University of Reading

Negotiating precarity: governance and agency in hydropower development in the Eastern Himalayan margins of India

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Livelihoods (International and Rural Development) Division

School of Agriculture, Policy & Development

University of Reading

Rinchen Angmu Lama

February 2021

Declaration of original authorship

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all materials from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged

SIGNED

…………………………………………..

DATE

…………………………………………

Acknowledgement

This research was accomplished with the support of many people, to whom I owe a great debt of thanks.

First and foremost, to the people who offered their time and shared their stories with me in Darjeeling: their experiences are integral to this thesis and without them this study would not have been possible.

To Sonu, Meena didi and Prakash jojo, who enriched my outlook by offering their assistance and invaluable views in the field.

To my supervisors, Professor Henny Osbhar and Dr. Alex Arnall, for their guidance and encouragement throughout the PhD process, and their overall support during my personal vicissitudes.

To Professor James Fairhead, my Masters supervisor at the University of Sussex, for being an inspiration and a kind mentor, providing invaluable encouragement throughout my career.

To my dearest friend Chandni, my abiding moral and academic support, without whose encouragement I would not have embarked on the PhD journey in the first place.

To my friend Natasha, my constant source of academic guidance.

To Carolyn, for constant editorial help and for offering me a safe and comfortable place in Reading away.

To my family, for giving me the privilege of undertaking this study, and Dechhen, my sister-in-law, who took on responsibility for my family. Thank you for all your sacrifice and unconditional love.

Abstract

This thesis is a detailed qualitative enquiry into the context, agency, and nested power dynamics shaping local responses of support to hydropower projects along the Teesta River in Darjeeling in the Eastern Himalayan region of India.

Since 2003, large-scale hydropower development promoted by central and state governments in the Eastern Himalayas, and their controversial governance, have invited severe critique. Academic debates around local conflict, and grassroots resistance, negotiation, and contestation to hydropower have been centred on the use of ethnicity and indigeneity as a means to resist or establish claims from hydropower projects. This thesis makes two contributions to the growing scholarship on the contentious politics of hydropower development in the Himalayas.

Firstly, it examines the agency of hydropower-affected communities in Darjeeling, who are highway residents and forest communities, with no claims to land ownership or indigeneity. Secondly, in contrast to the literature that focuses on state governance, it examines local, formal and informal political structures that mediate on hydropower decision-making, processes, and outcomes.

This thesis centres on three empirical chapters (written in the form of papers) that examine issues of governance, local precarity, and people's agency as they intersect with the politics of hydropower development. The empirical chapters demonstrate how colonial and postcolonial development agendas, local political dynamics, and top-down exclusionary practices of hydropower governance weaken collective agency and perpetuate unequal power relationships. Furthermore, even when encouraged to protest by elite actors, people living in socio-political margins or 'unruly spaces', may be induced to support hydropower projects by hopes of antecedent benefits of infrastructure development and temporary employment. These local responses of support, spurred by a network of politically charged local brokers, accrue to support ecologically damaging hydropower projects.

This thesis unpacks the drivers of community support for hydropower development and sheds light on the localized and wider dynamics of hydropower decision-making. It argues that responses of support have to be examined as embedded in the dynamics of broader social and historical processes of marginalisation and dispossession.

In providing perspectives from the margins, this thesis draws on and contributes to theoretical debates on political ecology, as well as postcolonial and political geography literatures on governance, development, agency, and state in the Himalayan region.

Table of contents

List of acronyms

BJP   Bharatiya Janata Party

CPI (M)   Communist Party of India (Marxist)

CPRM   The Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxists (CPRM)

DGHC   Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council

GNLF   Gorkha National Liberation Front

GREF   General Reserve Engineer Force

GTA   Gorkhaland Territorial Administration

GJM   Gorkha Jan Mukti Morcha

NH10   National Highway 10

NHPC   National Hydroelectric Power Corporation

PWD   Public Works Department

TLDPIII   Teesta Low Dam Stage III, Darjeeling

TLDPIV   Teesta Low Dam Stage IV, Darjeeling

List of figures

List of tables

Chapter 1: Introduction

We are doubly challenged because we do not have so-called identity or development. I think it gets magnified and highlighted in our case. For me, that's where the challenge is: you cannot consider the land rights pertaining to the dams apart from this larger thing. (Development worker, Darjeeling town, January 2018).

