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# *The Parvati and the Tragopan: Conservation and Development in the Great Himalayan National Park*

Vasant K. Saberwal, Moving Images  
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## ABSTRACT

In 1999 villagers in the Kulu valley in the state of Himachal Pradesh in northern India lost their ancestral rights to graze animals and collect medicinal plants in the area. This blow to their livelihood resulted from the creation of the Great Himalayan National Park, which carved out a vast area for wildlife conservation at the expense of resource use by local residents. However, after excluding villagers from the Park, a part of this protected area was released for the construction of a hydro-electric power project. In this paper we first document the seeming contradiction in the government's apparent conservation agenda; local livelihoods appear expendable in the interests of biodiversity conservation, but biodiversity may be sacrificed for national development. In the latter half of the paper we explore the nature of conservation and development politics, particularly as mediated by electoral considerations of the ruling government.

[T]here is a bird, tutru, which toils in the forest to build a nest for its young. But when the time comes, another bird, juraun, forces tutru out and takes over the nest that tutru has built with such effort and skill. The sarkar is doing the same to us. We have raised these forests. We have nurtured the birds and animals. Now the sarkar comes and throws us out of our forests.

Jai Ram, local medicine-man, village Majgraon,  
Raila

[I]s it not our duty, as a civilization, that we leave some area, just a small part, for nature, for future generations, for our own sanity?

Vinay Tandon, Chief Conservator of Forests,  
Himachal Pradesh

## Introduction

The conflict between conservation and livelihoods and between larger and local interests has become an integral part of conservation experiences in most parts of the world. In one of its most recent enactments, Indian conservationists have pitted the globally endangered Western Tragopan, a brilliantly colored pheasant endemic to the Western Himalaya, against the grazing and plant collection activities of local populations in the Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP), in the state of Himachal Pradesh. The preservation of the Western Tragopan, by exclusion of human pressure on its habitat, runs counter to local livelihoods

that are almost entirely dependent on using the same resources.

The story of the Western Tragopan is complicated by another factor. The water of one of the valleys of the Park is proposed to be harnessed for generating hydel power for the state. This parallel act of larger interest requires the construction of diversion weirs and underground tunnels in precisely the area that is preferred by the Western Tragopan. Through a peculiar sequence of events in 1999, a part of the Park was carved out to make way for the Parvati Hydro-electric Project. The larger interest of 'development' appears in this case to have edged out the larger interest of 'conservation'. This is the story of the Parvati and the Tragopan — emblematic representations of development and conservation — as it has played out in the GHNP over the last two decades. In this brief essay we will explore the contours and drivers of these emerging conflicts over resources within the GHNP. We will first provide a very brief account of developments in the GHNP, and then examine key elements of this story within a larger discussion on the politics of conservation and development.

## The importance of being GHNP

The Great Himalayan National Park lies in a relatively isolated part of the Kullu Valley, in Himachal Pradesh. It was established in 1984, following a survey conducted by

an international team of scientists who judged that based on the relatively low human pressures in the area and the exceptional condition of the forests, this would probably be an ideal location for a national park being planned for the state. It is noted for having one of only two protected populations of the Western Tragopan (thought to number 1600 animals in the wild), amongst four other pheasant species, sizeable, contiguous populations of Himalayan Tahr and Blue Sheep, and an endangered population of musk deer.

At the same time, the GHNP is used by local communities for a variety of resources. Approximately 11,000 people live in a five kilometer wide belt, on the western side of the GHNP border. All families cultivate land, for the most part small parcels of land that provide subsistence for some portion of the year. The bulk of the population depends on a variety of additional resources to meet their annual income requirements, including the commercial grazing of sheep and goats, the extraction of medicinal herbs to be sold to a burgeoning pharmaceutical and cosmetics industry, and the collection of morel mushrooms, considered a delicacy in many parts of western Europe.

There is a temporal and spatial seasonality to this use of resources within the GHNP. The sheep and goats owned by individual families are entrusted to the care of two to three professional herders from each village in April. These herders will care for these animals for the next six months, gradually moving them up to the alpine meadows at high altitude, where they spend three months, before retracing their steps and bringing the animals down to lower altitudes, where the owners care for the animals during the winter. The animals from each village are grazed in specific, clearly defined grazing runs, based on customary rights that have been worked out over the course of many decades. The wool of the animals tends to be used to meet the family requirements, while the occasional animal is sold as meat on the hoof, eventually ending up in the meat shops up and down the Kullu Valley.

