kamdong ex-employee, 11/10/2012).

Some members of the Ramo elite said to me that for a long time, they were unaware of the actual work of the company, and its significance for their area. "In the beginning, we thought these foreigners are really keen on fishing for sure," joked one interviewee (conversation 22/09/2012), on their perception of the company activities.

In early 2009[42], Henri, an engineer of French nationality, joined the team as the Chief Operations Officer. Under Henri's year-long leadership, two things happened that decisively shaped the company-community relationship and later festered into circumstances that would stall the Endor's work for more than a year. First, the community perception of the company as a valuable financial resource emerged, and second, due to the establishment of a field office in Tato town, a prominent family belonging to the Libo tribe cornered a significant proportion of the company's spendings by cultivating a financially profitable relationship.

By most accounts, Henri was well-intentioned and was well-liked in the villages. An Indian ex-colleague noted, "Henri really cared for the local people, and wanted them to benefit from the projects. Sometimes, he even spent money from his own pocket… He saw the value of money in Euros." That is to say, a few thousand rupees were small change to him. A Libo man from Tato area told me, "In the beginning when Henri was in charge, it was really great. He would move around from village to village, sleeping wherever he would happen to be at night. He lived like a local, eating everything we do. He would leave behind INR 5000-6000[43] where he spent the night. When we went to Aalo, he would lodge us in the best hotels. We would always eat at Aagam[44]." (Conversation, 22/06/2012).

Further, Henri was not tight-fisted regarding the work budget. Milar, a Ramo who joined the company as a Public Relations Officer, told me, "His philosophy was that time should not be wasted; if there was any threat of work stalling due to local conflicts, then one should fix it in any way possible, even by throwing money at the problem" (interview, 18/09/2012).

However, his open-handedness led to escalating expectations among the community members in terms of financial returns. Rates for local contracts began to be inflated, in the certainty that Henri

[42] While I was able to secure interviews with some Endor employees in Arunachal, the European employees did not respond to my requests for interviews. Therefore, details had to be reconstructed partially through their communication with the District Administration (DA).

[43] For perspective, an unskilled labourer working with the Border Roads Organisation earns about INR 7000 in a month.

[44] Aagam was a well-known upmarket hotel-restaurant in Aalo.

would approve the bill. For instance, according to a company employee, if previously shifting of S&I machinery to site cost INR 1lac, the cost was inflated to INR 4-5 lakhs. The escalating project costs eventually came to the notice of Delhi head office.

During this period, Henri began to spend more and more time in the Shi Valley and he formed close relationships with the community members there. However, Henri did not understand the local social terrain. Due to the time spent in Tato, the main object of his friendship came to be a prominent Libo family of Tato. Even though out of approximately 174 hectares of the project affected lands in Shi Valley, only 12 hectares belonged to this family and its affiliates, they cornered the largest share of Henri's largesse. Many members of this one family found employment or profitable deals with the company as a result of this friendship – someone rented out a building as a field-guesthouse, another rented out vehicles, yet others got employment. Due to their proximity to the company officials, during the early period, this family managed to gain financially, to the tune of about INR 1.32 lakhs per month. Later, this would go on to be a sore point of contention with the Ramos.

In 2009, the drilling and drifting (D&D) surveys were initiated. D&D surveys are part of geological studies and involve a sophisticated and expensive process of extracting rock samples from deep within the mountains, in areas where tunnels etc. are to be laid out. For these studies, the company needed the permission of landowners to access the study sites. At the same time, extensive labour was needed to move heavy and expensive equipment to inaccessible sites on the sides of the mountains. Besides, access paths had to be cut into the forests and brush to these sites. So, in a simple trade-off, the petty contracts for moving equipment and for path preparation were given to the respective landowners. For instance, D&D works under the Tato-I project were contracted to the Heo and Rinya clans among the Libos, and the Meyings and Dupings among the Ramos; in Purying and Hiri, the Kamdongs carried out the petty works. During this phase, work moved along at a decent pace. Money was moving down to some sections of the local community. Consequently, D&D works were being successfully carried out in a staggered manner at different sites.

By most accounts, the arrival of the company in the region was perceived as a positive economic development in the valley. At its peak, there were at least 100 employees from the local communities on the Endor payrolls. During this phase, people felt that everyone gained income opportunities commensurate with their abilities and skills. In fact, many of these employees were getting salaries for doing very little. For instance, a woman from Purying was employed as the cook at the 'company guesthouse' by the Chengrung roadside. In reality, the 'guesthouse' was barely functional.

By June 2010, the D&D work reached westwards into Chengrung-Rapum territory. Here, the investigation sites happened to be on the lands of the Jepak subclan of the Kojes of Rapum village. The de-facto leader of the Jepak subclan was Tomo[45]. Tomo also happened to be an important local politician, who had been the Zilla Parishad Member (ZPM) in the previous Panchayat session 2003-08. He had been 'out of power' since 2008 when he lost the ZPM election to Matin, a candidate from the Libo tribe. He was perceived to be an able leader of the Ramo community, not least due to his ability to deal with the administration and his proficiency with paperwork and English, the language of officialdom. He was a well-educated man, and one of the early college graduates from the community. Significantly, Tomo was also the president of AAYYAA (discussed in sub-section 8.1.2) during the period when he worked closely with the company. Partly because of this, he would go on to be at the centre of a number of inter-clan and intra-phratry conflicts.

Since many investigation activities were on the Jepak lands, Tomo and his Jepak kinsmen gained access to numerous contracts for the movement of machines and clearing of paths to investigation sites for the D&D works. Between November 2010 and March 2011, he and his kinsmen gained an income of about INR 14,35,000.00. Then, the other Ramo elites did not seem to object to it. This was probably because at this time, the stakes at hand were not clear yet.

> "In the early days we did not pay much attention to Endor. The problem was that all the senior employees were French. So we could not communicate with them. Tomo spoke English, so he was in touch with them. We didn't think much of it." (Interview with Jikom, 13/10/2012).

As such, according to the community leaders, the company also kept its communication to the minimal, concentrating only on the landowners and not the other members of the community. For instance, according to a senior Panchayat leader, neither the company, nor the MLA, nor the administration informed them about the projects. They only learned about the Endor projects after filing for information under the RTI Act. This was disputed by a company employee, who said that Endor had held a public meeting at the start to introduce the projects to the community. But there had been very little interest on the part of the communities in the meeting.

Be that as it may, in general, the investigation works progressed at a brisk pace, and Henri well-liked in the villages was as mentioned. People appreciated his 'going native' approach. They recalled with fondness how 'he would eat the local food with his hands', and leave lavish monetary token payments for their hospitality. This was significant in light of the feeling of 'tribal-non-tribal'

[45] Tomo was previously mentioned in Chapter 6.4 in context of an inter-tribal contestation over a government project in Yornyi village close to Mechukha town. He had been responsible for the founding of a tribe-based organisation called All Ato Yorko Yornyi Ao Association.

relations, and self-perceptions of being culturally inferior to outsiders. Every once in a while, a few community members made threats of violence against company personnel when unhappy at not being given business contracts. Since December 2009, the company hired private security on all three sites.

This phase of community cooperation with the company came to an end in late 2010, and several conflicts emerged simultaneously along various axes, with an overlapping cast of actors at different sites in the valley. This is discussed in the next subsection.

8.2.2. Emergence of distributive conflicts (Late 2010-2011)

By late 2010, instances of disruption of investigation work multiplied. Threats of physical assaults on members of the company field staff, as well as actual, were frequent. While all conflicts effectively played out as community-company conflicts, their roots could be traced to inter- and intra-community contestations over the distribution of employment and contracting opportunities.

Some conflicts played out along inter-tribal fault lines. For instance, on the western border of the Ramo lands, conflict arose between the Ramos and some Memba clans over who should benefit from the contracts for moving machinery. This was again primarily rooted in conflicting claims of land ownership. This was later resolved by splitting the contract. The Ramos advised Endor to henceforth hire vehicles and real estate only from Adi[46] persons as they owned the lands affected by the projects, and not from Membas, even though they were more numerous in Mechukha township and had more resources at their disposal.

Intra-clan conflicts too began to develop in erstwhile cooperative clans, when the inequalities in gains began to become apparent. For instance, many members of the Duping clan began to agitate that the company should stop employing a member of their clan, because they suspected him of profiting disproportionately from his position as the Public Relations Officer, without sharing the gains with the rest of the clan. One year previously, the clan had thrown its weight behind him, and recommended that the company hire him.

Out of these several consequent conflicts, in my study, I focussed on three interwoven conflicts that began in Purying, and engulfed the rest of the tribe. The first was an **inter-clan conflict** that of the Six Yorko Clans versus the Kamdongs, the second and the third resulted out of the Kamdong-Six Clan conflict. In all three conflicts, Tomo had a central role to play.

Before delving into the three aforementioned conflicts, it would be useful to narrate the two proximate triggers for the conflicts. The first was the attempt of the company to rein in the

[46] As discussed in Chapter 5 and 6, the Adi tribes in the area are the Ramos, Libos, Bokars and Tagins.

escalating project costs due to Henri's management style. The second was the increasing awareness in the tribe of the monetary stakes of land ownership. More and more community members realised that not only was land ownership linked to access to employment as well as remunerations for land damage during S&I activities, but it was also key to future compensation payments. Furthermore, in 2011, public hearings for Naying and Tato-II projects downstream in the Libo areas took place, and the Ramos learned that scale of compensation pay-outs for landowners was in crores, that is, much higher than what had been expected initially.

The first proximate cause appeared to be the attempt on part of the Company to control escalating costs. As described in the previous section, Henri's laisse faire management of "throwing money at problems" and the goodwill he had earned among the locals, had allowed the site work to progress smoothly so far. When the company headquarters attempted to control project costs, it triggered discontentment among community members who were now accustomed to the generous pay-outs made by Henri.

The second was the conflicts related to land ownership. Many land ownership conflicts predate the arrival of hydropower projects. One elder man said to me "Kebang cases are only about two things – either land, or woman (i.e. marriage)"; that is to say, conflicts over land ownership have been common. However, hydropower projects increased the stakes of land ownership to an unprecedented degree, leading to a scramble for staking claims even on lands previously considered worthless. As a Ramo man said, "People have started laying claim on stretches of land where even *yapoms*[47] never dared to fly to." The numerous claims and counterclaims to land ownership effectively ended up becoming threats against the company to validate the claims of this party but not the other.

In November 2010, the company appealed to the GoAP to resolve the land ownership conflicts:

> "At the district level, we would like to point out that, because of the absence of official land property register in the projects area, the main issue we are currently facing is the difficulty to draw the list of the owners / occupiers of the land required for the Projects.
>
> Although our team on site has been working for several months on the field with the local people and through various channels in order to determine the plots of land and their owner / occupiers, it remains impossible to complete the property survey for some parts of the impacted land, **because of the local controversy about the ownership of such land.**

[47] Yapoms are malevolent spirits that are believed to inhabit deep forests.

> This is delaying directly the EIA studies, particularly the social survey, as the list of Project Affected Families can be finalized only on the basis of the list of land owners / occupiers." (Letter dated 8thNovember, 2010).

The GoAP and the DA failed to take action on this appeal. For the DA, the local conflicts in Mechukha were just one of the many issues demanding its overstretched attention and resources. For it, hydropower development in the district was not part of its core responsibilities and hence not an immediate priority issue. For the GoAP, it is likely that the contestations around the larger projects such as the LSHEP took up all their attention.

8.2.2.1 The land conflict between Six-Clans and the Kamdongs

The legal conflict between the Kamdongs of Purying and six Yorko clans of three villages over land ownership was the first hydropower-related conflict in the Shi Valley that I serendipitously learned about. However, in the beginning, the connection of the conflict to hydropower was not obvious. I learned about the case through a chance encounter with Bogum at the start of my fieldwork. Bogum was one of the few people I knew in Mechukha from before my fieldwork. I had last met him in 2004 when I had visited Mechukha for the first time for work. He belonged to the Jepak sub-clan and was a close cousin of Tomo, and one of the litigants in the case. Of our renewed acquaintance in 2012, I wrote in my field notes:

> "Later (on 2nd August 2012), as I was… watching the street scene (from the tea stall), Bogum came into view… He walked towards the tea stall and I waved him towards me. He jokingly asked me why I wasn't researching the Galos (my tribe) and that I should have started at home. I retorted that even medical doctors are not supposed to treat their own relatives."
>
> I tried to change the tone of our conversation ... He in turn began to tell me about the land case for which he was staying in Mechukha...
>
> The land case in brief –
>
> The Kamdongs of Purying village have laid claim to some land parcels and one member applied for an LPC (Land Possession Certificate). The Kamdongs are erstwhile slaves who were released by the GoI sometime in the 50s. According to a few clans of the Ramos, as erstwhile slaves and sharecroppers, the Kamdongs have no rights over the land. That is the basic premise of the dispute. …
>
> The case was coming up for discussion at the Kebang[48] (the next day). Both parties could 'choose' five Gaonburas as mediators to speak on their behalf while there would

[48] Refer to Chapter 4 for information on the institution of Kebangs and Gaonburas.

> be a 'single umpire' appointed by the government – a kind of tie-breaker. (field notes 6/08/12)

On the designated day of the Kebang, I was at my watch at the tea shop next to the Kebang hall (described in section 3.3 of the Chapter on Methods).