The above excerpt came from the last interview in my fieldwork in Darjeeling (Figure 1) and exemplifies the common themes that arose in encounters with people over the course of my fieldwork where I sought to understand the lack of visible resistance against the severe environmental and social impacts of hydropower projects. This thesis is a detailed examination of the power dynamics that shaped local responses of support to hydropower projects in the Teesta River in Darjeeling, India. It seeks to develop a narrative of marginalised people's agency within social, economic, political, and environmental constraints and how they negotiate them. More broadly, it examines the implications of development in marginalised, precarious settings.

Figure 1 Fieldwork was conducted in settlements along the Teesta River in Darjeeling. This image is of Geilkhola village, upstream to one of the hydropower projects. Photo by author.

This chapter provides an introduction and background to the thesis. It begins by outlining the changing discourse of dams within the political economy of development in India. It then reviews hydropower debates in the Eastern Himalayan region of India that are central to this study, sets these debates in their regional background, and briefly introduces the research context. Following this, the chapter presents the research rationale, aim and objectives, and a brief note on personal motivations underpinning this research. The final section presents an outline the thesis with a brief summary of each chapter.

1.1. Dams discourse and the paradigm of development in India

Dams play a controversial role in the evolution of India's development policy. On the one hand, they are viewed as vehicles of development, meeting energy needs and national self-sufficiency, while on the other hand, they are infamous for causing ecological degradation, social upheaval, and in extreme cases, heightened conflict and marginalisation. In the 1930s–1950s, newly decolonised countries adopted trajectories of large-scale infrastructural development to accelerate their economic development.[1]

Growing populations, increasing urbanisation rates, and rising electricity demands accelerated global dam construction (WCD, 2000). Besides hydropower generation, dams may provide flood control, and water storage for domestic, industrial or agricultural use. These services and the benefits that follow, such as the expansion of physical and social infrastructures like roads and schools, were used to justify dams as the most financially competitive option for energy provision (McCully, 1996, Moore et al., 2010). From 1970 to 1975, nearly 5,000 dams were built worldwide (Nayak, 2010), of which 40% were reportedly being built in India (WCD 2000: 8-10). Over time, these large-scale projects have had massive social, cultural and ecological costs, causing loss of biodiversity, ecosystem services, land, and livelihoods (WCD, 2000, McCully, 1996, Duflo and Pande, 2007, Moore et al., 2010, Dandekar, 2017).

The World Commission on Dams reports that 40–80 million people worldwide are forced off their settlements, agricultural lands, and forests due to dam-related flooding (WCD, 2000). Besides loss of lands, which is the basis for livelihoods for most people, studies have shown that the experience of displacement encompasses a loss of power and agency as people lose

---

[1] Following in the footsteps of the United Sates and the Soviet Union, India and China became prominent developing countries to become dam building nations (McCully, 1996, Khagram, 2004).

sociocultural resources and networks (Mathur, 1998, Oliver-Smith, 2009). The impact of displacement leads to food insecurity, increased health risks, and loss of human rights contribution to poverty and insecurity (Cernea, 1988, McDowell, 1996). Simultaneously, the benefits of dams are not well distributed equally, and they often favour wealthy farmers, industries, and urban populations. The adverse impacts of large dams have fallen disproportionately on subsistence farmers, indigenous peoples, and ethnic minorities, thus largely failing to bring prosperity to the poor (Nüsser, 2003, WCD, 2000).