Equally seasonal is the collection of morel mushrooms, which grow at the lower reaches of the GHNP forests and in the forests outside the park. The mushrooms are collected during April or early May, depending on the amount of snow that falls in the winter as well as the timing of the snowmelt. Because of the ease of accessibility of the mushrooms, all members of a family may go on collection trips. The mushroom is dried in the village and eventually sold to local traders in the small towns of the region or to traders in the bigger towns in the Kullu Valley—Aut, Bhuntar, and Kullu. In the past, guchhi, as it is commonly known, has sold for as much as Rs. 4,000 (\$85.00) a kg, a lot of money considering the meager income generating activities in the region.

The collection of medicinal herbs is also highly lucra-

tive. For the most part, these herbs are extracted from the high altitudes, in the alpine meadows above 12,000 feet and higher. It is hard work and tends to be undertaken by the young men of the village, who might end up spending a week or more collecting herbs before descending to their villages. The collection appears to take place at various points during the summer, but it is generally accepted that collecting plants after August 15 is probably best, because the plants have set seed by this time, thereby diminishing the possibility of over-harvesting these plants. The combination of guchhi and medicinal herb sales contributes an average income over Rs. 10,000 per family in villages around the park (Tandon 1997). It is likely that the reduced access to park resources is particularly important for the poorest sections of the populace, a point emphasized by Baviskar (in press), although there is little data to suggest caste, class, or gender differentiated use of park resources.

Biologists and officials of the Forest Department have for long considered these activities to pose a serious threat to the biological diversity of the region. The presence of herders with their sheep is considered responsible for over-grazing the meadows, and at its worst is assumed to be responsible for large scale soil erosion. Their movement through the forests during the spring migration up to the alpine meadows is considered to be responsible for disturbing the Western Tragopan when it is nesting. Guchhi collection also takes place at a time when the Tragopan is nesting, and the “hordes” of people who comb the forest floor looking for guchhi are responsible, once more, for disturbing the nesting birds. The dogs that accompany guchhi collectors are thought to chase the Western Tragopans, and the dogs with the herders are believed to hunt wild animals such as musk deer. Both herders and medicinal herb collectors are seen as laying huge numbers of snares in the hope of catching musk deers, largely owing to the presence of the musk pod, at one point considered to be worth more than its weight in gold. And the medicinal herb extraction is seen as having escalated over the past few years, to a point where some of the species are, ostensibly, on the decline, far less visible, and smaller in size than just a few years ago (DeCoursey 1997; Sharma 1997; Vinod and Satyakumar 1999; Singh and Rawat 1999; Ramesh, Sathyakumar and Rawat 2000).

The scientific evidence in support of these arguments is tenuous at best. Over the past five years, a series of “long-term” studies have been conducted by the Wildlife Institute of India (the work referred to in the previous paragraph). Their conclusions, however, are generally unwarranted. They fail to establish a decline in the first place, and owing to poorly designed frameworks, lack any real capability for examining the relationship between human activities and biological resources in the park. At its worst, the report misinterprets its own data in arguing that human

activities have a negative impact on wildlife resources within the park.

To illustrate this last claim, we present the following data from Vinod and Sathyakumar (1999), a study that documented ungulate distribution and density patterns for the park, but which also undertook an exploration of differences in density and use as a function of human disturbance. Four transect lines were used, two each in “disturbed” and “undisturbed” parts of the park. Along these transects they recorded animal sightings as well as pellet (dropping) groups, the latter an indirect indication of use of the area by animals. The results are presented below in Tables 1 and 2.

A key argument presented by the authors is that goral and other ungulates are present in fewer numbers in the more disturbed areas. Yet the data does not support such a

position. While the Kharoncha-Rolla (KHRO) transect had far lower sightings of goral than the other three transects—Rolla-Shilt (ROSH), Chalocha-Nada (CLNA), and Rolla-Basu (ROBA)—there is little to distinguish the latter three in terms of either numbers of animals sighted or pellet groups counted. Yet, both the KHRO and the ROSH transects are listed as disturbed and the other two as not disturbed.<sup>2</sup> Given that one of the “disturbed” transects had numbers identical to the “undisturbed” the suggested relationship between disturbance and goral densities is unwarranted.