> "There was quite a crowd – Tomo Koje was frequently walking in and out of the ADC office, sometimes in the company of the laal-kots (Gaonburas)[49], other times by himself. A couple of non-regular faces had taken up one bench in front of the tea stall. They didn't say much. Later, I was informed that they were Kamdongs." (field notes 6/08/12)

The ease and boisterousness with which the members of the complainant group moved around the spaces in front of the ADC office, and conversed with each other and the government representatives, was in stark contrast to the quiet stillness with which the Kamdong representatives sat in front of the tea shop. Perhaps it had to do with their places in the social schema of Mechukha and the Ramo society. I did not have many occasions to observe this dynamic in Mechukha, as members of the Kamdong clan were not highly visible. That day, the single umpire did not turn up.[50] This case stayed unresolved through the duration of my fieldwork.

This land case emerged in late 2010-early 2011. The immediate trigger that led to the legal conflict between the Kamdongs and the Six Clans was purportedly the application for a Land Possession Certificate (LPC) by Marto Kamdong. Underlying this conflict were the divergent oral histories of status of Kamdongs in the Ramo society, as well as the uneasy integration of the ex-slaves into the Ramo tribe (discussed elsewhere in Chapters 5 and 6). Regarding the status of the Kamdongs, the Yorko clan members insisted that the ancestor of the Kamdongs had been a slave of Pupor, and thus incapable of claiming lands. Mixed into differing narratives of land claims were feelings of superiority over the ex-slave status of the Kamdongs and beliefs of authentic belonging:

> Arre, these Kamdongs… on their ST certificates, they write Kamdong, and then Ramo in brackets. We are the original Ramos. So what we say is that if they are getting the status of Ramo tribe, it is thanks to us… Kamdongs were tenant farmers for us. They were sharecroppers. Their ancestor was a slave who was given as a wedding gift to Pupor. How could they become landowners?" (Bogum, 03/08/2012).

The Kamdongs on the other hand were adamant that the ancestor had taken shelter with Pusang, a descendant of Yorko, as a refugee and not as a slave, and due to this important distinction, was

[49] Laal-kot is literally 'Red Coat'. The Gaonburas wear a government-issued coat of red wool.

[50] A couple of months later, a Ramo individual, unrelated to the land case, told me that the Yorko clan Ramos had asked the tie-breaking Gam to not turn up for the Kebang on that day, and he obliged.

a free man who could legitimately claim lands. The Kamdong perspective of the land ownership was different:

> Earlier, it used to be like this – whoever would fell the forest, would become the owner of the land. In the times of our ancestors, they (the Yorko-clan Ramos) had to ask for our permission even to cut wood. The Ramos are newcomers (to Purying). The Pusangs came during our fathers' generation. Then there was one Koje who claimed ownership of land by clearing some forest. That bit too was later purchased by us. In the end there was only one old woman left in the Koje family. We got the land in exchange for giving her a burial. (A Kamdong elder, 2012)

The Yorko-clan Ramos learned about Marto Kamdong's LPC application when the notification for the one-month period to register objections was declared. Tomo gathered together individuals from six of the Yorko clans from three villages adjoining Purying, and registered their objection with the administration. The member representing Purying in this group was Jarbom Pusang. Though he was born in Purying, he had migrated to a small town called Kaying many years ago. His mother and older brother, Jarkar, were still in Purying.

The DA referred the objection of the Six Clans to the ADC office in Mechukha. The ADC office in turn initiated an arbitration board within the Kebang consisting of eight Gaonburas and two Political Interpreters (ADC Order 11/04/2011). The board adjudicated that the "The Kamdong clan has settled on the disputed land since the last nine generations and there was no history of land dispute in the preceding nine generations. If the other clans who are making claims now, owned the land, where were they during the last nine generations. Nine generations are a very very long period." (Kebang decision 25/07/2011, edited for clarity).

This decision was not acceptable to the Yorko clan litigators for various reasons. The Yorko clans were unhappy with the presence on the panel of Duyor Komi, a hitherto well-respected Gaonbura who had descended from a slave family. They suspected that as an ex-slave, his sympathies lay with the Kamdongs. They also suspected that the then ADC, a Rinya man from Tato, and the Memba members of the arbitration board had been biased against them. Moreover, the Six Clans suspected that the company had been secretly siding with the Kamdongs, and had underhandedly paid off the Kebang members for a favourable declaration for the Kamdongs. To add insult to injury, they felt that this was due to the familial closeness the Kamdongs had with the influential Rinya[51] clan

[51] The mother of the current Rinya patriarch was supposedly a Kamdong woman. This tied the Rinyas and the Kamdongs into a tight bond of familial loyalty. In April 2013, a Libo individual who was a member of the mediation team sent by the DA said to me that the Rinyas had indeed been behind the impeachment of Tomo (which is discussed in a following sub-section 7.2.2.3).

of Tato. They felt that an influential Libo family from Tato was secretly influencing the company officials, to the disadvantage of the Ramos of the Yorko clans.

The Six Clans took the case to the Gauhati High Court. The Court in turn referred the case back to the Kebang. The court suggested that both parties should choose five mediating Gaonburas, and one Gaonbura appointed by the DA to act as a mediator. This was the abortive Kebang meeting that was to have taken place on the 3rd of August 2012, as mentioned earlier.

Another reason for the animosity towards the Kamdongs was that a few Ramos felt that the Kamdongs had benefited disproportionately from the company, in comparison to the other 'original' clans. In fact, they also suspected that the Kamdongs had initiated the LPC process at the behest of the company officials. There were also rumours that the Kamdongs had been taken to visit Paris as landowners. This association was not problematic in the eyes of the Six Clans until they also continued to receive a share of the company contracts for work on their village lands. But after the clampdown on frivolous bills and employment by Pedro, the site-in-charge who succeeded Henri in early 2011 (to be discussed in the following subsection), some of the resentment was deflected on to the Kamdongs, as they were thought to be protected by their familial relations to the Rinyas.

But overall, the animus towards the Kamdongs turned into animus towards the company. The cost-cutting measures of the new management of the company contributed to the growing discontentment against the company. Tomo, who up until the end of 2010 was a willing ally of the company, would turn against it and rally his faction to impede the company's investigation works. This downturn in company-community relationship is described in the next sub-section.

It must be noted that the Kamdong-Six Clan conflict was not an isolated incident, but instead a part of numerous intra-community conflicts sweeping the valley. According to the company:

> "Various clans are now threatening our teams and site in charge on a daily basis, in an attempt to force the Company to recognize their right of ownership. Land disputes have reached such a level that our entire operations are completely stalled as the access to the river banks is physically prevented. Unfortunately, we are not any more in a position to find arrangements, as we did in the past, and the concerned clans are categorically refusing discussion. Any single small contract awarded by the Company is now becoming subject to disputes, as it is interpreted as some sort of recognition of property right (such approach being totally false). The trend of action taken by various clans is now to threaten violent acts in order to try to impose a property right. (Letter to the DC, West Siang, 3/05/2011).

8.2.2.2 Tomo faction versus Company

In section 8.2.1 I described how Henri's managerial style had led to an escalation of the cost of investigation works for the company, as well as inflation of local expectations from the company. The company headquarters in Delhi had to address this budgetary overspending. In September 2010, Pedro, another French expat was sent in from Delhi. His mandate was to cut down on the expenditure. It was suspected by community members that on his recommendation, Henri was recalled to Delhi in March 2011, and was moved out of the Arunachal projects. In his place, Pedro was tasked with proposing and implementing "an ambitious action plan to reduce costs and improve relations with local people" (Pedro's Linkedin page accessed 2014). In late 2010, in the first step after the departure of Henri, the financial dealings of the company were made stricter. Pedro began raising objections to inflation of work costs and tried to bring the costs in line with the local rates. He further stopped entertaining bills that were unduly inflated. As a result, some demands for compensation were not fulfilled by the new management. For instance, a few bills from Tomo's faction, forwarded under the name of Kijom, a member of the Jepak sub-clan, that were framed as compensation for damage to trees, were not cleared by Pedro. This was taken as a slight by Tomo and his faction (Letter from a member of Tomo faction to Chief Operation Officer, Endor Energy, 29/04/2011).

As part of cost-cutting measures, Pedro also recommended the termination of the contracts of a number of 'welfare employees'. In end-2010, many contracts of Yorko-clan Ramos were terminated. But the members of the Rinya family and the Kamdongs were not affected. This was seen as a case of favouritism on the part of the Company. Not only was Pedro cutting off the income resources of Tomo, he was also seen as biased due to his close relationship with the Libos[52].

These changes in financial practice coincided with the promotion of a young engineering diploma holder from the same Rinya family mentioned above. Kenter was hired in October 2010 as a site engineer. But in January 2011, she replaced Milar as the Public Relations Officer for Endor. Her ascension caused resentment as not only was she a very young woman, but also from a different tribe, as well as from the very same Libo family which was seen to be profiting disproportionately through their proximity to the company[53] (Milar interview 2012).

Around this time (exact dates could not be verified), Tomo organised a community-based organisation called Ramo Area Land Owners' Committee (RALOC), mainly consisting of his faction. The objective of forming this group appears to have been to act as a lobbying group. One

[52] This suspicion was not entirely unjustified. A couple of years later, Pedro married one of the daughters from this family.

[53] This was corroborated later by a company executive that when the company was terminating contracts of local employees en masse, the Kamdongs and Rinyas were not affected.

meeting was held in Mechukha. The intent of the meeting appears to have been to pressure the company site management to give into their demands. Milar told me that he had raised the concern regarding the absence of many landowners in the Committee. Tomo apparently noted this concern and assured him that this was only a preliminary meeting, and that the group would be expanded. Milar told me:

> "I said to him, he's my elder though… even if you have a problem, it would be better to negotiate and come to a solution. As it is, our area is so backward… if the company is here, at least we get the chance to earn a rupee or two. The area will also develop. And it won't be for only one person, not only the catchment area. The neighbouring areas will also benefit. If the company stays, then these jungles where one finds only snakes and crazy insects, will bear gold. He replied, forget about the gold. I got the work stopped to mine for diamonds (i.e. something more precious than gold).

In effect, Tomo was indicating that the stoppage of work was temporary, and just a strategy to negotiate for a better deal with the company.

In February 2011, RALOC asked Endor to terminate various contracts of the remaining 'welfare employees' (letter to Endor 05/02/2011, cited in a letter from Company to administration). When no such action was forthcoming, the faction raised the pressure, and requested the ADC's office to intervene. The ADC, Mechukha, office notified the company to stop work due to land conflict between the Kamdongs and Six Clans (letter dated 17/02/2011).

Over the next months, the conflict between Tomo faction and the Company representatives escalated, or rather degenerated into threats of physical assault at first, and then actual physical assaults. Endor headquarters was also getting confrontational in its approach to community engagement. In April, when the Tomo faction sent a letter to the Company, asking it to refrain from investigation works in the Ramo area (28/04/2011 letter from RALOC to Endor), the Delhi office replied:

> "We are very surprised by the attitude of the Ramo Area LOC. Few months back, when the area was not blocked, the biggest amounts have been paid by our Company to the Chairman of the Committee. If you find it necessary, we are ready to disclose the concerned amounts. Unfortunately, despite the efforts done and the amounts paid by the Company, the Projects are today completely stalled and blocked because of the action of the Ramo Area LOC."(letter to LOC, 16th May, 2011).

Physical violence was relatively infrequently used, but its threat was always present and pervasive. One Ramo man said to me, a tad amusedly, "Whichever Company man has laid foot on Ramo ground, has gotten beaten up some time or the other." I got the sense through scattered conversations that in the Ramo culture, the use of physical force was a regular part of life until

recently. Due to the incomplete documentation, and existence of conflicting and varied accounts, it is difficult to say with certainty how matters escalated. The following excerpt from a complaint letter sent by Endor to the Superintendent of Police of the district, gives a glimpse of the level of threat of physical violence present in the valley:

> On the 2nd of June 2011, our contractor was intending to complete all the tests… At 8.00AM, while going from Tato to Purying, our contractor accompanied by our team including Pedro (Coordinating Officer) and Kenter (P.R.O.).. were physically stopped by Kito Puchung on the road...
>
> (He) went by bike up to Hiri village and gathered some people from (two Yorko clans) including: (names listed, redacted by the author). They were wearing swords and weapons and pushed us back physically from the road side. It has been said that our team was going to get "beaten and cut in pieces" if we or our contractors dared work in Purying… A part of our labourers managed to go to Purying village to take back equipment which was lying at the work site… Once the equipment reached our cars, Kito and Boyom, the leaders of the group, declared that, as per order of Mr. Tomo Koje, they had to "take any materials they (the Company) could have brought on sites." Pedro and several members of our team resisted… Then the assailants became very violent, and one of them, xx, took out his sword and almost stabbed one member of our team. We hereby remind that we are mandated by the (GoAP) to… conduct the related investigations at site, and that neither our teams or our contractor can afford to be permanently subject to the risks of assaults, death and robbery. (Endor letter to the Superintendent of Police, West Siang, 6/06/2011, edited for clarity)

In response to the complaint from the company, the DA called a meeting of the assailants as well as the Company representatives on 10th June 2011. Many members of RALOC attended the meeting in Aalo, and agreed to let the company carry on with its work. Another meeting between the site-in-charge of Endor and the Tomo faction was supposed to be held in a few days' time on site "in order to discuss various issues, with the aim of resuming project works and stopping the illegal blocking of the project by a small group of persons". The meeting likely did not take place, as another violent confrontation ruptured the process.