Often justified as costs borne by some people for the greater good, displacement and forced relocation, involuntary resettlement, ecological degradation, and uneven socio-economic impacts have been recurring themes in the debates surrounding hydropower development in India (Kothari, 1996, Nayak, 2013). Post-independence, the Indian state adopted a 'top-down, state-led, economic-growth focused and technocratic development vision in which large multipurpose dam projects played a central role' (Khagram, 2004, p. 33). Large tracts of un-surveyed forest lands were diverted for these projects and cheap raw materials granted to industries, without consultation with local people (Mohanty, 2005).

With a narrow focus on economic growth and national progress, the construction of large dams were justified in the name of 'public interest' (Sharma, 2018), and resulted in destruction of traditional livelihoods and local ecologies, as well as massive population displacement often of the poor and marginalised. Around 85.54 million tribal people constituting 8% of the country's population, were displaced from their lands from 1951 to 1990 (Sarin et al., 2003, Bose, 2010). The Sardar Sarovar project in the Narmada river valley alone displaced 163500 people, mostly tribal, from 297 villages (Khagram, 2004). Despite the scale of this displacement, resettlement and rehabilitation remains inadequate and delayed (Saxena, 1997, Kothari, 1996, Scudder, 2012).

 In the decades following the 1990s, dams were subject to severe, worldwide opposition on various social and environmental grounds. The criticism provoked multilateral efforts to establish an independent World Commission on Dams (WCD) to review the efficacy of dams and create guidelines for the future (Moore et al., 2010). Simultaneously, in India, the growing intensity of land acquisition for large dam projects led to widespread opposition which culminated in the popular *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (Save the Narmada Movement). This anti-dam movement formed by the affected people of the Sardar Sarovar Project and supported by the transnational environmental NGOs, pressured the World Bank, the world's biggest financier of mega dams to withdraw from the project (Khagram, 2004). In 2000, the WCD

produced an exhaustive assessment on large dams calling for extensive planning, consultation, assessment, and mitigation measures to justify the future construction of dams (WCD, 2000). The WCD's critical appraisal of large dams as being environmentally unsustainable and socially unethical, led to a dramatic decline in global dam construction (Khagram, 2004, Fletcher, 2010).

However, since the early 2000s controversial dam projects have once again gained prominence in development planning in many developing countries. This contemporary resurgence of hydropower is underpinned by the global concern for renewable energy production and meeting sustainable development goals (Pittock, 2010, Cole et al., 2014). Within the discourse of climate change mitigation, hydropower is widely considered as an affordable and "clean" source of renewable energy (Barros et al., 2011, Fletcher, 2010) and in line with the global agenda aims to reduce the carbon intensity of energy to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 7 (SDG-7) on affordable and clean energy. Although the current resurgence in hydropower projects is fuelled by green economy discourses to mitigate climate change, at the national and regional level these projects are pursued to meet objectives of economic growth and industrial energy demand (Ahlers et al., 2015). Many proposed dam sites are located in the isolated, economically marginal, and culturally diverse regions of the world such as the Nile river in North Africa and the Himalayan Rivers in South and Southeast Asia (Grumbine and Pandit, 2013, Cole et al., 2014). Within India, most of the projects are planned in the fast flowing rivers of the Eastern Himalayas.

1.2. Hydropower debates in the Eastern Himalayan borderland

Often called the water towers of Asia,[2] the rivers that run through the Himalayan region of China, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Bhutan are a potential source of energy through hydropower (Scott et al., 2019) (Figure 2). India's exploitable hydro-potential lies in the rivers of the relatively insulated, peripheral Eastern Himalayas (Subrahmanyam, 2013). With over 160 large and 900 small hydropower dams planned and in various stages of construction across all major river basins, this region is termed the country's "future powerhouse" (Menon et al., 2003, p. 3).

---

[2] The Himalayas, one of the highest mountain ranges of the world and rich in biodiversity (Myers et al. 2000), are the source of many important river systems (Xu et al. 2009).