On the other hand, one of the most carefully conducted studies of the WII (Mathur and Mehra 1999, see also Mehra and Mathur, this issue), suggests that at the level of the landscape, there is in fact little evidence to suggest a negative impact by grazing on the park’s vegetation.<sup>3</sup>

Transect Name	Winter (n = 12)	Spring (n = 16)	Summer (n = 4)	Autumn (n = 12)	Overall (n=44)
KHRO	3.69 +/- 1.30	5.96 +/- 1.88	1.62 +/- 1.63	5.58 +/- 2.04	4.84 +/- 0.96
ROSH	16.90 +/- 2.77	13.20 +/- 3.80	9.09 +/- 3.08	11.86 +/- 3.10	13.47 +/- 1.80
ROBA	26.38 +/- 4.88	14.14 +/- 2.99	6.16 +/- 2.37	8.50 +/- 2.85	15.22 +/- 2.16
CLNA	23.40 +/- 5.22	17.99 +/- 6.15	5.79 +/- 2.00	9.68 +/- 2.56	16.09 +/- 2.84
Overall	17.59 +/- 2.27 (n = 48)	12.82 +/- 2.04 (n = 64)	5.67 +/- 1.25 (n = 16)	8.91 +/- 1.33 (n = 48)	2.41 +/- 1.07 (n = 176)

Table 1. Seasonal encounter rates (#/km walk +/- SE) for Goral in the Study area (January 1996 – November 1998) (Source Vinod and Sathyakumar, 1999, p. 33).<sup>1</sup>

Transect Name	Winter (n = 12)	Spring (n = 16)	Summer (n = 4)	Autumn (n = 12)	Overall (n = 44)
ROSH	8.33 +/- 0.84	9.37 +/- 0.85	8.18 +/- 1.29	9.01 +/- 0.85	8.88 +/- 0.50
ROBA	10.83 +/- 1.18	7.42 +/- 0.82	8.41 +/- 1.41	8.03 +/- 0.91	8.60 +/- 0.55
CLNA	8.64 +/- 0.56	7.56 +/- 0.82	6.48 +/- 0.39	6.93 +/- 0.67	7.58 +/- 0.39
Overall	9.27 +/- 0.54 (n=36)	8.11 +/- 0.49 (n = 48)	7.69 +/- 0.64 (n = 12)	7.99 +/- 0.48 (n = 36)	8.36 +/- 0.27 (n = 132)

Table 2. Seasonal encounter rates (groups/km +/- SE) for Goral pellet groups in the Study Area (January 1996 – November 1998) (Source Vinod and Sathyakumar, 1999, p. 38).

<sup>1</sup> KHRO and ROSH are considered the “disturbed” transects, ROBA and CLNA the “undisturbed” transects.

<sup>2</sup> It is unclear as to why pellet data was not provided for the KHRO transect. See Chhatre and Saberwal (2001) for a more detailed analysis of the reports from the Wildlife Institute of India.

<sup>3</sup> See also Richard (1997). These findings are in line with those reported from a neighbouring valley, also intensively used by migrant shepherds (Saberwal 1999) and from alpine mead-

ows in the state of Uttaranchal (Naithani et al. 1992). Similar arguments indicating that moderate levels of grazing assist in sustaining high levels of species diversity in grasslands come from the US (Howe 1994), Europe (During and Willems 1986, Hopkins and Wainwright 1989, Smith and Rushton 1994), and Africa (McNaughton 1979, Collins and Barber 1985, Belsky 1992). For more general theoretical pieces see Grubb 1976 and Hobbs and Hueneke 1992).

While some villagers acknowledge that certain species of medicinal herbs may in fact be on the decline, the position is hotly contested. Certainly on the question of grazing impacts on forests and meadows, there is little sympathy with the position taken by the forest department. With regard to the medicinal herbs, the argument is that some of the most intensively used herbs are root-propagating, and it is almost impossible to actually eliminate the root stock. Other species are seed propagating, and where herb collection takes place after August 15, following seed set, over-harvesting of these species is biologically impossible. There are mixed responses to the allegations that guchhi collection is responsible for disturbing the Western Tragopan at a crucial juncture of its breeding cycle or to the fact that shepherds and herb collectors lay snares to catch musk deer.

The point for most villagers is that the value that is today placed on the national park cannot be disassociated from the history of use of the area. Many claim that the villagers need to be credited with having taken good care of the park, which is why it is in the good condition it is in today. They would argue that it is not *despite* their presence in the park, it is *because* of their seasonal presence that the animal, bird and plant populations have flourished. To support such a claim, they argue that certain medicinal plants need to be harvested on a regular basis to prevent them from rotting. As is pointed out above, it is now accepted within parts of the scientific community that moderate levels of grazing are necessary to sustain high levels of diversity within grasslands the world over. And villagers argue that because of their presence in the park, they provide the ears and eyes that guard against the intrusion of outsiders interested in hunting. It is because of their alertness that forest fires have been put out in the past. They argue that if their access to the park were curtailed, the condition of resources in the park would deteriorate.