> "As required by your good self, Mr. Tomo committed in your office to let the works resume and not to conduct anymore violent actions.
>
> "However, while going to Hiri village on 13th June in order to check logistics details for the meeting scheduled on 14th June, our Coordination Officer, Pedro, was again attacked by 3 persons:
>
> Shri Jarbom Pusang, Shri Tomo Koje, Another unknown person

> They first rushed towards Mr. Pedro,… They threatened him and told him very aggressively to cancel the consultative meeting planned on 14th June, and that otherwise there would be major incidents.
>
> "After having threatened again…, Mr. Tomo pushed him violently and tried to hit him at the head with a stone. Fortunately, Pedro. .. was beaten finally only at the shoulder… Mr. Jarbom, encouraged by Mr. Tomo, hit him with his feet. They took a heavy piece of wood and stone and pursued him…
>
> "This attack is even more serious, and violence is escalating only because of the same small group of persons led by Tomo."(Endor letter to DA 14/06/2011)

The version of the incident offered by Tomo to me differed in terms of provocation. According to him, the Ramos had gathered at Thirty-Five (a new Ramo settlement on the way to Mechukha) for the funeral of an old Gaonbura. When Pedro turned up amidst the sombre occasion to discuss the scheduled meeting, he was told that it was an inappropriate time to discuss the matter, and that the meeting should be cancelled[54]. Instead of conceding and departing, he stood his ground and got aggressive. While his appearance at the funeral may have been poorly timed, the Tomo faction was already annoyed with him because of his perceived favouritism towards the Rinyas, and seemed only to consult them through Kenter (Jarkar, 16/09/2012). Minde, who claims to have been present during this physical assault, said to me "It's so difficult to talk to these foreigners. Say anything to them, and they say 'let's fight'".

After the second physical assault, the DA registered a criminal case against a number of Ramo individuals belonging to the Tomo faction. The criminal case precipitated the next sequence of events wherein other elite Ramos of the Yorko clans, who had so far been uninvolved with the Company dealings were brought into the fray. This would later snowball into the next iteration of the intra-community conflict involving other elites and the Tomo faction.

8.2.2.3 Fracture in the Yorko-clan members

Following the registration of the criminal case against Tomo and others, company-community relations deteriorated considerably, and work on site came to a standstill. By 5th August 2011, Endor appealed to AAYYAA for their intervention in restarting the site work (Endor letter to Secretary, Power 5/08/2011). Now, as mentioned in the previous sub-section, AAYYAA (see section 8.1) was a clan-based organisation constituted to promote the interests, mainly economic interests, of the Yorko-clan Ramos. It had been created under the leadership of Tomo, who was also the

[54] According to a Ramo official in the company, Pedro had decided to visit the village in order to pay his respect to the dead man. So, the confrontation may have been due to an unfortunate misunderstanding.

Chairman of AAYYAA. But aside from him, many other elites of the Yorko clans of the Ramo community were members of AAYYAA.

The Endor appeal to AAYYAA to mediate a solution brought to light the financial dealings between Tomo and the Company. As AAYYAA was brought into the conflict, rumours spread through the community that Tomo had misused his position as the Chairman of the AAYYAA to enrich himself. Embezzlement is the word that the other Ramo elites used to describe Tomo's financial dealings with the Company. One of the Ramo elite individuals told me "He did work worth five rupees, and charged 20 rupees. On top of that he was drawing a salary of Rs. 50000 (as the Chairman of the Land Owner Committee)." (Karken, interview, 2012). Other members of AAYYAA began to agitate for his impeachment. Main among the agitators were Jikom and Komkar. Jikom, also from the same village as Tomo, had long been a political rival. In the past years, the conflict between the two had escalated to such a degree that it had resulted in a gunfight which ended in the death of a couple of persons. Komkar was a young and upcoming politician from Rego. The individuals who initiated the action against Tomo would go on to be part of the team of the organisation that came up instead. The split along the two main factions was mostly along the lines of the political divisions too.

People associated with the Company, both Ramo and non-Arunachali, disagreed with the accusation of embezzlement by Tomo. They insisted that Tomo was paid for the work he undertook as a landowner-contractor, like everyone else. The payments, even if inflated, had no relationship to his position as the Chair of the AAYYAA. Therefore, embezzlement was a wrong accusation. "The reason for the mix-up of AAYYAA… The confusion was that the person who was the president of AAYYAA was also the chairman of the Land Owner Committee… So when he would meet with the Company in his position as the chairman of the Land Owner Committee, to a third person it appeared that the AAYYAA president was making deals with the company. So, this mix-up led to the spread of rumours" (Milar, 18/09/2012).

However, for those who demanded impeachment of Tomo, the matter was not only about the legality of his transactions with the Company. Their contestation was primarily that in spite of being the head of AAYYAA, he profited alone from the contract opportunities, and did not share the opportunities with other sections of the Ramo community. More than one person said that Tomo did have the persona and potential to be a political leader, "but his greedy nature when it comes to money mars his chances" and that "he's incapable of sharing". Tomo was involved in land disputes with members of the Yorko clans too. One man from Purying told me that Tomo contested "a piece of land purchased by Jarkar's ancestors from Tomo's ancestors about four generations ago."

In October 2011, office bearers of AAYYAA convened a meeting to break the deadlock, and stated

> "in view of the prevailing standoff between some senior society members resulting in the bad reputation of AAYYAA, the members present unanimously resolved to suspend the powers and functions of President, General Secretary and Convenor of the society with immediate effect. The suspension will continue till the misunderstanding among the senior leaders are sorted out…. The members present unanimously decided to constitute a fact-finding committee in order to enquire about the allegations and counter allegations among leaders of society…. The members resolved to appeal to the Endor Energy Ltd. for immediate stoppage of ongoing work in the area till the standoff among the AAYYAA leaders are settled." (Minutes of Meeting, edited for clarity).

In October 2011, another meeting of the AAYYAA was held which constituted a fact-finding committee (Document 27/10/2011). The chairmanship of the fact-finding committee eventually fell on Karken. Karken was a Ramo, settled in Tato, where a number of hydropower companies operating in the area had their offices. He was also a public leader, who had contested in local as well as state elections, albeit unsuccessfully. As a public leader of the area, he had been instrumental in mediating the local conflicts related to hydropower projects in the Libo area, mainly the one related to the Reliance company. This made him a likely candidate in the eyes of the administration and the hydropower company to mediate.

The committee, headed by Karken, requisitioned documents from the Company, and clarified that Tomo had earned some money through contracts for the company, however not to the degree that was insinuated,

> "After going through all the available documents it is observed that – 1) Sri Tomo Koje has not drawn any amount specifically in the name of AAYYAA. However, he as Chairman of Land Owner Committee has received some amount as salary (Rs. 1.5 lakhs). It is to be mentioned that 18 lakhs of Rupees as alleged could not be proved as according to the documents available with us. … In the light of the above facts for the better interest of AAYYAA and Ramo Land Owner Committee the present incumbents holding the post of President, General Secretary and the Convenor of AAYYAA and Chairman of Land Owner Committee may be reshuffled. However, it should be done after a general body meeting of AAYYAA is called at an appropriate time. In case of Ramo Land Owner Committee, a meeting of the land owners may be conducted at a given date for a unanimous decision of land owners." (document 6/12/2011).

By November 2011, community contestations intensified so much that all S&I work came to a standstill. Endor appealed to the DA and GoAP for provision of on-site security. But for the administration, which was stretched thin over resources, it was impossible to do so. For almost every action, it appears that the company had to plead with, or cajole, and sometimes threaten with legal action, the state government.

8.2.2.4 Summary

Like the other instances of intra-community and community-Company conflicts in the Shi Valley, the series of three conflicts described above, appear to be distributive conflicts on the surface. This reading is correct to the extent that the various factions involved in the conflicts were partly struggling for the significant economic resources brought into the valley by the hydropower company. Most instances of conflicts emerged as contestation over land ownership, which was linked in the short term to contracts for shifting machinery and short-term compensation for 'damage to property'. In turn, this recognition of land ownership in the present was an assurance and guarantee of compensation payment when the project started. Thus, contestation over land ownership, i.e. recognition of claims were directly related to distributive claims. However, it is difficult to separate simple greed over the perceived windfalls from the question of identity rooted in land. It is difficult to label them as purely distributive or purely recognition based, or strictly procedural.

However, unlike the classical understanding of distributive conflicts that arose out of threats to traditional livelihoods, these were not resistance conflicts, but rather over the distribution of the gains among the community members. At the same time, other similar conflicts were stewing in different sections of the Endor project. For instance, the Dupings of Meying, had decided to withdraw its cooperation over land ownership clashes within the clan. The proliferation of conflicts and intra-community struggles for recognition of land ownership etc. led to the stalling of S&I activities for more than a year. As the costs of idle labour and machinery piled up for the company, as well as pressure from the state government for picking up pace, the company in turn demanded that the DA take up the task of resolving the land ownership issues. As mentioned in Chapter 6, issues of land ownership are an intractable problem, as traditionally, land 'sales' were made on trust, and natural geographical features or prominent trees and rocks were taken as boundaries.

So far, the GoAP and the local administration did not appear to have their goals in sync. Amidst the numerous conflicts brewing in the Shi Valley, and despite the attempts of the Company management to seek the intervention of the GoAP and the DA, the State Secretariat appeared content to let the local administration at the frontline to decide its own course of action. The company also requested for police officers, as protection for its teams, who were constantly threatened by offenders. The local administration on its part did not attempt any mediation to resolve the conflicts. Instead, its response to the various conflicts was to ask the Company to suspend work.

In the next sub-section, I will describe the next phase of bureaucratic mediation in the local politics, and how Tomo's faction continued to undermine these mediation attempts to leverage their own bargaining power.

8.2.3. Conciliation and Conflicts over Process, Legitimacy and Representation

This third phase, starting in early 2012 with a changeover of field leadership of the company, can be called the next phase of the intra-community conflicts, in which the company sought the mediation of the District Administration to resolve the intra-community issues so that the Survey and Investigation works could proceed.

8.2.3.1 A failed reconciliation

By early 2012, Pedro was moved out of the project. With his departure, there were no more expats among the field staff. Dharamaraju, an Indian from the southern state of Andhra Pradesh, was hired as the General Manager of the field activities. Dharamaraju had been working in the Indian hydropower sector for about a decade, and for the past four years in Arunachal in another company.

The impeachment had a been a significant loss of face for Tomo. He considered the impeachment a consequence of the interference of the Company. However, despite his impeachment and removal from the position of the chairperson of AAYYAA, he continued to play an important role in the hydropower arena in the early months of 2012, as a significant part of the Pauk project design fell on Jepak lands, the Koje lineage headed by Tomo, and the Company needed to carry out drilling and drifting on the Jepak lands.

In early 2012, he initiated a couple of meetings, which was attended primarily by his own faction. In February, his faction organised a meeting with the Company and its new field operations manager. The Yorko clan members, mainly from Tomo's faction, also held a meeting in Aalo in February 2012, with the objective to discuss the standoff with the company. The minutes of the meeting state that "the gathering was not against the implementations of project work in principle in Ramo area", as long as certain conditions were met:

> "That the FIR lodged against the members of Land Owners Committee be withdrawn unconditionally, that the allegation put upon by the Endor Energy Ltd. against the committee members be clarified once for all… dues pending in the form of contract work or employment till date especially in disputed areas may be cleared beforehand." (Minutes of Meeting, 15/02/2012, edited for clarity).

At this meeting, the following demands were placed: withdrawal of the FIR, release of money for construction work, benefits to the Puchung clan of Pauk and the Duping of Meying. The group

also raised the issue of employment of PROs from other areas (implicitly the employment of Kenter Rinya, who was a Libo). Overall, the considerations were financial.

Ten days later, a follow-up Public Information Meeting was held in Hiri village where Dharamaraju spoke with the Land Owner Committee members. However, these negotiations could not go further and the stalemate continued. According to a company official, "Dharamaraju had offered to withdraw the case and compensate the expenses incurred for fighting the case. However, the people involved started quoting very high figures (Rs. 3-5 lakhs per person) citing injury to public standing and therefore need for money to undertake rituals etc. This again led to the stalling of the resolution of the assault case." (interview with company official 09/2012). The new manager was not willing and not at liberty to continue with the old practice of giving in to what were seen as blackmail or unreasonable financial claims.

In March, Tomo's faction sent a notice to the company to stop work on what he claimed to be Jepak lands. In the notice, it accused the Company of creating misunderstanding in the community instead of supporting it through community development schemes (Notice to the company 2/03/2012). This notice too can be seen as an attempt to leverage land ownership to as power over the company. Tomo's faction did not necessarily want the project to be scrapped. However, it did want the Company to work within the constraints set by them.

In February, Matin, the ZPM from the Mechukha-Tato area, was requisitioned by the DA to facilitate community cooperation. At the meeting, representatives of the Puchung clans demanded that their lands be used for "developmental works, such as Colony/ Hospital/ Camps/ School etc." The lands owned by the Puchung clans were primarily unaffected by the project design, and they insisted that the project design be altered to include use of Puchung lands. This attempt at resolving the local conflicts failed.

8.2.3.2 Bureaucratic mediation, and formation of PAPWCRA, and emergent procedural conflicts

By the middle of 2012, the investigation works of the Company had been stalled for about a year. Not only was this delaying the progress of the project, but the Company was also losing money as it was paying idle charges on expensive investigation equipment and for technicians who had been parked in Mechukha. In its view, the intra-community conflicts over land ownership were the underlying cause for the stalling of its work, and it was the State's responsibility to resolve the various land ownership conflicts.

An earlier effort in the month of February through the ZPM (Mechukha) was not successful. The Company then appealed to Itanagar and Delhi to put pressure on the DA to resolve the various local conflicts hindering the progress of the project.

