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Introduction: Agrarian Environments

As *raiika* shepherds and other migrant pastoralists in western Rajasthan travel between pastures, forests, and fallow, they are moving across landscapes that have a long history of changing vegetation, human activities, and state policies (Agrawal 1999). When the gregarious *sal* trees in southwest Bengal colonize an abandoned mango grove or enter a fallow upland, we are reminded that lands in this region change from cultivated fields to naturally regenerating woodlands across space and over time (Sivaramakrishnan 1996). The expansion of irrigation in some parts of Kheda, Gujarat, and its contraction in other adjoining areas is a consequence of a combination of economic and ecological factors (Gidwani 1996). These are examples of "agrarian environments." They draw attention to the blurred boundaries between an autonomous nature that supposedly stands outside of human endeavor, and a human agency that is presumed to construct all landscapes. As changing, hybrid landscapes, these are but three of the many regions in India that remind us of the prodigious energy necessary to fix the agrarian and the environmental as separate domains of existence and analysis.

Our use of the term "agrarian environments" denotes an insistent attention to a field of social negotiations around the environment in predominantly agrarian contexts. The interactions and processes we examine are unavoidably inflected by the agrarian affiliations of the actors and issues involved. They demonstrate the pervasive links between the agrarian and the

environmental and suggest that to treat one independently of the other is to fail to understand either. In the predominantly agrarian socioeconomic context of India, studies that do not explore the connections of environmental changes with agrarian structures and processes delink environmental politics from the agrarian world that is both the locus and the object of these politics.

Over the last fifty years, the science of ecology, the struggles of environmental activists, and the scholarship of environmental historians have combined to demarcate the physical and conceptual field within which their concerns are to be located. Through a focus on natural resources, especially forests and water, and the analytical presumption that these resources degrade because of human impact, the field of environmental studies has created a site for itself that is resolutely separated from the agrarian world. The establishment of environmental studies has thus been predicated on a critique of scholarship and politics that were earlier preoccupied with the urban or the arable.

But the very category "environment" comes into existence only because many scholars identify the environment with "nature,"¹ remove it from the world of agrarian relations, and imagine it, ideally, as something that exists separately from humans.² Here scholars are producing what Deleuze and Guattari (1988, 362–64) call state science, something that imposes "an order of reasons" on the unruly nomadic sciences, or what Foucault (1994) (1997, 73) called biopolitics, the endeavor "to rationalize the problems presented to governmental practice." The "order of reasons," in relation to environmental and agrarian studies, has the specific spatial consequence of striation, manifest as a partitioning of landscapes into distinct domains of natural existences and productive economic relations.

The support for such separation of the natural from the human has far deeper historical roots than just the foundations of environmental studies or environmental history. Using creative interpretations of the biblical Genesis story, and anthropological and economic speculation, the attempts by Hobbes, Locke, Hume, and Rousseau to think about political order and property depended on an original assumption that nature exists separately from humans.³ The ontological status of the "environment" has thus depended on the belief in a distant past when humans had little technology, and, hence, scant ability to transform the natural into the artificial.⁴

Over time the pristine character of nature could be imagined in varied

ways, some opposed to each other. It has been envisioned as riotous and chaotic, needing the hand of man for systematic organization and productive utilization. It has also been seen as representing Edenic bliss, before man's actions led to a Fall from which it is impossible to recover. But in each of these visions, humans and the environment are distinct entities who act on each other rather than being mutually constituted.

The space in which the environment came to be constructed as the natural was created by a prior history of treating agrarian landscapes as the product of culture. The classic themes of agrarian studies—migration, commercialization, tenurial relations, changing patterns and intensities of cropped staples, credit, state formation, market and trade relations—were all directed at describing the complex social construction of nature through which agrarian societies emerged, transformed, and declined. This point can be amplified by looking at certain key areas of investigation that existing scholarship could have seized to apprehend agrarian environments as we discuss them.

AGRARIAN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORIES AND POLITICS

Historical work on the period between the decline of the Mughal empire and the consolidation of British rule is one such example. It is ironic that agrarian historians, arguing against older assumptions of eighteenth-century chaos, have reinforced the focus on continued agricultural commodity production even in a period of major political upheaval and transitions.⁵ In so doing, they missed the opportunity to consider the agrarian and the environmental together. Another example is the years between the world wars. The work of George Blyn on the agricultural statistics of late colonial India was enabled by the focus on crop production that had informed their collection, and promoted anxieties about declining food crop performance as populations rose after 1921.⁶ These concerns with agricultural production powerfully framed postindependence debates on the agrarian economy. By the 1960s, the selective implementation of green revolution programs in well-endowed regions worked to heighten the divide between arable and other lands. State science, and scholarship that conformed to it, etched deeper the divisions between agrarian and environmental domains in rural India.⁷

The divided focus on landscapes partitioned as cultural and natural has

ensured abiding differences in the research agendas of agrarian and environmental studies in India. Agrarian studies has concentrated primarily on regions where agricultural productivity was high, and where greater intensification of agriculture was evident. Thus the fertile Indo-Gangetic plains have received the greatest analytical notice. Even in the Deccan and the south, irrigated agriculture in river valleys and coastal plains has attracted the most attention from historical and contemporary agrarian scholarship. The presumption guiding the scholarly focus, it can be argued, has been that these regions are most capable of producing a social surplus, and that these agrarian spaces have undergone the most significant social and political changes.