In 1999, fifteen years after the park was first formally demarcated, the Himachal government issued the final notification for the park. The trigger for this sudden move appears, at least on the surface, to be the directive passed by the Supreme Court in 1996, requiring all state governments to complete, within the year, all legal requirements to bring protected areas in compliance with the requirements of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act. The act prohibits all human activities within a National Park, and those activities within a wildlife sanctuary which, in the opinion of the Chief Wildlife Warden, are not in the interests of the region's wildlife. Recognizing that many protected areas in India are used by people, who have demonstrable statutory and customary rights to biological resources, the Act requires the state government to "settle" or "acquire" these rights prior to finally notifying the park. This happens either through the payment of monetary compensation or through the provision of alternative areas within which such rights can be exercised.

The settlement of rights in the GHNP took place on the basis of the Anderson settlement, written in the late nineteenth century (Anderson 1894). Based on names of families listed in that settlement, a total of 314 families were granted monetary compensation. Claims of long-standing customary usage of grazing meadows by the remainder of the population were dealt with with the reassurance that alternative areas would be provided to people to graze their goat and sheep. Since the collection of guchhi was not listed in Anderson's settlement (presumably owing to the fact that demand from European palates had yet to materialize in the late nineteenth century), no compensation was provided for this loss of revenue. Nor were the vast majority compensated or provided alternative extraction areas for their loss of access to herb producing alpine meadows in the park.

There is considerable resentment within the affected population. While there is wide variation in the predicted income generated from families in the area, it is clear that some portion of the community is heavily dependent upon medicinal herbs, guchhi, and sheep and goat grazing to meet their annual income requirements. Vinay Tandon, Chief Conservator of Forests, found that in 1997 an average family made close to 10,000 rupees annually from guchhi and medicinal herb collection (Tandon 1997), with sheep and goat rearing bringing in some more in terms of both money and wool. Eighty percent of the population, according to Tandon, spent time looking for herbs and guchhi. Virender Sharma (1997) suggests a lower proportion of families (20%) looking for these plants, but realize similarly high level of returns. And in talks with villagers, most indicated that given the lack of any kind of industry in the region, with neither apples nor tourism having the sort of presence they have in the main Kullu Valley, a denial of access to park resources could represent a serious financial blow to the bulk of the population.

That considerable amounts of guchhi and medicinal herbs are being extracted from the region is borne out in discussions with traders who handle these products. They point out that certain items, such as mehandi and dhoop, are removed from the area by the truckloads. While such numbers are in themselves worrying owing to the magnitude of the trade that is above ground (there is reportedly a large and growing underground trade as well), it is also indicative of the large amount of money that is made from these resources. The attempt to deny people the opportunity to make this money has not been well received by villagers, and they have used various means to circumvent the law.

Much before the final settlement took place, there had been an earlier, more circuitous attempt to reduce human pressures on the park. Faced by mounting criticism of an exclusionary policy that forced people from their homes,

conservation organizations the world over had come up with a number of variants on the same theme – local communities needed to be provided a stake in the conservation process if it were to have any chance of success. In India this took the form of eco-development. The logic of eco-development was that through a variety of development initiatives, local communities would be provided alternative means of livelihood, thereby reducing their dependence on resources within protected areas. This was tested in seven national parks in the country, with support from the Global Environment Fund (GEF). The World Bank provided funds for two additional pilot studies—one in GHNP the other in the Kalakaad Mundantarai Tiger Reserve (KMTR).

Eco-development came to GHNP in 1994. Over the course of the next five years, approximately seven crore rupees (a crore = ten million)—all part of a loan from the World Bank—was spent on eco-development, research, and management in GHNP. Since eco-development was to take place for the people and required their cooperation, eco-development committees were formed in a number of *panchayats*. Expenditures on development were to be coordinated through these committees.

Confronted with the need to form eco-development committees, most forest guards simply went along with membership they were presented with. Invariably, it was the more powerful people in the village who became members of this committee. In numerous cases, there was overlap in the membership to the eco-development committees and that of the Devta (or deity) committees. Eventually, upper caste men comprised the bulk of those present on these committees (Baviskar in press).

Most villagers are unhappy with the way funds have been spent in the villages. Temples have been repaired in many villages, testimony to the presence of devta committee members on the eco-development committee. Funds were also spent on the building of bridle paths, some water holding tanks, and rain-shelters. Close to 70% of the total eco-development funds were eventually spent on civil works of this kind. Needless to say, such construction has had little impact on the income generating capabilities within any village, and pressures on park resources have in no way diminished, the key objective of the eco-development project in the first place.