The Company astutely recognised that the land ownerships disputes were at the heart of the conflicts. It proactively sought the help of the GoAP in resolving the land issue problem to gain access to sites for the conduct of tests and investigations:

> "Given that land revenue register is still not available, local people are fighting for the land and do not let us access physically to the site to complete the investigations required by GSI.
>
> Somehow it is understandable that this issue is for them of utmost importance, given the amounts at stake are very important.
>
> As a result it is their absolute priority to get a land ownership right recognized before the projects can go ahead. Otherwise, they would literally lose the opportunity of their life.
>
> The recent release of information on the compensations amounts to be paid to land owners of Tato-II HEP has recently rendered the situation even more tense (we know some families who are going to get 7 Cr. in addition to relief packages).
>
> We are seeing more people coming into the picture, clearly not land owners, and threatening us and asking us to change our project layout so that it goes through their land." (email from Endor to Chief Secretary, Arunachal 15/03/2012, edited for clarity).

In May 2012, the GoAP delegated the MLA of the area to conduct a meeting with the conflicting groups. The MLA called for a multi-partite meeting of the Government represented by the DA and the MLA, the company, and the different factions of the community. At this meeting, it was decided that in order to streamline the Company-community interactions and relations, a single cohesive group of landowners should be formed.

> "A committee should be formed by the landowners and project affected people of Ramo areas through which the aspirations and needs of the project affected people could be brought before the Govt. and the Endor Power developer.
>
> Individual submissions/ representations made by some clans or individuals like Puchung clan, Duping clan or by Shri Masa Koje can be looked into in due course of time by the duly formed committee members in consultation with the power developers". (Minutes of Meeting 15/05/2012, edited for clarity)

At the same meeting, it was also agreed that

> "Land and Property survey should be carried out immediately by the Land Management staff of the District Administration and the Power Developer. Only after the completion of the property survey, the landowners of the project affected areas can be pinpointed out. Accordingly, benefits under CSR and other facilities to the project affected people can be delivered properly… Property survey should be carried out even in disputed land amongst clans or between individuals. However, it should be reflected clearly in the survey report that the land in question is a disputed land between parties. …

On the matter of land survey, after the May 2012 meeting, the community members cooperated with the Land and Property Survey team of the DA in assessing the project land requirements and the survey was completed in June 2012. According to the report of the District Land Record and Survey Officer (DLRSO), "52% of Pauk HEP surface land requirement under dispute (41.2 ha out of 79.1ha) 75% of Heo HEP surface land requirement under dispute (35.2ha out of 47.1 ha) 35% of Tato-1 HEP surface land requirement under dispute (16.5 ha out of 47.7 ha)." (Letter from Endor to DC, West Siang, 2/08/2012).

On the second matter, the DA directed three Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) members – the ZPM who was a Libo, and the two ASMs of the Ramo area "to conduct a meeting to form a landowner committee of Ramo area in order to solve the individual problems/demands of landowners with Endor Company and also to solve the land dispute cases within the Ramo area amicably outside the court." (Order of the DC, West Siang 16/05/2012). Accordingly, in June, a meeting was conducted in Mechukha to which "two members from each clan from among actual landowners" were purportedly[55] invited. In this meeting on the 6th of July 2012, a common sentiment echoed by many attendee landowners was that no single individual should be vested with authority to act or take decisions on behalf of the entire community. It was decided to fashion a two-tiered Community-Based Organisation called Project Affected People's Welfare Committee of Ramo Area (PAPWCRA). The main body of the CBO comprising two members from every land-owning clan was called the Core Committee, and an Executive Committee comprising five members was formed for the purpose of pursuing paperwork[56]. This Executive Committee consisted of Karken, Jikom, Komkar, Mikar and one younger person employed in the government. While individuals sympathetic to Tomo were part of the Core Committee, there were none in the Executive Committee. Tomo himself was relegated to the nominal position of an advisor. Three out of the five members of the Executive Committee – Jikom, Karken and Komkar - had participated in

[55] In a subsequent meeting of the Core Committee that I attended (described later in the section), at least two individuals present stated that they too were legitimate landowners, but they had not been invited to the first meeting. An Executive Committee member acknowledged the mistake and apologised.

[56] Interestingly, almost every active member of the Executive Committee and the Core Committee no longer reside in the villages nor practise traditional livelihoods. Instead, most of them are settled in Mechukha, and are either working in the government or run their own businesses.

prosecuting Tomo at end of 2011. Moreover, Jikom had a long-standing animosity with Tomo and had been a competitor in the Panchayat elections.

The contents of the discussion of this meeting require some attention, as it will form the basis for subsequent inter-committee conflict and tussle for power in the latter months.

> "4. It was also decided until thorough discussion and agreed by landowners, executive body will never place any demand, request or appeal in front of Govt., Company or Administration.
>
> 5. After discussion of the landowner of Ramo area, any demand or request placed will be scrutinized by the executive body and if any discussion is found authentic, all the five executive members should sign after that only particular letter will be considered as legal one and will be served to the Govt. Company or Administration. …
>
> 7. That the entire responsibility for public and the company relationship will be maintained by the newly formed four executive members (sic) led by the Chairman and the company shall consult the executive committee members even for petty works allotment." (Minutes of Meeting 14/06/2012).

In short, the 5-member Executive Committee was strictly meant to serve a secretarial function for the Core Committee and was to make no decisions on behalf of the Core Committee. This measure to keep it under the authority of the larger Core Committee can be read in the light of the preceding events of 2011. Community members were still wary of the concentration of power in a few individual hands and wanted to maintain as much direct democracy in decision-making as possible. That is why within the committee, there was discussion to curb the powers of the Executive Committee, by making it subsidiary to the Core Committee. "The discussion was to not have a Chairperson. The five Executive Committee members would have the same power. But they too would work under the Core Committee." (Jikom, 2/10/2012).

For the DA and the Company, the formation of a CBO like PAPWCRA was to resolve the land disputes in the Ramo area. The DA and the Company felt that a committee composed entirely of the land owners would be able to resolve the disputes more expeditiously compared to the formal legal processes. The Core Committee on the other hand saw this as an opportunity to negotiate for securing economic and welfare opportunities for the community members. It proposed a 14-point memorandum to the Company, an examination of which makes it clear that every single issue on the list was based on an economic claim:

> "1. The Committee decided that if any individual, clan or group disturbs the Company without having any proper reason, then the Executive Committee and Core Committee shall take action against that particular clan, group or individual.

2. The unskilled labour shall engaged, from where the company starts work in particular place. E.g. if the Company starts work in Rapum village, then the Company should engage labour from Rapum village only, and not from other villages of Ramo area.

3. Home light solar (equipment) should be issued in 2 (two) phases. First phase should be issued within a month.

4. Vehicle should be hired from Ramo area only from among the land owners.

5. Permanent Company office should set up within the Ramo area.

6. Appointment of security guard should be from the Ramo area… .

7. Drilling Drifting work should given should be given to eligible Ramo contractors.

8. Early termination of outsider employees except the technical persons.

9. Early sanction of Rs. 1.5 lakhs per year for Ramo land affected people.

10. A lump sum amount may be paid to terminated employees.

11. Early sanction of Ambulance to affected people of Ramo area.

12. Early engagement in jobs for educated youths of affected people of Ramo area.

13. All the contract work shall be given to the land owners through the Executive Committee depending upon the financial and technical capability.

14. Any appointment of an employee shall shall be discussed with the Committee)" (Corrected for clarity)

In response to this list of demands, Endor proposed putting a Benefit Policy in place. It wanted to do away with having to deal with micro-demands from multiple actors from the community. Instead, it proposed to deal only with the formalised body of PAPWCRA.

"After the receipt of the property survey report by the District Administration and further signing the agreement in the presence of District Administration, a budget towards the benefit policy in favour of land owners will be declared by the Company. Committee and land owners will decide how to use the benefits allocation. … an amount of Rs. 1 lakh per year has been agreed for resolving the land disputes, transportation of members, overheads, general expenses, etc."(point-wise reply from company)

For the DA as well as the Company, streamlining community interaction to a single channel was the most preferred outcome. The Company was concerned about the factional demands, which had disrupted its work in the first place. Its understanding of the situation was that individuals and clan groups were concerned with immediate monetary benefits. So, it proposed a Benefit Policy for the landowners. To proceed with the Agreement, it was made conditional that:

> "…for the purpose of restarting the site work immediately, and considering that Land Owners Committees (LOCs) have now been registered with the District Administration notably to settle amicably land disputes, we would like to implement a Cooperation Policy, as per which our Company would grant a monthly Land Use Compensation and a monthly Committee Allocation to the LOCs.
>
> The LOCs, which shall keep permanent registration with the District Administration, would receive the payments and ensure, against such payments, that the site investigations are progressing smoothly without any stoppage / disturbances."(Company letter to DA 31/07/2012).

From Endor's perspective, not only did it prefer to conduct business with a single supreme representative of the community, it also wanted this CBO to be formally registered with the GoAP so that agreements and disagreements could have legal consequences. For the company, the registration was an urgent matter, because it wanted to sign a Benefit Policy with the CBOs before the conduct of the Environmental Public Hearings, which were soon to be announced.

This rush to speed up registration would eventually lead to the next iteration of intra-community conflict over process and legitimacy of representation, this time at the tribe level. At the behest of the DA and the Company, the Executive Committee of PAPWCRA began the process for registration of the CBO. Through August 2012, members of the Executive Committee were away in Itanagar and Aalo, negotiating the labyrinthine process of registering their CBO. In the process they learned that they also needed to draft bye-laws for their CBO, and restructure the Executive Committee in order to conform to the government regulations. The Executive Committee members decided to push ahead with bye-law drafting and expand the Committee to include new positions in order to meet the formal requirements for registration. Some committee members would later tell me that they had to make this choice because they were running out of time, and it is not a simple or inexpensive matter to travel multiple times between Mechukha and Itanagar[57]. Whatever the rationale, their decision to push ahead with the registration process without coming

[57] This is a fair point. In 2012-13, the journey to Itanagar from Mechukha took a total of 16 hours, over two days. The fare in a shared taxi alone cost about INR 1000 per head. To put things in perspective, a labourer working for B.R.O. earned INR 7000 per month.

back to Mechukha for consultation with the Core Committee triggered a new iteration of intra-community conflict.

At the same time, rumours were spreading in Mechukha that the Executive Committee members were benefiting individually from their positions as community representatives[58]. Information had reached Mechukha that the Executive Committee members had rented a building in Aalo, purportedly in the name of PAPCWRA, and a relative of an Executive Committee member had been employed as the caretaker. It was also insinuated that the Executive members were drawing salaries from the company.

Tomo, who had been sidelined since the July meeting with the DA, saw an opportunity in the brewing discontent of the Core Committee members to restore face, as well as grab back decision-making power from the Executive Committee members, who were also his political rivals. On 22nd August, a complaint letter[59] calling for 'immediate removal of chairman system from Ramo Committee' was authored by a group of 22 individuals. This was almost certainly drafted by Tomo. The demand for the resignation of the Executive Committee members appeared to stem from two concerns: one, that individuals holding office were thought to gain financially from their official position (given that there was a separate financial layout for the Executive Committee in the Benefit Policy, this was a legitimate concern), and two, the individuals gained private access to the company.

By the middle of September, the dates for the public hearings for environmental clearance of the three Endor projects were declared by the Arunachal Pradesh State Pollution Control Board (APSPCB). One hearing per project was scheduled: the 16th of October in Tato for Tato-I project, the 18th in Lipusi for Heo Project, and the 17th in Chengrung for Pauk Project. The Executive Committee members wanted to smooth over the discontentment with the news of the positive response of the Company to the 14-point demand submitted by the Core Committee earlier.

> "Now we will do a meeting soon, we'll share the company's answer to the 14-points. Now, we will also have to work in the Company's favour. It has okayed all public demands. So, we have to go in their favour, and that will bring us to the Agreement stage. After we do the Agreement, the Hearing will happen, is what I heard. The DC was saying that it would be good to get the Agreement signed as soon as possible so that the Public hearing can go ahead… " (Jikom, conversation)

[58] Suspicions of private deals were not unfounded. On a visit to Purying area, a Ramo Executive Committee member misheard a question I had asked, and replied, "well yes, I did ask for some private benefits".
An individual member of the Core Committee said to me, "One way or the other, whoever is in the Executive Committee would indulge in petty pocketing. That's fine. What is important is that they should do their job."

[59] No copy of this letter could be obtained, but it was cited in another document.

The Executive Committee called for a meeting on the 2nd of October, 2012. For the discontented members of the Core Committee, this was an opportunity to air their grievances.

8.2.3.3 Intra-Community conflict over the legitimacy of the Executive Committee

Three months after PAPWCRA was formed and a month after it was registered, the Executive Committee of PAPWCRA called for a meeting of the Core Committee. The formal agenda was to share information regarding the registration of the CBO with the government, and the response of Endor to the 14-point memorandum placed with it in July. This was to be the groundwork for the Benefit Policy agreement with the company.

Even before the meeting, there were already indications that it was not going to proceed smoothly. Many individuals were unhappy with the expansion of the Executive Committee, and the formulation of byelaws without the consultation of the Core Committee. Others were not happy with the choice of the Chairperson. In the days before the meeting of the Core Committee, I had the following exchange with a senior Ramo man settled in Mechukha

> "Me: What do people say about him?
>
> Tamar: That he won't do (as Chairperson). If there has to be a Chairperson, then it has to be someone else, but not him.
>
> Me: Why? Is he not capable?
>
> Tamar: Not incapable, but he's unreliable. … Sometimes he claims to have done things he hasn't, just to build himself up… Since his father's time, he has stayed below (in Tato). Many young people might not even recognise him."