Studies of agrarian change in the forty years since independence have been preoccupied intensely with the green revolution, with new technologies, with farm size, and with the political economy of state intervention in the ecologically and infrastructurally better equipped regions. Peripheral regions in the mountains, in the western semiarid plains and the hills, in the northeast, or even in the Chhotanagpur Plateau, have for the most part been ignored by scholars of agrarian politics and history. Agrarian studies has made few excursions out from the arable "heartlands" of India. Environmental scholarship, coming into its own only in the last two decades, has, conversely, been preoccupied with mountains, forests, tribal populations, and the semiarid parts in western India. Rarely has it ventured into the plains.

The regional focus of agrarian studies is perhaps derived from its rhetorical interests. The study of agrarian change has been dominated by debates about transitions to capitalism, the role of commodity and credit markets, the building of agrarian empires on the revenues derived from agricultural surpluses, the impact of technological innovations such as plowing in earlier times and mechanization in more recent periods, and the social consequences of privatization. The desire to identify modes of production, modes of power, and their attendant relations of production prevented agrarian studies from looking at the environment. The attempt to pinpoint the conditions under which different modes articulated, or were superseded, drew agrarian studies to regions where these phenomena appeared most developed. The sharply polemical oppositions that emerged within south Asian studies, between elitist and subaltern scholarship in the 1980s, did not result in a critique of the separation of the agrarian

from the environment. In part this might be because even subaltern studies remained caught up in debates about semifeudal remnants, precapitalist community, and other such symbols of imperfect class formation in rural India.⁸

The power of typologies developed in agrarian studies reverberates in the emergent field of environmental studies. Gadgil and Guha's pioneering work (1992) illustrates that even for environmental historians, the spatial distribution of agrarian and nonagrarian social formations is adequately mapped by hunting-gathering, nomadic pastoralist, settled agricultural, and industrial modes of production. Their book begins with a discussion of modes of production and amplifies it into their concept of "modes of resource use," extending "the realm of production to include flora, fauna, water, and minerals" (Gadgil and Guha 1992, 13).

In the face of this formidable analytical legacy from agrarian as well as environmental studies, our quest to identify and explore the conceptual landscape of agrarian environments begins with some of the most recent scholarship mapping this hybrid domain in rural India. The blurred boundaries that our work consistently finds between the agrarian and the environmental suggests that typologies separating environmental and agrarian studies serve both poorly. Where farmers become pastoralists in response to regional development policies, when forest conflicts signal the workings of a regional agroforestry system, when relations between tribal groups and agriculturists are redefined in the context of changing state strategies to exercise political control, then choosing between an agrarian or an environmental perspective is not just unsatisfying but plainly misleading. It is misleading because it is a truncation and a misrepresentation of the interwoven dynamics between the agrarian and the environmental worlds. It is also misleading because it prevents an examination of ideal-typical constructs that have formed the building blocks of much agrarian and environmental research.

Consider overgrazing as an example. It is seen by many to be an ecological problem created by shortsighted pastoralists intent on increasing herds to unsustainable size. Framed thus, pastoralism becomes a discrete mode of production, capable of self-reproduction independent of any relationships with agriculture, farmers, or the arable. But the world over, and certainly in India, pastoralist livelihoods depend on interactions in the market, with farmers, and around agricultural production. Grazing lands have declined

owing to the spread of settled agriculture and irrigation. Pastoralists have discovered new adaptive social-ecological niches, often in intimate continuity with agriculturists. To talk about pastoralists, then, without considering their links with the agrarian world is to posit a model of pastoralism that is descriptively incomplete, analytically deceptive, and of limited practical use.

Agrarian environments, the chapters of this volume insist, have to be comprehended as being part of a biophysical and social environment that always includes the urban and the nonurban, the arable and the nonarable, and other areas that are integrally linked to the world of agriculture and environment and their allied social-economic relations. Not only must we reject the tunnel vision of agrarian studies, focused as it remains on the bounded terrain of river valleys and coastal plains, but we need also to move beyond the compartmentalized perspectives of the first generation of environmentalism. In the last thirty years, air, water, forests, pastures, fisheries, and wildlife have taken shape as distinct realms in nature, shored up by their separate, elaborate, legal-institutional structures. We must learn how to navigate across these domains in the search to learn more about our subject matter and the problems that interest us. As a recent review of environmental policy in the United States suggests, we should strive for "an *ecologicalism* that recognizes the inherent interdependence of all life-systems" (Esry and Chertow 1997, 45).

But we do not merely emphasize the need to see the systemic interconnectedness of rural life-support systems. In speaking of agrarian environments, and in explicitly referring to the constructed nature of all environments, we draw attention to how nature and landscapes mutate over time in their physical characteristics, human interactions, and cultural representations. Our emphasis on the malleability of landscapes is not simply for the sake of scoring a postmodern point. Rather, the attempt to consider agrarian environments as a single analytical construct is a means as well of being alert to changes in the social identities of people who live in, and help comprise, these changing landscapes. The hybridity and plasticity of landscapes, when comprehended as something processual, leads to a consideration of the politics of identity and other similar processes through which social typologies are constructed, politicized, deployed, and unraveled. The reification of landscapes into the environmental or the agrarian, our perspective suggests, is closely allied to the politics of naming, to the fetishiza-

tion of social difference. For instance, the use of the term "environment" to represent autonomous nature, divorced from the agrarian, also facilitates the use and fetishization of allied ideal-typical concepts such as "woman," "indigenous," "community," and "local."⁹ A glance at some of the recent literature in environmental studies is instructive.