There are reports of rampant corruption in the civil works that were commissioned by the Forest Department—undertaken both for eco-development and for improved park management. Watch towers, rest houses, and guard huts built just over a year ago with inferior construction materials already have cracks that are six inches across. They have not been used to date, and nothing indicates they will be used in the future.

But corruption is not new to the bureaucracy, and this

could surely have been anticipated. Perhaps of greater interest is the attempt to bring “development” to the doorsteps of the park, with the explicit intent to reduce human pressures on the park. As Baviskar (in press) points out, the Forest Department is not trained to do development work, and it should come as no surprise that little came of its efforts.

But there are at least two additional dimensions to the GHNP story. The first is the building of a hydel-power project in a portion of what was formerly part of the park. The Parvati Hydel Power Project had been pending with the government for a number of years. In order for it to move forward, a portion of the Jeeva Nallah was deleted from the original demarcation of the park boundaries. The final settlement that was conducted in 1999 appears to have been timed to enable this deletion—justified by the Chief Wildlife Warden on the grounds that the area was ecologically insignificant. An argument was also made that the deletion of this area from the park would ensure that the residents of the villages of Kundher and Majhan would not be forced to move (since human habitation within the park was prohibited following the final notification). And yet, surveys by wildlife biologists had indicated that the area between Gatipath and Kundher village, part of the area that was denotified, had some of the finest bamboo forest and was ideal habitat for the Western Tragopan. And in any case, all but one family from these two villages had long since moved lower down the Jeeva Nallah, in response to persistent attempts by the Forest Department to move them out of the park, over two decades ago. All that remains of these two villages are abandoned houses, many with trees growing out of them.

An area of 10 square kilometers was deleted from the original demarcation of the GHNP. Because this is a run of the river project, there will not be a great deal of destruction or displacement resulting from the damming of the Jeeva Nallah. The area was deleted, primarily to allow the building of a wide road which will go to the site where a relatively small dam will be built high up on the Jeeva Nallah. But for the building of this road, and eventually the building of the dam itself, a labor force of 5-6,000 people, three times that of the current population, has settled in Sainj Town. As was demonstrated with the Pandoh dam lower down the Kullu Valley, the influx of so many people is likely to lead to rapid deforestation of adjoining slopes, entirely a function of meeting the fuel needs of this huge labor force.

As a result of the building of the road and the dam, the forests around the town of Sainj will almost certainly be destroyed. The building of the road on numerous steep sections of the Jeeva Nallah will almost certainly destabilize the mountainside. And, from the biological diversity perspective, the Western Tragopan and Chir populations

that used the area between Gaatipaath and Kunder will need to move elsewhere. What comes through most vividly in the settlement order passed by the Kullu district commissioner is the double standard of a developmentalist state. While local livelihoods can be sacrificed for the sake of biological diversity, biological diversity must make way for national development.

A final component of the story remains untold. When in June of 1999, the District Commissioner announced the ban on villager entry into the national park, there was incredulity and some feeble protests. The opposition Congress party got involved and organized rallies in the villages around the park, protesting the anti-people attitudes of the party in power, the BJP. With national elections two months away, the Congress used the situation to extract maximum electoral mileage. Forced on the defensive, the Member of Parliament from Kullu, Thakur Maheshwar Singh, called up the District Commissioner and instructed him to allow people back into the park. This was done through an entirely illegal order issued by the DC, in the name of the park director, and circulated within all affected villages. Maheshwar Singh had saved his political life, and people were back in the park as usual.

The following year, *panchayat* elections were to be held in December. With the park director taking a tough stance and asserting he would not allow people into the park (herbs collected by a group of villagers were confiscated, along with pots and pans they had used while in the park), Maheshwar Singh had no choice but to intervene once more. This time he sent his brother on a tour of the villages with the park director in tow. Sanjeeva Pandey was forced to tell people they would be allowed to enter the park but that he hoped they would not go in until the middle of August—the date by which seed set normally takes place.

#### **Politics, conservation and development<sup>4</sup>**

The influence of politics on conservation initiatives is seen repeatedly in studies of conflicts over natural resources (Guha 1989; Peluso 1993; Neumann 1992). Many of these studies document a harsh state, bent on the exploitation of nature and labor. And yet the notion of the omnipotent state, capable of exerting its will over disparate, fragmented communities (Yang 1992; Saberwal 1999; Sivaramakrishnan 2000; see also Chhatre this volume). An emerging literature provides more nuanced descriptions of community and the means by which access to resources is negotiated or contested within and beyond the community (Agrawal 1999; Jeffery and Sundar 1999; Sivaramakrishnan 2000).