On the scheduled day, almost all members of the Core Committee arrived in the morning at the Panchayat Hall in Mechukha. The hall, a rectangular space with functional wooden tables and plastic chairs was packed. Noticeably, Tomo did not participate in the Core Committee meeting. However, several individuals from his faction participated[60]. Members from non-Yorko clans also attended. The members of the Executive Committee sat on the raised dais facing the hall. I had successfully gained permission to attend the meeting as an observer. However, I was asked not to make visual or audio recordings of the proceedings as "this is a family meeting. Heated words may get exchanged" (field notes on the Core Committee meeting). My research assistant and I positioned ourselves in a corner of the hall, facing the Executive Committee. Since many members

[60] I had paid a visit to Tomo's house during this period, and many dissidents from the Core Committee meeting were camped out by his fireplace after a night of drinking.

had already seen me in town and had already spoken with me over the last months, my presence was not disruptive.

Heated words were indeed exchanged. The meeting opened with a formal welcome address by a junior member of the Executive Committee, who outlined the meeting agenda as a discussion of the response of the Company to the 14-point memorandum that the Committee had submitted in July. However, the proceedings were soon dominated by the Tomo faction on the offensive against the Executive Committee. While many members were neutral, and asked for the agenda of the meeting to be followed, they were not able to gain control of the house.

The opening offensive of the Tomo faction was regarding the creation of the position of the Chairperson. An Executive Committee member tried to explain how the Executive Committee was compelled into taking this particular course of action:

> "I was also among those who was against the appointment of a Chairman,... But we were compelled into making this system. I personally think that the Company should be allowed to continue. But if anyone disagrees, they should say so. The Company will leave, the project will be closed. Big deal. But if we want to let the company carry on, we have to understand our own responsibilities … The public hearing is on the 17th. If you want to have the hearing, then stop all this [infighting]. (Mikar, Executive Committee member)

A senior Executive Committee member addressed the demand by 22 members for the resignation of the Chairperson in the 22nd of August letter, and defended the position of the Chairperson thus:

> "As it is impractical to have five members to sign on one circular, one authority was chosen (for communication purposes). The idea was proposed by Aba Puyor[61]. At that time (of the first meeting), Karken's name was proposed. There was no objection. Everyone agreed that as Karken had a vehicle and the resources, he would be able to handle the position… What problem do you have with Karken? If you could prove any instance of corruption by him, of course he'll resign right now. But you all are the ones who appointed him, so you should show some respect (for your choice). Instead you are making allegations. I myself have not seen any wrongdoing. If you have seen any mistakes, then write with proof."

Regarding the course of action taken by the Executive Committee on the matter of registration, which had been a subject of criticism from some members, he defended it pre-emptively.

> "After our selection (as Executive Committee members), the DC changed. The new DC is a very strict man… Byelaws were needed for registration, and a Chairperson was

[61]Aba Puyor was one of the few members of the tribe to have a relatively high government position. As such his opinions were widely respected within the community. In this case, he was seen to side with the dissenters. His wife was the ASM, and she keenly sided with Tomo.

> required for having byelaws. He sent back our file twice, and made us change the name of the organisation to reflect the tribe. In Itanagar also we had a number of problems. For instance, we had to have seven members, and not just five. It was impossible to come back for consultation in time… As for the byelaws, this (the process of constituting CBOs) isn't only happening in the Ramo area, it's happening all over the state. You can't even change even one word on a whim." (Karken, at the Core Committee meeting).

However, the gathering was not willing to be assuaged by these explanations. One questioned the very legitimacy of the course of action taken by the Executive Committee.

> "Yes, we constituted the Core Committee at the suggestion of Aba Puyor. The Core Committee expressly decided that no Chairman or President should be appointed. I applaud you for the good work you have done – got byelaws made, got the registration done. However, why did you five members go ahead on your own, leaving 40 of us behind? That was a terrible mistake, and you all should resign… How did a Circular authority become an appointment authority?" (Lijum, member of Tomo faction)

Karken dismissed the call for resignation by invoking the authority of the DC. "We did not just cook up any old bye-laws on a whim. It was done together with the DC, a DC who is an IAS[62]… We can't just resign." By invoking the elite status of the DC, Karken was also claiming legitimacy for the existence of the Executive Committee.

A second charge against the Executive Committee was that they were privately benefiting from their positions in the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee members were supposed to be earning a salary for their offices. At the same time, their properties had been rented out to the Company, thus ensuring cash flow to a few individuals. Someone from the Tomo faction said, "I met the General Manager (of the IPP). He said you guys are getting a salary." Another member of the faction asked the various Executive Committee members, "Why did you rent the building? Why is your daughter listed as the caretaker?".

Karken, the Chairperson defended himself, "Once the company starts work, and if I am found to be indulging in corruption or giving jobs to my relatives, then you can point fingers. Then I will resign. If there are charges of corruption, give in writing, we will do it procedurally asking for a show cause notice, having 1/3 majority voting… Someone asked the company why it is paying salaries to the Executive Committee members. We are not drawing any salary. No agreement has been made with the Company yet, no work has started, and we have not recommended any names for employment, please don't talk about such stuff. My task is to ensure employment for everyone. Only then will the fires burn in our hearth."

[62] IAS, short for the Indian Administrative Service, is the top-tier of Indian bureaucracy, above state-level bureaucrats.

The Executive Committee viewed itself as championing the cause of the community. But did not see any conflict of interest in getting funded by the Company for carrying out its day-to-day tasks.

> "… don't think we are on the payrolls of the company. We don't have vehicles or helicopters. Running around [for paperwork of the organisation etc.] costs time and money. If we get a little bit of financial support from the company, don't think badly about it. After all, we are working for the interests of both [Company and community]." (Mikar, Executive Committee member)

As it stood, even those who were demanding the resignation of the Executive Committee members unwittingly admitted that they too had financial interests tangled up in the issue, and that they were dissatisfied with how the Executive Committee members had failed to secure their interests. Some members of the Tomo faction brought up the issue of not having their individual issues with the Company resolved. For instance,

> "I asked the GM for INR 2.5 lakhs for the contract for making the venue for the public hearing. While others are getting INR 1. lakhs, I was told I would get only INR 50,000. Forget land, I won't even let the public hearing happen. And you, brother, you did not do your duty as a middleman [taking care that both parties benefited], you took the side of the Company." (Masa, member of Tomo faction)

> "Why didn't the Executive Committee take up action on the issue of compensation for land destruction on my property? It has been three months now." (Lijum, member of Tomo faction)

Minde Puyor had the backing of Aba Puyor to execute the venue for the public hearing in Lipusi. He also pointed out that the Executive Committee had failed in making Endor stick to the conditions set during the Hiri Meeting that it would unconditionally withdraw the criminal cases against community members, that it would pay up money as compensation, and that the pending bills would be cleared.

At the same time, many other members present at the meeting were against the derailing of the discussion by those contesting the legitimacy of the Executive Committee.

> "What's done is done (about the bye-laws). Today we should be talking about the 14 points of the agreement with the company." (a Core Committee member from a Yorko clan)

> "Such things should not happen between brothers. The Executive Committee was selected by the Core Committee and now some people want to remove them. If matters go on like this, neither will the Company be able to carry on working, nor will there be any unity left among the brothers. Let's not fight inside the family. We must try and let

> the Company start work as soon as possible. As long as it is not working, no development activity can start." (a Core Committee member from a Yorko clan)

> "Now is the last stage, now work has to start. Now is no longer the time to discuss if we should give our land or not. Now we should discuss how to get the Company to work. It's time to sign the Agreement with the company. The Heos and the Rinyas have already signed their Agreements [with Endor]. There's money to be made, every single person will get opportunity to do wage labour. But if we discuss too long, this will never take off. The date for Tato hearing has been fixed, those Tato people will get the money, and we'll have to look on helplessly." (a Core Committee member from a Yorko clan).

These comments represented the broad agreement within the community regarding the positive impacts of the hydropower projects.

Komkar, one of the younger members of the Core Committee and a Panchayat member, appealed for dialogue and reconciliation for the greater good and development of the community:

> "Matters are still at the paperwork stage, no real work has started. We are all from the Ramo area, we are all brothers. This is not some India-Pakistan fight (that cannot be resolved). We must sit down and talk. Let us not try to pull each other down. What is the problem in developing our society together? If the hydropower (project) starts, it is our Ramo area that will benefit, and not Mechukha or Manigong. There will be jobs for our children. With the money for land compensation, we can educate our children. Of course, we can have arguments, but we should also find solutions. We will only tender resignation if there's proof (of misdoing). Otherwise, demands for tendering resignations will never end."

By late afternoon, the gathering had disintegrated. People trickled out of the meeting hall having said their piece. Some hung around the porch of the Panchayat Hall, smoking and having discussions in little groups. By the end of the meeting, only a handful of the initial members were there in the hall. The meeting was called to a close, and one of the Executive members proposed that "we will demand for an *awareness* meeting before the *public hearing*."[63] No members of the Core Committee were around to endorse the proposal. As it turns out, the Executive Committee used the attendance sheet from the morning as a formal sign of endorsement of the conclusions from the discussions of the day.

Tomo's faction exploited the discontent among the members regarding the perceived arbitrariness of the Executive Committee. For Tomo, there were many motivations as to why he acted in this way: first was to restore face, which he lost in the process of impeachment. Secondly, he wanted to have the control back of the community organisation. On the eve of the meeting, a member of

[63] A day after the meeting, I was invited by one of the Executive Committee members to join a social gathering. At this gathering, I suggested that I could do a workshop with them regarding the purpose and significance of a public hearing. My suggestion was not met with an enthusiastic response and was allowed to slide.

his faction had announced loudly in public that the Chairman had to be one of their own. It is also likely that his actions were motivated by his underlying desire to further his political career. After all, in the previous term, he had been the ZPM of the area[64], which was one of the highest political offices.

8.2.3.4 Signing of Agreement for Cooperation, postponement of public hearing, and no end to conflict

On the 5th of October, 2012, the Executive Committee members left for the district headquarters. I had not been aware of their departure. The wife of one of the Executive Committee members told me that they were scheduled to have a meeting with the DC and Endor for the signing of the Benefit Policy Agreement. She urged me to follow the team, as 'it would be important for your research'.

I took her advice and travelled down to Aalo the next day in order to follow the events. Here, I learned that the signing of the Agreement had to be postponed due to concerns registered by the Kamdongs and the Dupings (Kamdong letter to DA 2/09/2012). These minor clans were reluctant to join PAPCWRA, as they perceived it to be an interest group for the Yorko clan Ramos, and feared that their interests would be sidelined. This was a fair concern in light of the existing social dynamics within the Ramo society. However, both the Company and the DA wanted only one representative organisation for the communities. The DA rejected demands for separate land owner committees for the minor clans, and instead directed that one representative each of the Kamdongs and Dupings be included in the EC.[65]

Finally, on the 15th October 2012, a 'Memorandum of Agreement for Cooperation in Hydropower Development' was signed between the Company and the PAPWCRA. The terms of this Agreement (see Annexure II for details of financial allocation) provided among others that:

> "Based on the formation of the PAPWCRA officially registered by District Administration as Land Owners Committee, and for the purpose of restarting the work and conduct field investigations, the Companies have decided to grant:
>
> A financial allocation for the purpose of Committee operations & expenses (Hereafter Committee Allocation).

[64] As it turns out, in the 2014 elections, Tomo contested for the legislative seat as the candidate of Bharatiya Janata Party, a national political party. He did not win.

[65] This suggestion of the DA led to infighting within the Kamdong and the Duping clans too, as to which individual should get a spot on the Executive Committee. The infighting was indicative of the mistrust that ran deep within the clans too.

> A compensation to the land owners during the site investigation phase (Hereafter "Land Use Compensation") which will be based on the land requirement under Ramo area.

In the meantime, a week before the scheduled public hearings, the DA recommended to the Arunachal Pradesh Pollution Control Board (APSPCB), the authority responsible for the conduct of public hearings, that the hearings should be cancelled in light of objections from various community-based organisations. The APSPCB took the advice, and the hearings were cancelled.

Despite this setback, the Company hoped that the signing of the Benefit Policy would reset its strained relationship with the community, and that it could restart the pending drilling and drifting activities for its geological studies. For this, the Executive Committee was to assist it in gaining physical access to study sites. On the 21st of October, the Manager of Technical operations paid a site visit to Hiri-Purying accompanied by Executive Committee members. The purpose of the visit was to mark the locations for the drilling on the Purying hillside. I shadowed the team on during the visit. Interestingly, Jarbom, a member of Tomo faction which was actively thwarting the Executive Committee's attempts to facilitate things, was part of the visit. He was friendly and cooperative with the members of the Executive Committee.

Right after this visit, the Tomo faction registered a strong resentment with the Company directly, and discouraged the management from carrying on activities. On 25th of October, 2012, the Tomo faction called for a meeting of the Core Committee. While Tomo attended this meeting, the circular was sent out in the name of others (EC's complaint to DC 16/10/2012). The Executive Committee members were not invited. The objective of this meeting was to declare the registration process of PAPWCRA as illegal.

> "On 23rd October 2012, several Clan representative members of the PAPWCRA… have strongly requested our officers not to attempt any site works, and indicated that otherwise serious Law and Order incidents will take place, because in their allegation the PAPWCRA does not allocate the shifting (of equipment) works to the real owners of the land affected by this drilling.
>
> All the persons/clans mentioned above belong to the Ramo area and are members/advisors of the PAPWCRA… (Endor letter 25/10/2012, edited for clarity).

In the same communication, the company functionary offered an analysis of the intra-community conflicts, stating that it was over distribution of economic resources.