The past two decades have witnessed a fragmentation in writings about environmental questions. Although a significant literature continues to be produced on global environmental change, many scholars of the environment have also moved away from treating environmental problems as having a primarily global character.¹⁰ Focusing on institutions, demography, and social identities, and their relationship with resource use patterns and environmental problems,¹¹ newer writings have begun to consider explicitly the interests of different social actors (Agarwal and Narain 1992). Much recent political-ecological research has documented how environmental degradation is embedded in exploitative relations between regions and nations.¹² These scholarly trends have helped to make the analyses of environmental issues more political.

The specific form of this shift toward the political has been a greater emphasis on the group identities and interests operating in formal and informal institutions that regulate the use of renewable resources. Underscoring the gendered nature of environmental degradation, for example, has done much to reveal that women often bear the brunt of environmental degradation and seldom have much voice in how degradative processes can be reversed or halted.¹³ Similarly, nation-states today can be seen neither as constituting the sites of a monolithic rationality¹⁴ nor as unproblematically representing the interests of heterogeneous communities within their borders.

The recognition that communities can be efficient resource managers and form viable alternatives to the contractual or hierarchical institutional arrangements embodied by markets or states¹⁵ has been one of the central achievements of the large literature on commons and local communities. A spate of recent practical initiatives on forests, irrigation, wildlife, and pastures, where governments have attempted to devolve resource management responsibilities to communities, can be seen as a significant consequence of the realization that communities can be viable managers. The focus on community has also brought to the fore the possibilities inherent in a series of concepts related to community, chief among them being the

local and the indigenous. The significance of local-level processes and the conflicts between localities and larger interests have become a staple of research on the environment.¹⁶ Indigenous knowledge, at the same time, has emerged as the foundation of a range of programs concerned with the environment. Current writings point to the relevance of indigenous knowledge to processes of development and conservation and highlight the role of indigenous peoples in environmental management,¹⁷ especially in contrast to "outsiders," who are often seen to possess little stake, and therefore little interest, in the stewardship of resources.

The emphasis on specific social identities has helped shift attention toward more marginal social groups and led to a greater appreciation of the differentiated impacts of environmental problems. Unfortunately, it has also congealed a series of dichotomies that threaten to become naturalized. "Woman," "indigenous," "community," and "local" have become central as building blocks for specific streams of environmental writings. The populist potential of these constructs is enhanced by using them in opposition to others such as "man," "Western/scientific," "state," and "global."¹⁸ For some ecofeminists, women as the embodiment of nature are also its spontaneous guardians and protectors. The projected unity is shattered only because of the intrusions by a patriarchal society. Indigenous knowledge and people, in an analogous fashion, have come to symbolize the aspirations of those wishing to return to an earlier, less complicated, more ecological state of existence. As the holding place for stewardship possibilities, indigeneity may seem politically appealing to many. Similarly, the reification of women and the indigenous may serve an immediate political cause. But the easy solace of such reifications can well sacrifice long-term gains for all classes of people whose varied experiences are concealed by hastily composed social categorizations. They close off possibilities for alliances across politically and analytically expedient groupings, which for that reason might appear unsettling. Such alliances must nonetheless be explored if politically marginalized groups are to claim a share in power.¹⁹

The emergence of community as a source of hope for those who believe markets to be incapable of privatizing externalities and who are disappointed with the achievements of centralizing states has led to mythic visions of place-based communities. Through the mechanism of such mythical communities, analysts can unite the diverse social goals of equity, sustainability, and development. These visions hinge on a naturalized past

where communities protected the environment and lived as one with it. But such versions of community, and of the ability of communities to manage local resources, must always remain troubled by research that points to internal stratification and oppression within communities, and the politically asymmetrical position of all communities attempting to behave as autonomous actors ranged against powerful political or economic interests.²⁰

The complex political and analytical moves that have conjoined the local with community have also meant that the local has assumed oppositional overtones against the homogenizing influences of a global modernity. As the presumed site of cultural diversity, isolable local spaces may often be seen to constitute gaps and possible sources of autonomy in a world rapidly being pushed to experience a blandly uniform consistency. But such visions of the local and the local community cannot address any acute questions about the nature of the homogenizing influences modernity is supposed to introduce, or about the existence of breaches and fractures within modernity.

It may not, then, be surprising that nature itself is symbolized by the sequestered natural park within which biodiversity in its various forms can be preserved. But this way of conceptualizing and operationalizing the protection of nature ignores a tremendous array of historical ecological evidence that demonstrates the multiplicity of strategies through which humans have been instrumental in producing nature even in what are assumed to be the remotest and most virginal landscapes. Environments have histories from which humans cannot be excluded (Sponsel et al. 1996).

The attempt to identify women, the indigenous, communities, or the local with the natural environment is attractive to many scholars, activists, and policymakers alike. The appealing aspects of such identifications cannot be denied, and their utility for drumming up support is evident in the passions created around them. But we must also recognize that such attempts often reduce complicated social and historical dynamics and the fraught nature of social identities to mere caricatures. The resulting simplification and reification of categories not only flattens the complexity of phenomena that are thus imagined but also limits the possibility of enriching the study of environmental politics with new theoretical insights.