The problem we pose in this preliminary and highly

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<sup>4</sup> The argument presented here has benefited greatly from discussions with Amita Baviskar.

speculative argument is that in this move toward the local, toward obtaining a better understanding of how power plays out within communities, there has been an unfortunate reduction in focus on the larger politics of state formation. In particular, the questions of electoral politics that keep a post-colonial government in power and development politics that keep the state financially solvent demand analysis. Development has often been left out of the conservation picture based on the belief that exploitative development and exclusionary conservation are related phenomenon, with similar roots, but that these are ultimately separate issues. Joint Forest Management, thus, gets discussed within the context of questions of livelihoods and more equitable access to forests, rather than within the larger context of development policy and how that relates to conservation. Thus, for example, we focus on issues of gender within Orissa's JFM experience but rarely locate JFM within a larger discussion on Orissa's development orientation.

We now analyze the potentially contradictory impulses of conservation and development within the context of the GHNP and a politically powerful electorate.

Two seemingly unrelated events lie at the heart of the GHNP story. Both are associated with the final settlement of the national park but have led to dramatically different outcomes. The first involved the final notification by the Himachal Pradesh government for the GHNP through a settlement that would deny people access to park resources. Importantly, this notification came fifteen years after the intent to notify the park was first announced. As with almost every other protected area in the country, the GHNP was a National Park only on paper, meeting none of the legal requirements that all human consumptive use of resources within the park be eliminated before the park could be notified. With over 500 protected areas in the country at the time, only a handful had been finally notified, testimony to the fact that state governments were willing to go along with a conservationist agenda, but only up to a point. No state government was willing to incur the political costs of eliminating human access to these areas. That the Himachal government should choose to finally eliminate all rights within the national park defies all electoral logic.

The second event provides insight into the nature of the calculus of the government in finally notifying the national park. In 1999, at the time of this settlement, a portion of the Jeeva Nallah was deleted from the original boundaries of the park, ostensibly on grounds of allowing the villagers of Kunder and Majhan villages to remain within the park, rather than be forced to move out following the settlement. It was a specious logic given that in other instances in which villagers refused to move out of the park, such as Shakti and Maror, the relevant areas had been carved out and downgraded to the status of a Wildlife

Sanctuary. The decision to entirely delete the area from the national park, instead of merely reducing the level of protection, appears to have been necessitated by the need to accommodate the building activity associated with the second phase of the Parvati Project.

Despite the seemingly contradictory nature of these two events—the protection of wildlife on the one hand, the enabling of environmentally destructive development on the other—they are closely connected. We argue that environmental politics are crucially entwined with a development discourse that enables a state/central government to appeal to a larger Himachali identity—in this case, centered around the creation of a new Himachal, the power-house of the country. Hydel projects have been conceptualized and implemented for many decades, but the current government has given a huge impetus to establishing Himachal Pradesh as a major source of hydel-power in the coming decades. Over 300 projects are proposed in the state and are up for grabs for the private sector. Big development may get part of its legitimacy through the process of identity creation in which Himachalis associate their state with hydel power.<sup>5</sup> But such projects are also important because of the possibilities of diverting funds towards building financial and political empires. The haste with which the settlement process was carried out, including the deletion of a part of the Jeeva Nallah, appears directly linked to this developmentalist rather than conservationist agenda of the state government.<sup>6</sup>

This brings us to a second sphere of conservation politics. As a result of the final notification of the park, people were restricted from the park and its resources. And yet,

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<sup>5</sup> In suggesting this creation of a Himachali identity we are going out on something of an intellectual limb, seeing as we have no hard evidence to substantiate this notion. Even so, the pan-Himachali scale of the projects that is being talked about, suggests the likelihood of the government moving in this direction. In similar ways, Himachali identities have been crafted around the growing of apples during the 1970s and 1980s. See paper by Walt Coward in this issue.