> It clearly appears that those internal disagreements within the PAPWCRA, regarding both the allocation of work orders for the shifting of machinery between various clans

> and the distribution of financial benefits, are going on and hampering the start of the work.
>
> "However, as proven by recent events, the PAPWCRA cannot work without intervention and arbitration of District Administration, which is the sole possible nodal authority for streamlining the proper functioning of the Committee and for overseeing land disputes settlement and law and order control."

At the time I was preparing to leave Mechukha, the intra-community conflict appeared far from being resolved.

8.2.4. Summary

This phase from early 2012 onwards was marked by attempts at reconciliation and further entrenchment of conflicts. The Company reached out to the community directly, while also advocating for a stronger role for the District Administration (DA) as a mediator in community conflicts. In early 2012, the company attempted reconciliation with Tomo and his supporters, but the attempt failed. The Company then lobbied successfully with the GoAP to make the DA mediate the Company-community stand-off. Thus by the middle of 2012, the DA became an active participant in the local politics of hydropower development in Shi Valley. Both the DA as well as the Company considered the stalling of the project investigation as an outcome of the land ownership conflicts, that is, distributive in nature. For this, the DA mobilised the Ramo elite to organise themselves as a Community Based Organisation for resolving land disputes.

However, in the months following the creation of the CBO, its work was impeded by in-fighting within the Core Committee. In particular, a faction within the Core Committee led by Tomo successfully contested the legitimacy of the Executive Committee of the CBO to represent the community interests.

Other stakeholders in the arena – the DA and the Company – recognised the Executive Committee as the legitimate representative of the CBO, and thus the communities in the Shi Valley who would be affected by the hydropower projects. The Executive Committee was able to shepherd through the registration process of the CBO as well as the signing of Benefit Policy with the Company in the form of a 'Memorandum of Agreement for Cooperation in Hydropower Development'. But Tomos's faction effectively challenged the legitimacy of the Executive Committee at the local level by harnessing the trust deficit among other Core Committee members.

When the DA attempted to mediate in the conflict within the CBO, Tomo and his supporters had a simple strategy to defy the attempts – either they would not overtly disagree with issues raised during meetings, or when asked to appear for show-cause, they would simply not bother to turn

up. The unmindful local administration in Mechukha gave the faction enough leeway to hinder the process of conflict resolution.

This phase of intra-community conflicts was primarily a contest over legitimacy of representation between two factions within the Yorko-clan Ramos. Not only that, but the contestations also arose from a fundamental issue of lack of trust among the members of the community, and their wariness of the concentration of power with a few individuals. This in turn was closely bound up with other forms of political contestations. The wider population of Ramos were ambivalent about the contestation. On the one hand, many members of the Core Committee were unhappy with the Executive Committee members for undermining the decision-making authority of the Core Committee, on the other hand, they were willing to move past the missteps of the Executive Committee, and to move on with the process of negotiation of the Benefit Policy.

8.3 Afterwards

In April 2013, I visited Mechukha for a few days after the end of my fieldwork in Pasighat. My visit coincided with the visit of a delegation of Libo elite, many of them government teachers. They had been instructed by the DA to arbitrate between the Executive Committee and the Tomo faction. I learned that since October 2012, when I had last attended a meeting of the Core Committee, the stand-off between the Executive Committee and the Tomo faction had only exacerbated. While the Executive Committee continued to be recognised as the legitimate representative of the community by the DA and the Company, this did not prevent the Tomo faction from hindering the Company from making any significant headway. In the latest instance, in January 2013, Tomo and his faction had initiated proceedings to dissolve the Core Committee and to force the Company to deal with the landowners directly through an Action Committee. While the DC sent out a show cause notice to members of the faction, this had no practical effect in resolving the stand-off. Hence the arbitration committee had been constituted. In private, one of the members of the arbitration committee said to me that the conflict appeared to be intractable. His assessment was that "These Ramos – they are too colourful, put two people together, and you get a third colour. (They are) egoistic".

I left Arunachal for Bonn soon after this visit. In 2013 winter, the public hearings for the two remaining projects of the Endor cascade, Heo Project and Pauk Project, were finally conducted. In the end, the composition of the Core Committee was not changed. Karken represented PAPWCRA as the President. Tomo attended the public hearing in his position as an important public leader and spoke in support of the project. At the public hearing, a Mithun was sacrificed, and a feast for the local communities was held.

8.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter dealt with the local politics of hydropower development among the Ramos of the Shi Valley in upper reaches of the catchment of Siang River. In general, hydropower projects proposed on the territories of the Ramos and their neighbours had a high social acceptance from the early days. There were three main reasons for this. The first was that due to the nature of the projects and the topography, the submergence traditionally associated with large dams was drastically minimised. Besides, the livelihoods of the Ramos are almost so completely unmoored from their natural resource base, that they no longer adhere to the concept of ecosystem people. Hence, the traditional distributive issues associated with large dams – displacement, and damage to natural resource bases, were perceived by the community members as negligible. Secondly, from the start of the S&I phase of the project, the company involved community members in ancillary activities, thus ensuring that they benefited from economic opportunities. Third, the policy framework governing hydropower development had evolved to ensure adequate compensation for land loss. For the affected landowners, this was an attractive proposition as they considered their lands to be unproductive otherwise.

These factors bypassed the conventional triggers for distributional issues such as threats of dispossession and impoverishment. The Ramos understood that the company with its tools of technology, knowledge and capital, could unlock the exchange values of the water, flowing away through their territory, and the land, lying unused under the forests. But they also wanted to have gains out of it. They wanted to opt into the economy opportunity presented by hydropower development, but they wanted to do so on their own terms (c.f. the indigenous politics of hydrocarbon extraction in Bolivia in Perreault, 2006). The developer, being a stock market listed French company[66], was highly sensitive to the concept of social license to operate and reputational risks, and was therefore responsive to community concerns to a degree.

So, in contrast to the experience of the Pongging villagers, the community members in the Shi Valley were broadly welcoming of hydropower development in the valley, even during phases of contestation with the company. As the survey and investigation activities expanded in the Shi Valley, new livelihood avenues sprung up in the short term. These could be direct employment or in the form of contractual work. For a few years of the S&I phase, the projects enjoyed extensive cooperation of the community members.

However, despite the social acceptance of the projects themselves, the projects eventually faced intractable contestations. Like in the case of the LSHEP, issues of socio-environmental justice

[66] It has since then shut down its operations in hydropower development in Arunachal.

drove the contestations here too, even amid cooperation with the company. Intra-community distributive conflicts arose once livelihood opportunities were constrained. Often, these conflicts evolved into what appeared to be community-company conflicts. Once the livelihood opportunities were constrained, they became objects of contestation along tribal, clan and descent lines. Claims over opportunities were made based on land ownership. Land ownership claims in turn were based on conflicting oral histories. In short, these conflicts were about conflicting claims for recognition. Concerns regarding procedural justice exacerbated the contestations. There was a significant trust deficit against the company as well as the government bureaucracy and procedures. This led some sections of the community to reject the government's attempt to mediate the intra-community conflicts. Due to the scope for ambiguity in the traditional concepts of land ownership, and the rejection of outside attempts at mediation, the conflicts in the Shi valley became almost intractable.

9. Conclusions

This research examined the changing dynamics of the encounters between small indigenous communities and large-scale hydropower development projects. Considering the history of the contentious relationship between indigenous peoples and large dams in the 20th century, it appeared counterintuitive that in the primarily indigenous state of Arunachal Pradesh, the 50,000MW hydropower development initiative should go ahead largely unopposed. To do this, my research cast a fresh eye on the local politics of hydropower development process, thereby understanding the changing relationship between indigeneity and Development. This research set out to answer three questions: How had the indigenous peoples responded to and interacted with proposed hydropower projects in their areas? Why did different groups and actors within these communities respond differently? And how did these groups negotiate divergent interests and arrive at collective action?

This research makes three significant contributions: the first is ethnographic data from Arunachal on the long-term social, economic, and political changes in the indigenous lives. To the best of my knowledge, no study documenting the impact of development on Arunachal's indigenous communities has been undertaken. Secondly, it offers evidence of the evolving relationship of indigenous communities and large dams. As the resurgence of large dams in the 2000s has been driven by hydropower development, the responses of local communities have become more diverse. Third, my research brings insight into the enmeshing of local electoral politics and hydropower politics.

9.1. Discussion of Findings

This research sought to understand the interaction of indigenous peoples, development, and large dams. It did so by examining the concerns underlying the local politics of hydropower development using an explanatory framework that synthesised Conde and Le Billon's (2017) articulation of determinants of community responses to extractive industries and Schlosberg's trivalent conception of environmental justice. The framework consisted of two sets of interacting variables: the first set consisted of the intrinsic socio-economic characteristics of the affected communities themselves. These characteristics were the baseline conditions from which members of the host community evaluated the impacts of the proposed hydropower projects. The second set were variables such as project characteristics and characteristics of the institutional environment that mediated the social acceptance of the projects by the communities. The interaction between these two sets of variables led to differing aspects of socio-environmental justice, and this in turn led to either conflict or cooperation.

In terms of project characteristics, the large dams proposed for hydropower generation in Arunachal were different from the 20th century large dams in a few significant ways. First, almost all planned projects are run-of-river projects that do not require significant storage dams. Secondly, most projects were in higher valleys with high gradient. This minimised land submergence in most cases. At the same time, a few mega projects with significant storage components were proposed in low-gradient valleys. The significant instances of local resistance were among these mega-projects with storage component.

The institutional environment was characterised by two broad variables. The first was the policy context, and the second was the community perceptions of the state. The post-liberalisation policy changes transformed large dams from a classical Development project based on the 20th century discourses of nation-building and modernisation into hydropower, a neoliberal extractive industry. New incentive structures encouraged private companies to participate in hydropower development for profit. National-level policies were put in place to redress, mitigate and ameliorate the negative impacts of large infrastructure projects on local communities. At the same time, the GoAP reconfigured private sector-led "hard" infrastructure projects as instruments of "soft" local development projects, by building in instruments such as Local Area Development fund and Corporate Social Responsibility programmes into the MoAs.

The community perception of the state had been shaped over many years second variable was the relationship of the state and the local communities. At many proposed sites, the presence of the state was sparse. Here, the local communities expected the private companies to fill in the role of the government in terms of provision of social welfare services, such as social security for vulnerable sections of the community, and infrastructure development.

The economic liberalisation of the 1990s and the subsequent financial squeeze led the Government of Arunachal Pradesh (GoAP) to explore hydropower development through privatisation as an opportunity for revenue generation. However, the opaque process through which the state government parcelled off projects to private developers later led to a trust and legitimacy deficit among the communities.

Overall, the outcomes of the interaction of the baseline conditions of the host communities and the intervening variables impacted the social acceptance of the projects. Broadly speaking, most hydropower projects in Arunachal enjoyed cautious social acceptance of the host communities, thus upending the popular narrative of indigenous rejection and resistance of large dams. At the same time, despite the acceptance of projects, numerous conflicts still animated local politics that led to the withdrawal of the private developer. Besides, there were indeed a few instances of 'pure'

resistance. The two case-studies I chose represented the different ends of the spectrum. While the instance of LSHEP represented a deviant case of resistance, the Shi Valley projects represented the wider acceptance of hydropower projects in Arunachal.

Community characteristics such as livelihoods, natural resource dependence, economic marginality, place connection formed the baseline against which community members judge the potential impacts of a project. In literature, characteristics such as natural resource dependence and place connection acquire special salience in indigenous lifeways. My research revealed the diversity of the indigenous experience among communities that started at similar baselines under the same State. Broadly, the development process reshaped the social, political and economic lives of people in similar ways. The state's development programme altered the livelihood practices of the communities, integrated them into the market economy and enveloped them into the national political mainstream.

At the same time, the state pre-emptively and tacitly recognised the territorial sovereignty of the tribal communities at a time before the discourse of indigeneity arose. Thus, while the material shape of indigenous lives changed remarkably, their identities were rooted in the idea of land and territory. Due to the particularities of Arunachal, the social, political and economic aspects of indigenous lives became intimately enmeshed. At the same time, in both communities. Even the local elite who did not depend on wage labour for sustenance, had tenuous sources of livelihoods drawn primarily from government contracts. Their aspirations and desire for development are also an outcome of this encounter.

On the other hand, the development programme led the two project-affected communities into divergent economic trajectories. By the 1980s, the Panggis of Pongging village had transitioned successfully from swidden cultivation to settled wet rice cultivation. Their lives and livelihoods were entrenched deeper in their land and natural resources, even as there was a gradual gendered and generational shift of livelihoods away from agriculture as the primary activity.

In contrast, the Ramos of the Shi Valley underwent a near-complete de-agrarianisation in the last decades, as well as depopulation of the villages, as people moved out to urban settlements for economic opportunities. By the early 2000s, the remaining rural population had been incorporated into the informal and precarious wage labour market of border road construction. Even as objective indicators of life quality – life expectancy, food security etc. improved, the relative sense of deprivation increased.

Politically, the Ramos perceived themselves to be heavily marginalised, at all three levels of the state, the district, and the legislative constituency. The villagers of Pongging did not have strong

grievances since as part of the Panggi tribe they had a representative from their tribe in the State Legislative Assembly. Further, the entire village constituted an entire Anchal Samiti constituency.

At the first site of the LSHEP, its social acceptance in Pongging village was low from the start, after the dam axis was shifted downstream of Pongging. The LSHEP required the construction of a high dam whose backflow would have inundated some cultivated land of the village. As the subsistence part of the village economy was strongly rooted in its land, and the surrounding forests, almost all sections of the village community viewed the distributional impacts due to submergence issues as harmful to the village life. On the other hand, from the perspective of economic precariousness in the Shi Valley, the launch of hydropower projects was evaluated as a positive economic development. The prospect of monetary compensation in exchange for land acquisition made the projects appear even more lucrative. Thus, the hydropower company was initially welcomed as an alternative to the absent State.