In contrast to the naturalized "environment," agrarian environments are places that can neither be isolated as parks nor be seen as the obvious centers of Vavilovian biodiversity. They are local spaces, as all experi-

enced space perhaps is. They are home, however, not to the striking and exoticized indigene or the essentialized natural woman but to complex social formations and identities that reflect the diversity and flux of their landscapes. The communities that live in them are not the self-sufficient and harmonious formations currently the darling of many conservationists. Rather, these communities are unavoidably fragmented politically and are located and shaped in wider sociopolitical contexts toward whose construction they contribute. These are the convictions that inspire this volume and provide the basis for a schematic review of the literature on environmental studies in south Asia.

THE STATE OF PLAY IN SOUTH ASIA

Two recent and important collections of essays on the environmental history of south Asia have attempted to set the terms of debate and define a research program for future work on environment-related scholarship in India.²¹ The introductions to both the volumes survey the development of the fledgling field of environmental history in south Asia and conclude that the field was deeply influenced by the concerns of the Indian environmental movement as it emerged after the 1970s. We are powerfully reminded that environmental history in India was inspired by a radical critique of government and development that was building up amid the Sarvodaya movement and other anticentral government sentiment of the early 1970s. We also observe a clear link between environmental history, international Green politics, and the sharpening of anxieties about tropical deforestation, land degradation, and its relationship to global futures.

The agenda that has been set, and begun to be accomplished, by Arnold, Gadgil, Grove, and Guha has brought environmental concerns to the fore in older social and economic history debates in Indian studies while charting much unexplored territory in the historiography of colonial India. Among other things, they have started to trace the chronological course of ecological sciences, offered materialist and culturalist histories of the nature-culture relationship, initiated studies of the environmental impact of urbanization and technological transformations in agriculture, analyzed environmental degradation as it affects specific resources such as water and forests, signaled the role of modern state formation in resource exploitation, and indicated how science, technology, medicine, and law can be

studied as colonizing projects.²² The writings of Grove in particular, and others in his wake, have detailed the development of colonial discourses about nature, science, risk, and control of natural resources; suggested that forest history is the legitimate focus of environmental history against those who have focused on the urban or the arable; and posited differences between indigenous and colonial constructions of nature and their interaction in specific settings.²³ Writings about the environment in the Indian context have thus opened up many new, exciting vistas. But they have also tended to accept the tenacious and obscuring dichotomies regarding the foundational concepts already identified. The acceptance of these dichotomies, driven in part by agendas oriented toward practical politics, is visible especially in the writings of Guha and Gadgil.²⁴ In explanation of these scholars, it must be said that their concerns were more to establish the environment as a legitimate domain of study. Indeed, without their contributions, it would be that much harder to call for studying agrarian environments, or to argue for dismantling the easy separations between nature and culture, indigenous and scientific, community and state, that are erected and enacted in the defense of disciplinary boundaries.

Some recent contributions to the study of the environment have begun the move toward recognizing the interpellated nature of the agrarian and the environmental. New research has begun to demonstrate the interlinked livelihoods of forest-dependent communities and local economies and the networks on which the livelihoods of tribal groups were dependent (A. Prasad 1998). Dangwal (1998) documents how migration from the hills was linked to a whole series of demographic, agricultural, and land use changes that can be ill understood if we remain locked within a concern with either the purely agrarian or simply the environmental. Building on similar ideas of the links between the natural and the cultural, Rangarajan (1998) suggestively argues that views about the animal world, about the dangers or beauty inherent in wildness, are closely affiliated with forms of land use, rhythms of agrarian expansion, and social relations among humans around production processes. These existing arguments help found the grounds for a third generation of analyses of environmental processes and politics. The chapters of this volume extend the limits of these arguments by undermining the conceptual and social identities consolidated by separating the environmental from the agrarian, and elaborating on the politics of lived experiences.

ORGANIZING THEMES

The chapters of this volume suggest that the relations between identities and interests articulated during resource allocation conflicts are contingent on specific ecological, historical, and cultural contexts. Further, unitary subject positions entailed in dichotomous analyses always have a repressive as well as a coalescing function. The idioms of the local, or the indigenous, or the community, opposed to the global, the outsider, or the state/market, can prove fruitful for rallying support. But support for these causes, as they have hitherto been constructed, also simultaneously requires that internal differences be glossed over and erased. The implicit larger argument we present is that there are no conceptual categories that endure in the same way or mean the same thing to all people. Especially when they take the form of politically charged binarities, categories can assume a phenomenological life of their own, but that process itself needs to become an arena of inquiry.

A second intervention of this volume is the articulation of the concept of agrarian environments. Despite pertinent distinctions drawn by south Asian and other scholars between developed and developing country environmentalisms,²⁵ both these modes of analysis and political mobilization share an approach that treats nature, its degradation, and its conservation by separating them from the world of rural production.²⁶ The separation between the arable and the nonarable in the rural environment is consolidated by focusing on questions of deforestation, shifting cultivation, hunting and wildlife, and the degradation of pastures from the perspective of state policy and peasant resistance. This delinking of non-agricultural and shifting agricultural livelihoods from the settled agrarian economy has ironic consequences. Environmental historians of India are quick to chide agrarian historians and rural sociologists for neglecting the nonarable world that surrounds the arable world they study. But the environmental historians themselves only insufficiently examine the role of agrarian change in the emerging patterns of environmental transformations and conflict.