<sup>6</sup> It should also be noted that in 1997 the Supreme Court had passed an order requiring all governments to finalize settlement procedures in all National Parks. It could be argued that the Himachal Pradesh government's actions were aimed at meeting this requirement of the Supreme Court. This is questionable, however, on two counts: first, the settlement finally took place within a matter of a few weeks, having languished for over two years since the directive from the Supreme Court. The haste of the settlement appears to be linked to a trip planned by the Prime Minister to lay the foundation stone for the Parvati Project. Second, most states in the country are arguing against the feasibility of settling all rights within National Parks, and refusing to comply with the Supreme Court directive. One assumes the Himachal government was aware of these reactions from other states and could not therefore have felt unduly bound by the SC directive.

now for two years running, people have used the park pretty much as they please. They have grazed their animals in the park, they have continued to harvest medicinal herbs, and they have continued to take their deities into the park. They can do this because the practice of conservation is a long way from the rhetoric. Local politicians call up the District Commissioner or the park director and direct them to permit villagers access to park resources (Baviskar in press). The MLA and MP constituencies constitute the crucial arenas within which the politics of conservation are played out. It is at this level that the actual implementation of conservation policy takes place and where the flexible arm of the law comes into its own.<sup>7</sup> It is the knowledge of this flexibility that provides the necessary re-assurance to the government that a final notification need not in fact force the government to incur significant electoral losses.

The interaction of these two spheres of politics ultimately shapes both the direction of development and the practice of conservation in the Kullu Valley. As can be seen in the GHNP case, the state may espouse a conservation ideology while pursuing a developmentalist agenda that has potential for great environmental damage. Significantly, the articulation of a conservationist agenda provides legitimacy with international funding agencies as well as with an urban middle class with an interest in conserving wildlife. Interventions at the level of the political constituency ultimately work to minimize any electoral costs the government may have to bear through an enforcement of unpopular policies. It is only because the director of the GHNP, Sanjeeva Pandey, has insisted on enforcing all restrictions that any notice has been taken of the settlement at all. Ultimately, Pandey himself has had to back down or risk being replaced with someone more pliable.

With the growing availability of big funding for conservation projects, there is new reason for state governments to adopt a language that meets international expectations. Thus, eco-development has emerged in recent years as a panacea for dealing with continuing conflicts between people and protected areas—the rationale being that through the development of alternative sources of income, local dependency on park resources will be drastically lowered. Human development is seen as going hand in hand with the effective conservation of biological diversity.

The GHNP experience with eco-development demonstrates the complexity of the development process. As with any government project involving large-scale expenditure of money, corruption during the first five years of the pro-

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<sup>7</sup> As has been demonstrated elsewhere, pastoralist communities in Himachal Pradesh have routinely used political influence to undermine Forest Department restrictions on access to reserve forests (Saberwal 1999). Such manipulation of an ostensibly harsh state is widely reported (Saberwal in press).



cess was rampant. More importantly, however, the department appeared to have little conception of just how to go about bringing development to the people. While a certain expenditure of money took place in the construction of civil works, and items such as handlooms, television sets, and pressure cookers were handed out to villagers, none of this was linked in any way to an impending curtailment of villager access to park resources. Close to seventy percent of the money budgeted for eco-development was spent on civil works of a general nature, with little investment into activities or initiatives that would enhance villagers' capacity to reduce their dependence upon herb collections as a form of livelihood. People took advantage of the benefits of eco-development, but did not relinquish, in thought or in deed, any right to grazing, fuelwood or herb collection in the park.

Politics is again omnipresent. Even as the government attempted to gain the trust of the community through the use of Entry Point Activities, they chose to deal with the most powerful people in the community—members of the *devta* committee. These committees are comprised of high caste men and are clearly not representative of the varied interests within a village (Baviskar in press). For the most part, these committees seemed to function as rubber-stamps, enabling the departmental activities that took place during the eco-development exercise. The forest department commonly sanctioned temple repairs, clearly in response to the demands of the *devta* committees. But the department did all that was demanded of it by the World Bank by working with the local NGO SAVE, appearing to work with village level institutions ( *Devta* committees and Village Eco-Development Committees) and spending money according to microplans that had been developed on the basis of villager participation.

Government needs legitimacy for its actions from a wide range of constituencies. Large scale development projects provide a legitimacy that is linked both to the creation of jobs and by appealing to a larger Himachali identity, centered around defining the state in terms of the future powerhouse of the country. Projects such as eco-development, when de-linked from curtailed access to the Park, potentially provide legitimacy with a village elite, while enabling the smooth flow of funds from the World Bank to the state coffers. And the elasticity of the law, which enables people to enter the Park despite existing restrictions, works to minimize any potentially negative electoral fall-out of the final settlement of rights within the area.

There is a final political sphere that requires examination. The scientific discourse on human impacts on the environment is part of an over-arching context within which conservation debates take place. It is political in so far as an identifiable constituency has attempted to push through the idea that all human activities are inimical to the conser-

vation of biodiversity. Such a relationship is clearly not axiomatic. Yet, even in light of evidence to the contrary, there is little attempt on part of the mainstream conservation lobby to develop alternative models of human interaction with the landscape. This conservation lobby uses its scientific expertise to press for the closure of areas to human presence. The eco-development project that has a stated interest in reducing human dependence on the Park is clearly influenced by the dominant conservation rhetoric generated both within India and within the international conservation community. This rhetoric and the scientific community apply additional pressure for a permanent closure of the park to all human activities.