Figure 2 Hydropower development planned in the Hindu Kush Himalayas.
Source: United Nations Environment Programme
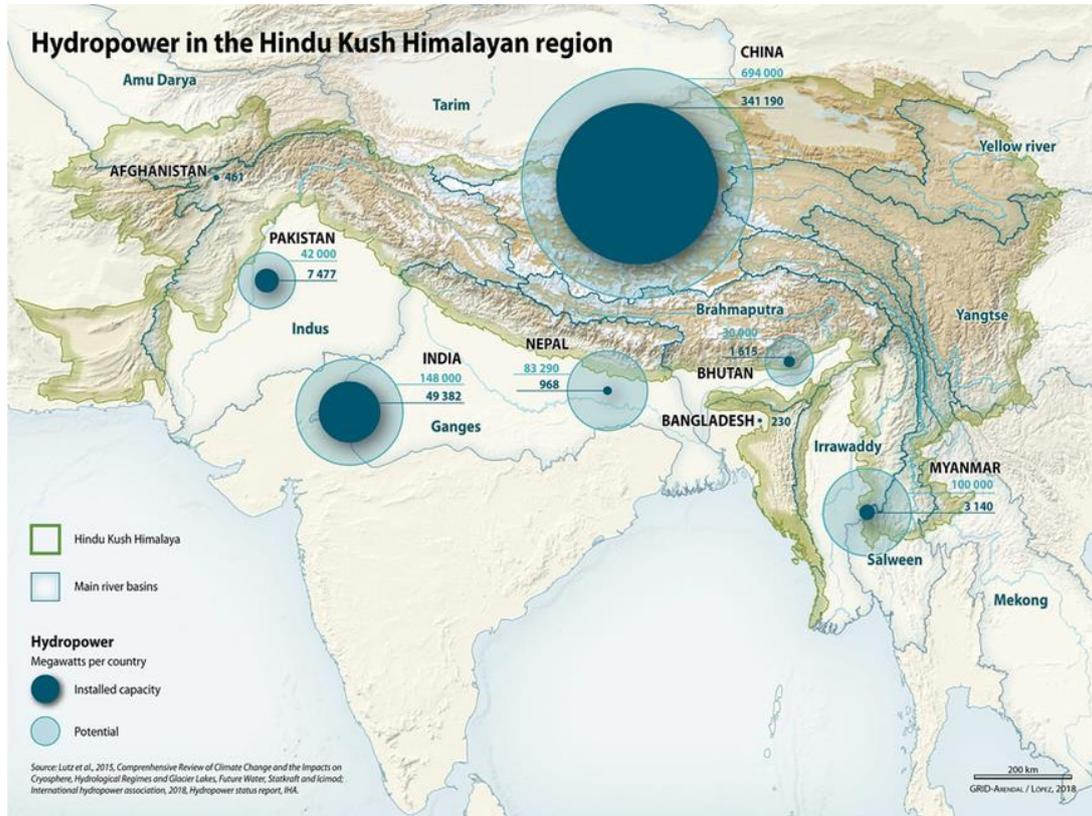
1.2.1. Discourses of hydropower: development and climate change

In the last two decades, hydropower dams have acquired significance for two reasons: the liberalisation of the Indian energy sector in 2003 and the quest of the global policy agenda on climate change for a 'clean' source of renewable energy (Dharmadhikary, 2008, Ahlers et al., 2015).[3] Harnessing hydropower is seen to meet the twin goals of greenhouse gas mitigation and energy production to meet the increasing need for power in the industries and cities of 'mainland' India (Government of India, 2008). International organizations and multilateral lending organizations have also supported this renewed focus on hydropower development (World Bank, 2007, IEA, 2017).

---

[3] Decisions related to the hydropower sector in India, and in other emerging economies like China, are also bolstered by the funding of hydroelectric projects via the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol which enables polluting Northern (Annex 1) countries to buy Certified Emission Reduction (carbon credit) certificates (CERs) from less developed countries to meet their climate commitments (Pittock, 2010, Haya & Parekh, 2011).