Even when environmental problems are located in a specified relation to the agrarian economy of intensive crop production, the focus has usually been on one of two things: first, on the problems of technological change that are somehow considered superior to power, or to economic and so-

cial relations of production,²⁷ second, on unilinear accounts of deforestation and consequent agrarian distress, following the directions charted by the large empirical and statistical undertaking of the Duke University project.²⁸ The connections that have been established by recent work have thus tended to be unidirectional, explaining environmental decline in terms of new agricultural technologies, or blaming famine and other rural hardships on deforestation.

Let us take the case of famines. A range of writing in agrarian history has described famines, their social and economic consequences, and, in passing, their relationship to peasant unrest. There is little scholarship, however, on the frequency, intensity, spread, and recurrence of famines, especially with a view to finding the connections between environmental change, the politics of environmental management, and agrarian relations.²⁹ Vinay Gidwani's contribution to this volume raises some of the issues pertaining to the material complexities of famine and its relationship to environmental history. Cultural-geographic studies of the construction of India as famine prone, in the late colonial period, are the subject of Darren Zook's chapter. "How did Indian landscapes come to be imagined by different groups as famine ridden in the nineteenth century?" he asks. His analysis of the representations of hunger in colonial and nationalist writings shows how these literary productions depict environmental crises as emerging from a profound lack in agrarian landscapes.

The chapters of this volume thus argue for a more nuanced and dialectical relationship between the world of agrarian production and environmental change. This allows us to point out, for instance, how narratives of deforestation are constructed culturally in competing representations of changing landscapes. Questions about the cultural construction of agrarian landscapes were notable omissions from the literature in U.S. or third world scholarship until recently. A spate of work promises to remedy this absence in Western scholarship.³⁰ Writings on the environment in Africa have also begun to consider the issue.³¹ Environmental history in India, however, remains little influenced by these new approaches to studying landscapes as cultural representations of contests over resources and identities.³²

A third problem in the environmental history of India relates to its historicism. Because of the opacity and flatness with which current histories of the environment treat concepts such as the state, traditional communities,

and capitalism, their assumptions about the relations among these concepts become suspect. Their flawed historicism often assumes chronological and epochal divisions between the precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial periods that are not always useful. Instead, we need greater, more curious, and more insistent attention to the social construction of historical relations in environmental conflicts, how the past is inflected by current utopian aspirations, in short to explore the dynamic relationship between history and current moments. The recognition of how the past might be constituted by the present, or explorations of the ways in which the past provides legacies shaping regimes of management and contestation in the present, lift us out of conventional disciplinary domains and permit research that effectively integrates approaches and methods from the humanities and the social and natural sciences.³³

THE CONTRIBUTIONS

We started our journey with two broad sets of themes and a conviction that they are related in potentially fascinating ways. One was the need to examine the cultural and political production of social identities in the context of environmental conflicts. The other was the desire to integrate agrarian and environmental politics. The integration of these two themes in the concept of agrarian environments allows a focus on the significant regional variations within modern India's agrarian environments, rendering the project of a south Asian environmental history a fundamentally comparative one. Environmental history and politics, we learn, have to be written at several levels of aggregation, the national or subcontinental being but one of them. South Asian agrarian environments need also to be placed in a wider universe of European expansion, international commerce in commodities, ideas, and images, and changing landscapes as one moves from west Asia toward southeast Asia.

Colonialism, ecofeminism, deforestation rhetoric, environmental catastrophe, green revolution technologies, international aid packages, and modern state formation are powerful elements in a developing international public sphere around environmental issues. The relationships of Indian agrarian environments to this sphere are changing in ways that begin to erase the moral distance between environmentalisms in first and third worlds. For instance, the rise of social justice movements in the United

States and Great Britain is symptomatic of the new salience of equity issues in environmental struggles worldwide. The attention to community involvement in resource management is burgeoning both in the West and in the South.

These fairly new connections between environmental politics across the developed-developing divide prompt us to examine the production of analytic categories and social aggregates. The chapters of this volume collectively demonstrate how categories such as gender, community, caste, state, technical knowledge, and binary land classification schemes are constructed and can be contested. At the same time, an assumed affective social cohesion can become—at least temporarily—an actual interest-based collective consciousness. Caste and gender are good examples of such transformative potential in gross social aggregations. Occupational markers, like pastoralist, or bureaucratic functional ranks, like extension officer, carry the same possibility.

The chapters are located in a rough chronological order. Without a necessary adherence to linear historical time, we nonetheless want to suggest that the themes we are marking in this introduction apply to writings about the environment in the Indian context both historically and contemporaneously. Rangan, Baker, Saberwal, Springer, and Zook, in particular, examine the social relations embodied in the state to expose its shifting priorities, internal fractures, and modes of representation. Gulha's chapter marks a shift in the location of analysis from the state and uses historical evidence to penetratingly examine the idea of community. The following three chapters are located in the present, but they are equally alive to the issues that raise their heads once the easy identity between community and conservation is questioned.