This pressure is applied most forcefully when there is a committed forest officer in charge of a national park such as the GHNP. Sanjeeva Pandey is a conservationist in body, spirit, and in mind. Outside of the village communities in the area, Pandey is likely the best-informed person about the park. He knows its terrain and has a dream that human pressures will one day be absent from his park. He works hard to fulfill this vision, instructing his subordinates to prevent anyone from entering the Park, confiscating equipment and goods, touring villages in the hope of convincing people that they should stay out of the Park, and attempting to provide them with alternative forms of employment that will reduce their ultimate dependence on Park resources. Sanjeeva Pandey uses the science at his disposal—that of the WWII era—to buttress his arguments against the continued use of the Park.

When local residents use their electoral clout with MP Maheshwar Singh to force Sanjeeva Pandey to back down, this is merely another intersection of two spheres of politics—local politics on the one hand and science as politics on the other.

Given the influence of politics in Indian conservation, many of those concerned about Indian biodiversity call for a more insistent engagement with the political process at each of these intersecting levels—local, state, and national. Debates amongst many urban conservationists take place on a regular basis. A dialogue between different conservation camps has been sustained by the annual consultations organized by the conservation NGO Kalpavriksh over the past five years. This forum is attended by bureaucrats, social activists, and exclusionary conservationists, in an atmosphere that is for the most part conducive to a real exchange of ideas. Such exchanges are useful in prodding the center towards adopting more inclusive legislation and policies.

There is also a call for greater dialogue with people directly affected by conservation policies and the need to build bridges with local communities. Such bridges are seen as necessary both to secure the support of these people for conservation initiatives, as well as to provide the elec-

toral and political bulwark against destructive activities such as mining and the building of dams. While greater local involvement may be beneficial in the context of a given conservation initiative such as the management of the GHNP, it is unlikely to be of great relevance in the context of the larger development agenda being set by the state. This is primarily because of an imbalance with regard to electoral pressure in a single political constituency on the one hand and the over-arching developmental agenda of the state on the other.

For political pressure to work in the interests of the environment, particularly when confronting big development, there is a need for mobilization at the larger scale of the state (in the geographic sense of the term). Within Himachal Pradesh there are the beginnings of such mobilization. A Palampur-based NGO, Navrachna, is working towards the establishment of a state-wide network of individuals and organizations involved with a variety of issues related to conservation and development. The initiative is entirely political in its orientation, with an explicit interest in exploring the links between environment and development, rather than dealing individually with either or both issues. The work of Ekta-Parishad in Madhya Pradesh and recently in Bihar is similarly broad-based in its approach, focusing on land reform, access to forest resources, and a greater say in setting development priorities, rather than merely focusing on more restricted issues associated with conservation.

And so finally, we return to the issue of what happens with GHNP. Within the Himachal Forest Department, there is an extremely small lobby of officers with an interest in wildlife conservation. That two of these officers are men of great integrity and are pursuing the closure of GHNP to conserve biodiversity can hardly be questioned. But the relative political isolation of GHNP must be addressed. Within Himachal Pradesh, practically the only other people with an interest in the Park are the people who are currently being denied access to its resources. If they cannot be directly and politically involved in the management of the park, there is little chance that the department will ultimately succeed in keeping people out. In the absence of recognizable authority of either the forest department or of local institutions, GHNP will remain an area of open access, vulnerable to intrusion by developmental activities such as dam building as well as to grazing and medicinal herb collection, quite in contrast to the park director's oft repeated argument that the park has now moved from open to closed access.

In counterpoint, there is a positive argument from a conservation perspective that can be made for allowing residents of adjoining villages into the park. The continuation of grazing practices is likely to be necessary to maintain high levels of herb diversity within the alpine mead-

ows. The inclusion of people with a real stake in the biological resources of the park can also lead to much greater support for effective management of the park, including better monitoring of who goes into the park, for what, and at what times of the year. Poaching could be more effectively controlled as could the excessive extraction of medicinal herbs. If these people have a stake in the park, it is possible that electoral pressure will be used to counter real threats to the park such as big dams and other industrial development. Already there is talk of establishing hydro-projects on the Sainj and Tirthan rivers. Without resident villagers, there is little chance that any significant opposition will be mounted against such developments.

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