The community responses in both cases showed mutability through time, and different justice claims gained importance at different points. Despite the positive perceptions of the hydropower projects in the Shi Valley, localised distributive conflicts over access to the new economic resources emerged within the community. These were often expressed as contestations over land ownership. With time, they took on the added layers of representation and procedural legitimacy. Matters complicated by migration histories and slavery. Theses intra-community conflicts morphed into community-company conflicts. On the other hand, in Pongging, the initial near-unanimous community resistance against the project was splintered due to initial attempts by the State and the company to accommodate the distributive concerns of the villagers.

Even when there may be widespread social acceptance of a project, the challenges of representing the community's concerns within the government-prescribed apparatus can lead to intra-community conflicts, as we saw in the Shi Valley. My research shows that the local elite played a significant role in shaping the community-company and community-state encounters. However, their actions were constrained by political calculus extrinsic to issues related to hydropower development, which led to perceptions of intra-community procedural injustice, leading to withdrawal of the support of the wider community. This created opportunities for other actors to bid for the role of representing the community. The rise of youth leaders in Pongging was an instance of this.

To a degree, community contestations led to renegotiations of the well-being outcomes and processual concerns when the State and companies responded sympathetically to these concerns. If the community members found these responses satisfactory, then their response would shift to

positive. On the other hand, if the other stakeholders were unable or unwilling to change their position, or were not responsive to begin with, the community responses veered towards resistance. For instance, in the wake of the contestations against the LSHEP, the GoAP offered amendments to the state R&R Policy to address distributional justice concerns. This in turn led to a re-evaluation of the costs and benefits of the project by some sections of the community in Pongging. However, the extent to which the State and companies could address community concerns were sharply limited by other extrinsic factors. Moreover, at both sites, there was a pervasive suspicion that the hydropower sector was rife with rent-seeking and corruption, creating an abiding trust deficit in the state's stewardship.

In the local politics of natural resources, conflict and cooperation are not terminal states, but rather ongoing processes that existed on a spectrum. Community contestations are in this regard, a bid for justice. At different phases of project development – right from project conception, exploration, implementation, or even operation – can give rise to situations which may be perceived by community members as unjust. The forms of contestations can change in response to structural changes, and responses also shift from contestations towards cooperation as goals of contestation are met. At the same time, as newer injustices are perceived, community consent can be withdrawn at various points in the process.

9.2. Theoretical reflections

The local politics of hydropower in Arunachal is animated by a complex and contradictory conjuncture of the desire for Development and the desire for territorial sovereignty, individual aspirations and anxieties, territoriality and unmooring from land, and a technical and political calculus of impacts and impact mitigations.

In the logic of their desire for Development, traditional subsistence practices based on natural resources are no longer an adequate livelihood paradigm. Members of the community are willing to trade in their natural resources for other, more profitable opportunities. Consequently, 'traditional' issues of distributional injustice such as enclosure of land, loss of livelihoods, and concern of impoverishment, have become less important. Instead, intra-community distribution of potential economic benefits and opportunities has become central.

Frequently though, while communities may frame their discontent in terms of distributional issues, underlying the conflicts are issues of recognition and process. Fairness and equity in distribution of resources for different members of the community are often rooted in underlying issues about recognition and belonging, frequently expressed through claims of land ownership. Similarly, perception of procedural justice mediated by the trust or its deficit of the community in the state

and the company may be framed as distributional concerns. Thus, communities may question the fairness of compensation rates, or the commitment to carry out resettlement and rehabilitation, when they lack faith in the state or the companies. Not only that, but communities also find the current scope of their participation inadequate. At present, participation in environmental public hearings is the only formal channel of participation in resource governance for communities. They consider their participation in the public hearings as a sign of their one-time consent, after which they lose all leverage and power, and would not have any recourse to justice should new issues arise in the future. Thus, instead of participation in a singular event, they appear to want to participate in decision-making through the life cycle of the project.

The discontent over the limited scope of participation and the increasing importance of procedural and recognition justice claims in hydropower politics can be best understood as community's desire for active territorial sovereignty. By active sovereignty I mean an equal role for the communities in decision-making related to their natural resources, and not only invitation to be passive stakeholders in formal governance processes.

In the post-Development pushback against mainstream Development, indigenous communities were held up as an alternative model. Today even more so, indigenous communities are hailed as partners for biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation. The pursuit of Development by indigenous communities in the exploitation of their natural resources disrupts notions of indigenous conservationist ethos and their intrinsic stewardship of natural resources.

In a recent essay, Sanjib Baruah, an eminent political scientist of northeast India, remarked on this rupture among other issues. Drawing on the evidence of environmental damage inflicted by the extractive activities in north-eastern states, Baruah wonders using Anna Tsing's words "How, indeed, do ordinary people end up destroying their own home places and environments?" (2020, p. 80). Using this as an entry-point, he then implicitly questions the entire enterprise of ethnic homelands. He constructs a sprawling argument drawing causality between the creation of ethnic homelands for the tribal communities to the present-day state of environmental damage due to the enclosure and abuse of natural resources by tribal elites. Thus, he rejects the idea of ethnicity-based territoriality, and by extension, indigeneity in northeast India entirely.

There are broad points of congruence between his argument and the findings of my research in Arunachal. But my interpretations diverge from his perspective. I will limit myself to two main issues. In his view, the original sin appears to be the concept of territoriality itself which he appears to consider misguided. He notes with some scepticism that "Colonial administrators and ethnographers considered some ethnically defined groups to be culturally incapable of becoming

full market subjects and decided that they needed protection" (2020, p. 82) and thus created pockets of exclusion. The postcolonial government continued with this practice and repurposed the "colonial-era protocols of protection and exclusion" as "policies of positive discrimination or affirmative action" (2020, p. 89). He thinks that "such laws misread mechanisms of dispossession and overestimate bonds of community" (2020, pp. 82–83) and the community lands were inevitably captured by ethnic tribal elites, who then proceeded to exploit the erstwhile commons for private profit.

First, in characterising the colonial and post-colonial policy as misguided, he minimises or overlooks the material and cultural deficiencies of the stateless Arunachali tribes at the start of the process of protectionary exclusion. The territorial claims of the tribal communities predate their integration into the Indian state. If at all, the ethnicity-based homelands were a pre-emptive acknowledgement. By pre-emptively recognising the de facto territorial claims of the tribes and offering them protection. The idea of indigeneity emerged as a means of providing protection to vulnerable groups. The significance of this political decision can be best understood by considering the counterfactual - what if the tribes had not been offered the protection of the Inner Line and instead their lands had been attached to the state of Assam as a hill district? The likeliest scenario would have been that they would have been dispossessed of their lands, their communities fragmented, and their lives impoverished. The Arunachali communities were able to thwart the 1983 proposal to build large dams on the Siang (discussed in Chapter Four) mainly because of their federal sovereignty. Besides, this scenario-building is not just speculative, but has been borne out by the historical experiences of tribal groups in Central India or even in the north-eastern state of Tripura.

Secondly, I would argue that the enclosure of commons by the elite happened not due to the weakening of the bonds of community, but because the bonds remain strong, although transformed. Just as their indigeneity has been shaped by modernity, the tribes too have co-opted modernity to their needs. For instance, they have reshaped electoral democracy to suit their kinship needs (for an example from another north-eastern state, see Wouters, 2015). As Baruah himself notes, the Arunachali communities is that the GoAP is already organised such that all but one legislative assembly constituencies are reserved for Scheduled Tribe candidates, and the executive branch is also lead by elected members of the indigenous communities. The political representatives share not only political ties but also social ties of tribe or clan with their constituency.

It is possible that some point in the future, these bonds between the community members and the tribal elites will dissolve, but we are not at that point yet. The relationship between the political

elites and their constituency appears to be a client-broker-patron formation, wherein the local elite act as mediators. The local elite themselves are often political entrepreneurs active in Panchayat politics and act as vote bank brokers for state-level elections. However, I hesitate to label this as purely clientelism. In the indigenous communities of Arunachal, bonds of phratry and belonging continue to exist at an intimate level. Provision of social safety net is not a core function of the State. Absent this, it is the better-off members of the community, often part of the state elite or even the local elite, who take place of the welfare state. The clan and tribal elite may help with healthcare and education costs. Besides, loyalty to the phratry and tribal pride in the achievements of individuals (See for example Aisher, 2007) in the modern spheres, even at the cost of enclosure of commons, point to the existence of social relationships that transcend a simplistic client-broker-patron connection.

This brings us back to the question of territoriality and sovereignty for hydropower development and resource extraction: I had posited that territoriality underpinned the tension between indigenous peoples and extractive companies. My findings indicate that the desire for recognition of territorial sovereignty is a significant reason for community-company conflicts.

What shape should active sovereignty take? If local communities want active sovereignty over their natural resources, they will have to wrest it from the state government, which comprises their own tribal elite. But the relationship between local communities and the state is more ambiguous than a straightforward adversarial relationship. Furthermore, though the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination is recognised by the international development apparatus as essentially a collective one (Colchester, 2002), in practice, the communities are heterogenous, consisting of different actors and groups articulated by different social and political projects. This is further complicated by the stratification and the role of new elite within the tribal communities.

9.3. Limitations of the Study

While the socio-environmental justice framework is helpful in analysing conflicts between local communities and other external actors, it fails to account for inter-stakeholder conflicts that emerge out of intra-community politics over issues of distribution, recognition, and process. Further, the explanatory framework fails to capture how hydropower politics interacts with the local electoral party politics and the everyday struggles over political power.

Regarding the generalisability of the findings within Arunachal, a significant limitation is that both my case studies were from the Siang catchment. As I mentioned previously, the two communities belong to the Tani group and are therefore similarly organised. The traditional social structures of tribes in western and eastern parts of the state were organised differently with other hierarchical

institutions like the monastery and chieftainship. Therefore, the outcomes of the local politics of natural resources could be different in these regions.

As a native and an indigenous researcher, a stumbling block that I encountered often in course of data analysis and writing the dissertation was: how to make implicit knowledge explicit. As a member of the larger society that I undertook research in, some knowledge was so taken for granted, and agreed upon as shared knowledge between my interviewees and me, that they were left unspoken. It is possible that the implicit knowledge that comes with being an insider may also leave one vulnerable to analytical blind spots that an outsider-researcher might not suffer from.

The most significant limitation of my study were my own beliefs at the start of the research about destructive Development, large dams and small communities. Because of this, I had intended to root my study in the literature of resistance and social movements and understand the local politics as "absence of resistance". I discovered the extractives literature in Melanesia serendipitously post-fieldwork, and that led me back to re-examine my fieldwork data through the lens of socio-environmental justice informed by indigeneity and territoriality.

9.4. Policy Implications

At the time of writing this, the GoAP has renewed efforts to kickstart the hydropower development programme after a decade-long lull. The programme had gone into limbo in the 2010s. Since the launch of the programme in 2004, only two projects have been commissioned and only one project is under construction. Only 815MW out of 70,000MW identified power potential has been exploited. Even projects which had the social acceptance of the host communities, such as the Endor projects, did not reach the construction phase. Some of this delay had to do with the complex and time-intensive process of shepherding a large-scale project through cumbersome governmental oversight. The other factor was the power market. As solar power and wind power took off, the cost of production of per unit hydropower was significantly less attractive to investors.

In early 2022, the GoAP signalled the revival of the programme by terminating Agreements with non-performing Independent Power Producers, and re-allocating the projects to public parastatals. At the site of the Dibang Project that had faced strong grassroots resistance, the monetary compensation for affected communities was finally disbursed. This took place after almost nine years after the public hearing for the Dibang multipurpose project was successfully conducted.

Going forward, the GoAP must address the desire of local communities for active sovereignty if it wants their consent and cooperation. It can begin to do so by formally and legally acknowledging the territorial sovereignty of the communities over their traditional lands. In the current legal framework of Arunachal, the territorial sovereignty of local communities exists in an ambiguous

zone between de facto and de jure. On the one hand, the existence of the Kebangs and their jurisprudence over traditional land conflicts indicates a tacit acknowledgement of the territorial sovereignty of the tribes. On the other hand, unlike the status of tribal territories in neighbouring states such as Nagaland and Mizoram, land ownership and territoriality are not legally codified in Arunachal. The first step to respecting the territorial sovereignty of the Arunachali tribes would be to codify their land rights. A practical aspect of territorial sovereignty that came up in my research is that the communities' consent to relocation is conditional to rehabilitation being implemented on their own territory, and not to shifting to the land of another clan or tribe.

Besides acknowledgement of the territorial sovereignty of the indigenous communities, pathways for accommodating their desire for active sovereignty must be created. Internationally, the position of affected communities as stakeholders in projects is accommodated through the instrument of Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). In India and Arunachal, under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act (2006), there is a protocol akin to FPIC whereby the village Panchayats give their consent for a project to be implemented on their territory. Active sovereignty would transcend consent. Active sovereignty would transform communities from being passive stakeholders to active participants.

Active sovereignty would also imply that the development of a project must not be presumed as fait accompli. Unfortunately, in this regard, the GoAP has not shown itself to be flexible. For instance, the anti-LSHEP activist groups had clarified in the years following the 2010 violent conflicts that they were only opposed to hydropower projects on the main stem of the Siang River, and that they would not contest projects on the tributaries. Even after this statement, not only did the GoAP not withdraw the LSHEP, it went ahead and signed another MOA with a government parastatal for the 11,000MW Upper Siang project on the main stem of the Siang.