In earlier analyses, agrarian historians had certainly explored such fractures within the community and the state, pointing to the politics to which both these conceptual formations are home. These historians' analyses had focused on the differentiations within the state apparatus and on changes over time in the factors and perceptions that shaped state policy. But in carving out the environment as a separate domain of study, existing scholarship seems, ironically, to have lost that insight. In this sense, some of the arguments in the following chapters are only an attempt to regain that nuanced understanding of state and community that agrarian historians of south Asia have always had. Of course, we should add that the separa-

tion of the chapters into those focusing on the concept of the state and those looking more closely at community is not an attempt to indicate that community and state are somehow separate from each other. Certainly the arguments in the chapters do not support such an improbable stance. Instead, they go a long way toward suggesting that the contours of social formations called the "state" and the "community" are often constructed interdependently. The existing organization of the chapters follows a particular social scientific approach to state/community but also reflexively questions the foundations of that approach.

Rangan's chapter is part of a new scholarship that is recovering for the study of the environment the same sophistication that characterizes the treatment of the state by agrarian scholars. She discusses the different phases in the government's attitude toward, and interest in, forested land in the Uttarakhnad from 1817 to 1947. Her investigation seriously undermines the belief that during this entire period a colonial state worked to appropriate forest resources in the name of a coherent scientific forestry policy. In pointing to the different phases of colonial forestry policy in Uttarakhnad, and the motivations that led to these phases, she connects the history of forestry to larger colonial concerns. She thus helps undermine the boundaries placed around constructions of environmental histories and shows how these histories and politics develop in relation to much wider concerns.

If Rangan points to the historically changing nature and interests of the colonial state, Baker, Saberwal, and Springer employ different strategies. Baker describes how the belief in the opposed interests of the state and the community is untenable. The colonial state in Kangra, according to his account, was simultaneously facilitating efforts of communities to expand agriculture and restricting their interests in forests. The same desire to increase revenues led to very different kinds of negotiations between the state and the community depending on the nature of resources, extractive institutions, and technologies. At the same time, the imposition in the hills of categories of property from the Indo-Gangetic plains created forms of communal organization of land that today are often seen as belonging to a distant, traditional past.

Saberwal adopts a more direct route to demonstrate the internal fractures within state institutional structures and an overall incoherence in state

objectives. He does so by reporting on the contradictory understandings displayed by the revenue and the forest departments in the matter of defining and combating a problem termed "overgrazing." The exacerbation of differences between these two rural land management arms of the government generated and fed on a desiccation discourse that gained ever greater influence on forest policy. The continued vitality of the discourse can be seen today in how it permits the forest department to extend control over land. Saberwal's arguments are reminiscent of other work that examines bureaucratic conflicts in the colonial period, especially between the land revenue and the forest departments.

Springer's chapter turns attention to the internal fractures and permeability of the contemporary postcolonial state. By showing how agricultural field agents in Tamil Nadu are both transmitters and objects of development, she reveals their multiple locations within state hierarchies and social formations. Their subject positions and relationships with farmers serve to transform, and at the same time extend, the aims of development by rendering them in terms that are locally meaningful.

Several of these analyses of the state also point to the politics of representation—a theme taken up explicitly by Zook in his study of images of famine and hunger in south India. Zook shows how images of India as a land and Indians as a people who were constantly beset by famine and hunger were used by colonial officials as well as their Indian critics. Although there was considerable variance in the objectives and intentions of various groups in seizing upon famine and hunger as problems afflicting Indians, their strategies led to similar consequences: the enshrining of representations that depicted India as incapable of dealing with these problems. His contribution goes on to discuss the reasons behind the enduring power of such representations of poverty and famine today.

The next set of four chapters by Guha, Jackson and Chattopadhyay, Gururami, and Robbins takes up for investigation perhaps the most powerful locus of imaginings in current environmental writings: community. Guha turns his critical attention to the belief that autonomous premodern village communities were the repositories of a conservationist ethic. He points to the existence of numerous conflicts over land, pastures, and forests, and he shows the negotiations through which these resources were used and often appropriated by the more powerful strata in premodern agrarian society.

His study shows the value of placing the discussion of ecological change back in agrarian environments to understand the frictions within, and the construction of, community.

Community emerges as a complex and conflict-ridden world in seventeenth-century western India in Guha's work. That characteristic of community, its tendency to disappear when the relations of its members are examined closely, has not changed today. Robbins's detailed study of pastoralists in Rajasthan shows how the same ecological changes differentially affect members of pastoralist castes. Opening the category of pastoralist, he shows how internal stratification allies the interests of some pastoralists with landowning elites in a village and of others with more marginal agricultural producers. His analysis problematizes images of the village as a coherent, bounded community, and that of migrant pastoralism as an undifferentiated subsistence activity.

Jackson and Chattopadhyay's work on a single village in Jharkhand similarly shows how caste identities critically shape access to forest resources. Questioning the often taken-for-granted category "woman," they explode the myth that women have any necessarily unified consciousness about resource use or management. But theirs is not simply a deconstructive exercise. They also show the specific social and economic forces that produce particular forms of consciousness about resource access and use. In showing the internal politics and dynamics of village communities around issues of caste and gender, their chapter moves environmental accounts toward a needed emphasis on how communities themselves are produced or undermined in struggles.

Gururani, like Jackson and Chattopadhyay, uses caste to problematize analyses of forest access that have so far used simple gendered approaches. Her work on practices that women follow in harvesting forest products in different villages in the Kumaon Himalaya shows the ways in which the category of "woman" is internally fractured and under constant renegotiation and contestation by the very subjects the category presumes to represent.

Of all the chapters in this volume, Gidwani's description of the changing agrarian landscape in Matar Taluka in Gujarat and its relationships to the environmental context addresses the reciprocal relationship between agriculture and the environment most frontally. He accomplishes this by examining the validity of a widely accepted polarization thesis that pre-

sumes to explain the emergence and consolidation of social inequalities in agrarian societies. The caste communities on which he focuses to lay bare the limitations of existing arguments about the generation of inequalities, he argues, emerge in their concrete relationships with what is glossed as nature. However, nature itself is neither "an autonomous entity, nor a mere imagining." The argument holds for all communities that encounter nature through some sort of labor. Gidwani's chapter would be valuable enough for just this insight. But he goes several steps beyond. In charting four "agrarian environmental" mechanisms through which agrarian and social change unfolds in Matar Taluka, he provides the beginnings of a framework that potentially is relevant to any analysis of agrarian change. What we have in his chapter is a carefully and insightfully elaborated explanation of the means through which agrarian environments come into being, both as social formations and as identity-related transformations.

The second part of the volume, entitled "Reflections," presents the thoughts of two scholars on the themes and theses explored in the different papers. Using their extensive research experience in the subcontinent, David Ludden and Ajay Skaria bring different theoretical perspectives to bear on the original research presented in this collection. Ludden provides an appropriately broad sketch of the nature of agrarian environments in a larger perspective, covering the entire subcontinent, and examining as well some of the issues related to urban development. Skaria focuses on the conceptual and theoretical relationship between modernity and environments, especially to discuss how the colonial or postcolonial variants of modernity are integrally connected in the very production of the idea of nature or the natural. Their comments, together with the earlier chapters, show the dynamic interplay between empirical research and theory construction.

The discussions in all the chapters in the volume demonstrate the larger implications of questioning scholarly practices that divide environmental relations along conveniently bifurcating axes, of investigating the agrarian intersections of environmental conflicts, and of focusing on the "field" as well as the "archive." The volume provides a new emphasis on politics and the differential impacts of environmental policies by focusing on constituent groups of the so-called community, and categories such as "indigenous" or "woman." Further, by indicating how many of the foundational concepts in the discourse of environmental studies are themselves constituted, the chapters in this volume force a more nuanced appreciation of

these concepts. In providing a more textured analysis of how, for example, categories such as "woman," or the "community," or the "state," emerge, the chapters hint at possible alliances across naturalized divisions between the community and the state, or across gender lines, or in relation to indigenous and outsider populations. Exploration of such potential alliances may be seen as a survey of dangerous grounds—co-optation, after all, is always a possibility that lurks in the wings of such a venture. But it can also prove critical to environmental initiatives by pointing to ways in which existing divisions can be breached. Finally, insisting on the historical and contextual specificity of environmental conflicts also implies a refusal to bow too easily to the seduction of theoretical generalization, a seduction that has been responsible for numerous painful, wrongheaded, and unsuccessful policies for environmental protection and conservation.

NOTES

- 1 The point is especially applicable in relation to studies of the environment in south Asia, but also relevant more generally. See, for example, Rolston 1988.
- 2 In this context, work by scholars such as Buiel (1996) and earlier by Redclift and Benton (1994) has usefully pointed to relationships between the social and the environmental/natural. See also Cronon 1995.
- 3 The normative assessment of this originary, imaginary state of nature differs, of course, across the works of these political philosophers.
- 4 This image of a pristine environment is analytically analogous to the "state of nature" in the thought experiments of political theorists such as Hobbes and Rawls. In much environmentalist discourse, however, the idea of a "pristine environment" assumes the status of something that actually existed in a fairly recent past, and which is now irrevocably gone.
- 5 These important revisions of an otherwise flawed historiography are outstandingly represented by Bayly (1983) and Washbrook (1988) and well discussed by Stein (1989), but they worked to strengthen a scholarly distinction between agrarian landscapes and other non-descript ones.
- 6 For more on this, see S. Gulia 1992, 3–6.
- 7 As Bhattacharya, in his introduction to a special issue of *Studies in History* on "Forests, Fields, and Pastures," argues, "If the old agrarian history neglected the forests and pastures, environmental history now has banished the peasant fields and farms from the realm of historical concern" (1998, 165).
- 8 See the contributions of Partha Chatterjee and Asok Sen to *Subaltern Studies I–V* (Chatterjee 1982, 1983, 1984, A. Sen 1987). A limited exception to the failure of elite and subaltern studies alike to study the interrelations between agrarian and environmental issues might be the work of Eric Stokes (1978) and David Washbrook (1978).