My research findings have implications for other energy sectors as well. While costs for solar and wind energy have come down drastically, their viability as a peak load alternative is still hampered by the costs of storage solutions. In any case, both production of photovoltaics and storage solutions are linked upstream in the value chain to extractives. Seen this way, there will be social and environmental impacts of scaling up the production of green energy which will most likely affect indigenous peoples and other marginal groups. If issues of socio-environmental justice as well as local politics are not considered, then conflicts will continue to disrupt the international energy transition effort. Addressing the balance between climate goals and indigenous rights must be addressed through policy.

9.5. Further Research Needs

Hydropower remains an important component of the global energy generation mix as it is the most reliable and cost-effective energy source for peak load. Besides, the urgency of energy transition puts it back on the centre stage as an important non-carbon source of energy. At the same time, as technologically complex projects with large-scale social and ecological impacts, they remain contentious, although the nature of the contentions is changing. Correspondingly, the recent years have seen a renewed academic inquiry into the relationship of large hydropower projects and small indigenous communities. While some researchers find that hydropower projects remain sites of repression and violence against local communities (Del Bene et al., 2018), others have pointed out that the rights of indigenous communities are dependent on the political norms prevalent in the nation states (Schapper & Urban, 2021) and that outcomes for indigenous communities could be bettered if indigenous law practice could be applied alongside conventional law (Macias Gimenez, 2022). Similarly, others see the potential for the sector to thrive if international social and environmental governance norms are respected (Susskind et al., 2014). At the same time, there remain affected groups such as downstream communities that are still not recognised as stakeholders (Okuku et al., 2016). That is to say, the debate on hydropower is far from settled (Boelens et al., 2019), and there appears to be a stand-off.

Based on my research process and findings, I believe that the academy in social sciences must find a fresh way of engaging with hydropower projects that veers away from a simplified resistance lens. While I cannot prescribe what this approach should be, I do concur with Ortner's call to delve into the 'internal politics of dominated groups' and 'the ambivalence and ambiguities of resistance itself' (1995, pp. 191–192). Furthermore, for future large-N studies of large dams, it would be illuminating to separate data on dams planned in the pre-WCD era from new-generation dams that were conceived in a later political and policy environment. Furthermore, for scholars of energy policy and organisational studies, the success of NEEPCO in Arunachal in shepherding multiple projects to completion and operation should be of interest.

I argued above that despite the growing disparities between the elites and other members, the community bonds remain strong within the indigenous communities, albeit transformed to suit the needs of modernity. The question is then how much longer can these bonds last until they cannot cater to the changing political and economic realities anymore? It will have to be seen if kinship bonds are tensile enough to withstand the modernising processes that undermine mutuality. Indigenous tribal societies are based on the primacy of the collective over the individual. Can the emerging inequalities finally rupture them such that the communities are no longer recognisable as tribal and indigenous?

It is also possible that fractures and deeper inequalities will emerge within the close-knit tribal societies due to the gains and losses from the hydropower projects (See Li, 2014 for an example of the gradual land alienation and impoverishment within an indigenous community in Indonesia brought on by the rise of commercial plantation farming). Hydropower development could contribute to the process of dispossession, landlessness, and impoverishment. As such, in Arunachal, a gradual process of enclosure of commons and concentration of land in the hands of the economic and political elite predates hydropower development. If the erstwhile commons are being enclosed by the elites, what is happening to the rest? If they are being dispossessed, what does it mean for their well-being outcomes?

The increasing inequality and dangers of dispossession within so-called egalitarian indigenous populations should be of interest to researchers of indigenous studies and development studies.

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Annexures

Annexure I – a page from 'Hydro Power Potential in Arunachal Pradesh, a brochure of the Department of Power, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, undated ca. 1990s.

Present Status of Hydro Power in Arunachal Pradesh

- **Micro Hydel Projects in Operation: 32.48 MW**
- **Micro/Mini/Small Hydel Potentials: 1600.00 MW**
- **Major Projects with NHPC: 19910.00 MW**
- **Major Projects with NEEPCO: 1005.00 MW**
- **Major Projects identified for detailed Survey & Investigation: 28058.00 MW**

HYDRO ELECTRIC PROJECT UNDER SURVEY & INVESTIGATION IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Sl. No.	Name of Project	Installed Capacity in (MW)	Location	Scheduled Date of submission of DPR
1. CWC				
•	Sisiri Multipurpose Project:	222	Dibang Valley Distt.	June 2001
•	Deopani Multipurpose Project:	20	Dibang Valley Distt.	March 2001
•	Nyukchrongchu HEP:	75	Tawang District	March 2001
•	Water Resources Development Project (Kameng/Tawang Basin):	150	Tawang/West Kameng Districts	June 2003
	TOTAL (under CWC):	**467 MW**		
2. NEEPCO				
•	Ranganadi Stage-II:	100	L/Subansiri Distt.	Inv. in progress
•	Dikrong HEP:	100	Papumpare Distt.	-do-
•	Papumpare Project:	100	L/Subansiri Dist.	-do-
•	Pakke Project	105	Papumpare Distt.	-do-
•	Kameng HEP	600	W/Kameng Distt.	-do-
	TOTAL under NEEPCO:	**1005 MW**		
3. NHPC				
•	Subansiri Dam Project :-			
	a) Lower:	2800	L/Subansiri Distt.	March 2001
	b) Middle:	2000	L/Subansiri Distt.	April 2002
	c) Upper:	2500	L/Subansiri Distt.	June 2002
•	Siang Dam Project :-			
	a) Lower:	1700	East Siang	June 2002
	b) Middle:	700	West Siang	June 2002
	c) Upper:	11000	Upper Siang	Dec. 2002
	TOTAL under NHPC:	**20700 MW**		
4. BRAHMPUTRA BOARD				
1	Lohit Dam Project:	3000	Lohit Distt.	March 2002
•	Kameng Dam Project:	1100	W/Kameng Distt.	March 2002
•	Noa-Dihing Dam Project:	75	Changlang Distt.	March 2006
•	Dibang Dam Project:	2500	D/Valley Distt.	March 2007
	TOTAL under B. Board:	**6675 MW**		

GRAND TOTAL: 28847 MW

Annexure II – Example of agreement on upfront premium between the Government of Arunachal Pradesh and Independent Power Producer, mid-2000s.

PROCESSING AND UPFRONT FEES

15.1 The Company shall deposit a sum of Rs. 160.00 lakhs (Rupees One hundred Sixty Lakhs) only @ Rs. 10,000/- (Rupees ten thousand) per MW of the proposed installed capacity towards nonrefundable processing fee by a demand draft in favour of the Secretary(Power), Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh at the time of signing of the Memorandum of Agreement.

15.2 The Company shall make upfront payment of Rs 336.00 Lakhs (Rupees Three hundred thirty six Lakhs) @Rs. 21,000/-(Rupees twenty one thousand) per MW of the proposed installed capacity to the Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh at the time of signing of this Memorandum of Agreement and another installment of same amount shall be deposited after 36 (Thirty six) months from the date of signing of the MoA. This upfront payment shall be adjusted from the free power of the State Govt. in the first year of commercial operation. The payment shall be made by demand draft drawn in favor of the Secretary (Power), Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh. In the event of the project becoming not viable after the DPR, such upfront payment shall be refunded to the Company without any interest on it but if the project is not taken up due to the fault of the Company, the State Govt. shall have the absolute right to forfeit the upfront payment.

Article 16.

PENALTY.

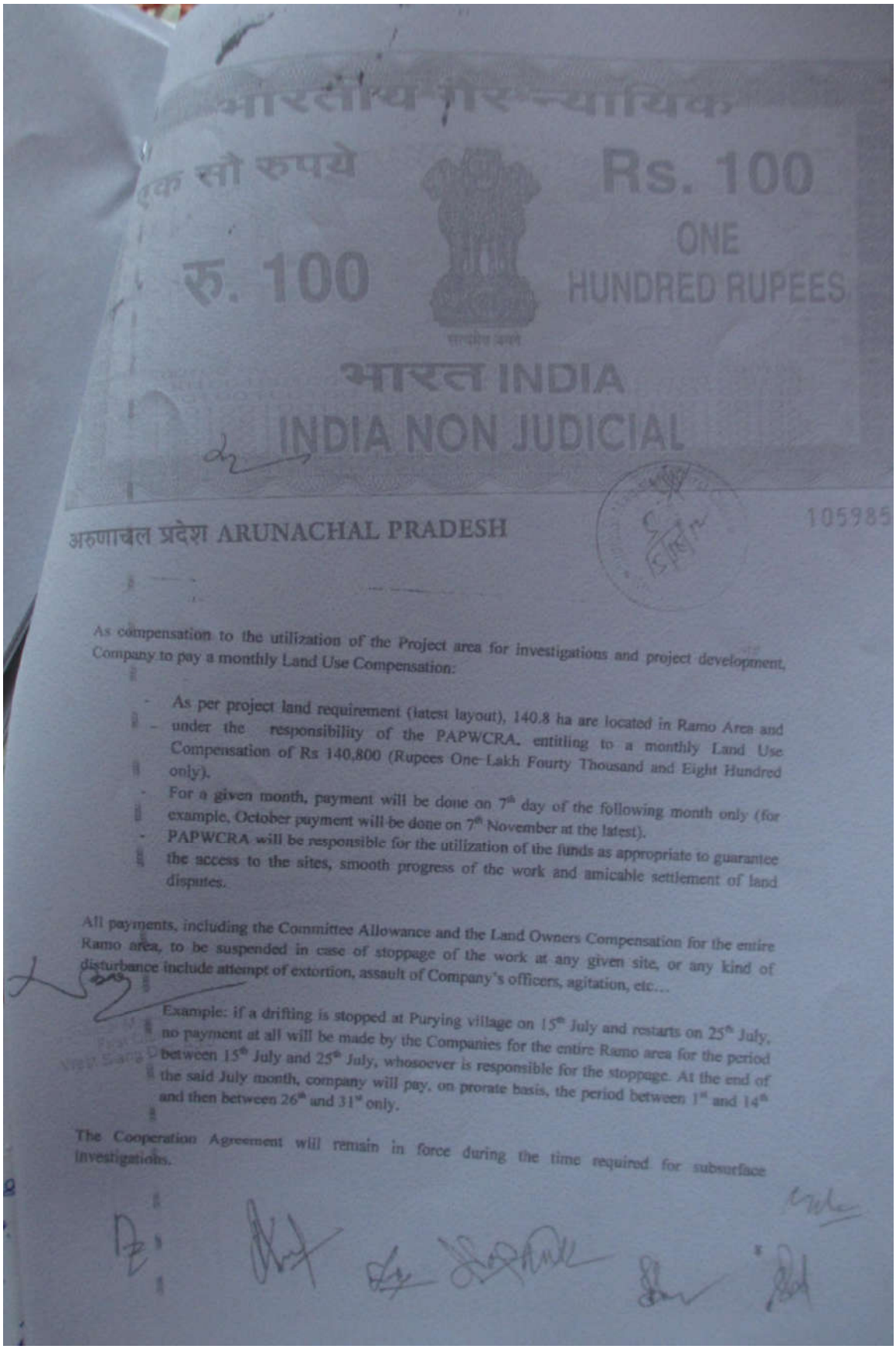
16.1 The Company shall commission the project within a period of 6 (Six) years (as per offer) from the date of receipt of all statutory clearances from State/Central Govt. agencies/authorities and availability of land required for the project. In the event of failure on the part of the Company to commission the project within the targeted period, the Company shall be liable to pay penalty @ Rs. 10,000/-(Rupees Ten thousand) per MW per month to the Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh for the extended period of commissioning, except when such delay is caused by Force Majeure events.

Article 17

PROJECT MONITORING COMMITTEE

17.1 The State Govt. shall constitute a Project Monitoring Committee with the Secretary (Power), Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh or any other appropriate State Govt. authority as the Chairperson, for the purpose of overseeing the progress of the project and sort out the difficulties and issues that could arise with respect to implementation of the project. The Company shall be represented by a senior executive of the Company or its associate companies.

Annexure III – A page from the community-company agreement, Shi Valley, showing details of financial agreement.


भारतीय गैर-न्यायिक

एक सौ रुपये

Rs. 100

ONE HUNDRED RUPEES

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INDIA NON JUDICIAL

अरुणाचल प्रदेश ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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As compensation to the utilization of the Project area for investigations and project development, Company to pay a monthly Land Use Compensation:

- As per project land requirement (latest layout), 140.8 ha are located in Ramo Area and under the responsibility of the PAPWCRA, entitling to a monthly Land Use Compensation of Rs 140,800 (Rupees One Lakh Fourty Thousand and Eight Hundred only).
- For a given month, payment will be done on 7th day of the following month only (for example, October payment will be done on 7th November at the latest).
- PAPWCRA will be responsible for the utilization of the funds as appropriate to guarantee the access to the sites, smooth progress of the work and amicable settlement of land disputes.

All payments, including the Committee Allowance and the Land Owners Compensation for the entire Ramo area, to be suspended in case of stoppage of the work at any given site, or any kind of disturbance include attempt of extortion, assault of Company's officers, agitation, etc...

Example: if a drifting is stopped at Purying village on 15th July and restarts on 25th July, no payment at all will be made by the Companies for the entire Ramo area for the period between 15th July and 25th July, whosoever is responsible for the stoppage. At the end of the said July month, company will pay, on prorate basis, the period between 1st and 14th and then between 26th and 31st only.

The Cooperation Agreement will remain in force during the time required for subsurface investigations.