- 9 For the most part, after this initial indication of our deep disquiet with the use of these naturalized terms, we do not use quotation marks each time we use one of these terms. Given that the objective of the volume is precisely to examine the formation and deployment of these problematic categories, we trust the reader will take our discomfort with these terms from the context of the discussion.
- 10 But for a relatively recent example of the obsession with global environmental impacts, see Shah 1998.
- 11 Several of the essays in Arizpe, Stone, and Major 1994 are serious efforts to link institutional, demographic, and environmental variables. Agrawal and Yadama (1997) provide an example from the Kumaon.
- 12 Notable works are Blaikie 1985; R. Guha 1989b; Peluso 1992; and Schimink and Wood 1992. These monographs have helped to define the emerging field of political ecology. For studies tracing the origins of political ecology to different environmentalisms, see A. Atkinson 1991 and Eckersley 1992. More recently some scholars have defined the scope offered by political ecology for social scientific research on environmental questions. Useful essays in this genre are Neumann 1992; Bryant 1992; and Peet and Watts 1996.
- 13 See B. Agarwal 1994, Fernandes and Menon 1987, and Merchant 1980.
- 14 See, for example, T. Mitchell 1991 and Gupta 1995.
- 15 The definitive work in this regard is Ostrom 1990. See also Berkes 1989; Bromley 1992; McCay and Adhesion 1987; and Wade 1988.
- 16 See, for example, the literature review in the research document produced by the IFRI (International Forestry Resources and Institutions) Research Program (IFRI 1993). For a sample of new political ecology research that illustrates these approaches, see various articles in the collection "Voices from the Commons: Evolving Relations of Property and Management," *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (1996).
- 17 For the role of indigenous knowledge in development and conservation, see Warren, Slikkerveit, and Brokensha 1995. For writings about the role of indigenous peoples in environmental protection, see Greaves 1994 and Brush and Stabinsky 1996.
- 18 But see Agrawal 1995 for an interrogation of the concept of the "indigenous." See also Ilahiane 1993, which focuses on the divisions within a community on the basis of religion, class, and ethnicity, and how they lead to explorative relationships among community members. Sivaramakrishnan 1998 discusses the exclusions and coalitions through which "community" is constructed.
- 19 This point is particularly important for discussions related to the environment because social movements around the environment are generated by irreducibly plural constituencies. The consideration of environmental and agrarian problems calls for analyses that do not use class, gender, ethnicity, or caste as the only lens for viewing. Warnings on the environment have increasingly begun to pay attention to this issue (Barel 1992; Mellor 1996).
- 20 Insightful discussions of how community is constructed and deployed are present in Li 1996 and Moore (1998). For a general review, see Agrawal 1997.
- 21 Arnold and Guha 1995; Grove, Damolalan, and Sangwan 1998. See also Ramachandra Guha 1993.
- 22 Ramachandra Guha 1986b; Gadgil and Guha 1992; D. Arnold 1993; Rangarajan 1994.

State Economic Policies and Changing Regional Landscapes in the Uttarakhand Himalaya, 1818–1947

Narratives of environmental change in the Uttarakhand Himalaya generally fall into a declensionist genre, invoking images of a pristine and isolated region located in the eternal past until the advent of colonialism and capitalist development marked the beginning of relentless ecological degradation (see, for example, Bahuguna 1982; Berreman 1989; Bhatt 1987; Dogra 1983; Gadgil and Guha 1993; Ramachandra Guha 1989b; Shiva and Bandyopadhyay 1986a, 1986b; Weber 1988). The dramatic power of these narratives is enhanced by attributing a particularly malevolently powerful colonial state. The colonial state is caricatured as overwhelmingly powerful, autonomous from and thriving on antagonistic relations with civil society, and single-minded in its predatory pursuits that inevitably cause ecological degradation and impoverishment of Himalayan communities (exceptions to this view are R. Tucker 1983, 1991; J. Richards 1987; Chetan Singh 1991). The colonial state plays the role of villain in the relentless Manichaean struggle of environmental change. It is the destroyer of pre-colonial harmony, the promoter of modernity against hallowed tradition, the harbinger of Western patriarchal modes of capital accumulation that undermine “Oriental” feminine principles of nature, the diabolical agent of capitalism that transforms ecological utopias into lifeless terrains. The environmentalist Vandana Shiva, for instance, uses this imagery to eulogize the passing of simple and self-sufficient peasant lifeways organized around the “feminine principle of nature” as they encountered “western patriarchy.”

23 Grove 1995; MacLeod and Kumar 1995; Rajan 1994.

24 We may, however, argue that Grove's seminal work on environment and forestry has also contributed to some extent to institutionalizing the separation between the agrarian and the environmental.

25 See, for instance, Ramachandra Guha 1989b, and Guha and Martinez-Alier 1997.

26 Some exceptions to this assertion would be Worster 1979; Blaikie and Brookfield 1987; Bennett 1984; D. Anderson 1984; Richards, Haynes, and Hagen 1985; Richards and Hagen 1987; Richards and McAlpin 1983; R. Tucker 1989; and Richards and Flint 1999.

27 Classic examples are the work of acknowledged pioneers in environmental history in India and the United States, respectively. See Whitecombe 1977 and Cronon 1991. The enduring influence of a technology-driven analysis of agrarian change and its environmental consequences may be seen even in recent work in India. See, for example, Agrilhotra 1996.

28 Recent examples of such work may be found in Danodaram 1995 and M. Mann 1995.

29 See Dhanagare 1984 and the collection of essays in Hardiman 1993.

30 See Cosgrove and Daniels 1988; Schama 1995; W. Mitchell 1994; Mackenzie 1995; Harrison 1992; Hirsch and O'Hanlon 1995.

31 See, for instance, several articles in Bernart 1989, Fairhead and Leach 1996, McCaun 1995, and Wilson 1995.

32 D. Arnold (1996) provides a pointer in this direction.

33 Further discussion of the ways in which we can integrate historical and contemporary approaches to environmental topics in India may be found in Sivaramakrishnan 1995. Ludden (1992) suggests a comparable reformulation of development's histories. For a discussion of history as politicized memory, see also Peet 1995.