In India, liberalization of the national energy sector in 2003 renewed privatisation and deregulation in order to attract new investors to the renewable energy market (Dharmadhikary, 2008). Following this, state governments across the North Eastern region[4] promoted rapid approval of these projects without adequate social and environmental impact assessments (Vagholikar and Das, 2010, International Rivers, 2016b, Business Standard, 2013, Prasai and Surie, 2013).[5] After the new Bharatiya Janata Party-led (BJP) Union government assumed power in Delhi in May 2014, it adopted a policy to expedite the forest and environmental clearance processes necessary for many development projects throughout the country (Sharma, 2018). Despite reports on the impacts of existing dams highlighting the social and environmental concerns in the region (Menon, 2019, International Rivers, 2015, Baviskar, 2009, Rao, 2012), hydropower projects continue to be positioned as a form of green and renewable energy policy.

As the relatively biggest 'development' interventions in the Eastern Himalayas, these projects are seen to ameliorate infrastructural inadequacies and bring about social and economic progress in the region. Revenue from hydropower projects is seen by the state governments as a way to enable regional development as well as obtaining more financial autonomy and political influence from the centre (Vagholikar and Das, 2010, Menon et al., 2003, Joy et al., 2017). However, projects designed to generate energy for growing urban centres come at the cost of heightened risks to the local environment and livelihoods. Furthermore, since the people of the affected regions often gain very little from these projects, these interventions exacerbate inequality by unevenly distributing project costs and benefits (Dharmadhikary, 2008, Ahlers et al., 2015). In the Eastern Himalayas, dams are being commissioned and built in a region of high geological and seismological instability (Dharmadhikary, 2008, Tambe et al., 2011, Mukerjee, 2015). Concerns are also raised about the impact of climate change on the hydrogeological dynamics of the Himalayan region, which have a significant effect on geology, biodiversity and local livelihoods (Bandyopadhyay, 2009, Sharma et al., 2009, Pandit and Grumbine, 2012).

---

[4] The Eastern Himalayan states are common referred to as the North East.

[5] In May 2008, Jairam Ramesh, the former Minister for the Environment, used the term "MoU Virus" to describe the speed with which each document requiring approval for hydropower projects was signed by the Arunachal Pradesh government. https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/mou-virus-hits-arunachal-pradesh-33962. Accessed 10.01.2019.

While globally, hydropower is framed as a climate change mitigation strategy, the discourse driving hydropower development within India and in the Eastern Himalayan region, is more about development and modernization and less about clean energy, sustainability or resilience to climate change (Banerjee and Sood, 2012, Ahlers et al., 2015). Domestically, explicit attention to climate risks is hardly acknowledged in national government and donor strategies with regard to the impact of infrastructure construction (Dharmadhikary, 2008, Bawa et al., 2010). For example, the State Action Plan for Climate Change (SAPCC) for West Bengal, mentions hydropower development, but largely in the context of enabling sustainable growth in mountain states (Government of West Bengal, 2010). Despite these crucial concerns, national policy in India advocates hydropower development as a means of achieving energy security and fuelling economic growth at regional and national levels (Ahlers et al., 2015, Joy et al., 2017).

1.2.2. Regional dynamics and the colonial and postcolonial development context

The eastern Himalayan region comprises the hill districts of West Bengal and Assam, and the states of Sikkim, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura, and Arunachal Pradesh. Geographically on the far-eastern margins of India, the Eastern Himalayan borderland of India is surrounded by international boundaries and is connected only through a narrow 23km tract of land at Siliguri in West Bengal to mainland India (

Figure 3).

In some states, the dominance of geopolitical and national security concerns has resulted in an extreme form of militarization and the rule of civilian law is in abeyance (Saikia, 2014, McDuie-Ra, 2009).[6] The regional dynamics which affect governance and development primarily relate to its geographical and geopolitical location (Figure 4), and distinctive cultural demography to the mainland of India.

---

[6] The region shares 90 per cent of its borders with Nepal, Bhutan, China (Tibet), Myanmar, and Bangladesh, due to which national security concerns and militarisation dominate the region. For example, The Indian Army has been given extraordinary powers in counter-insurgency operations in the region, most notably through the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958 (AFSPA).

Figure 3 Himalayan states of India. Source: http://gbpihedenvis.nic.in/indian_him_reg.htm
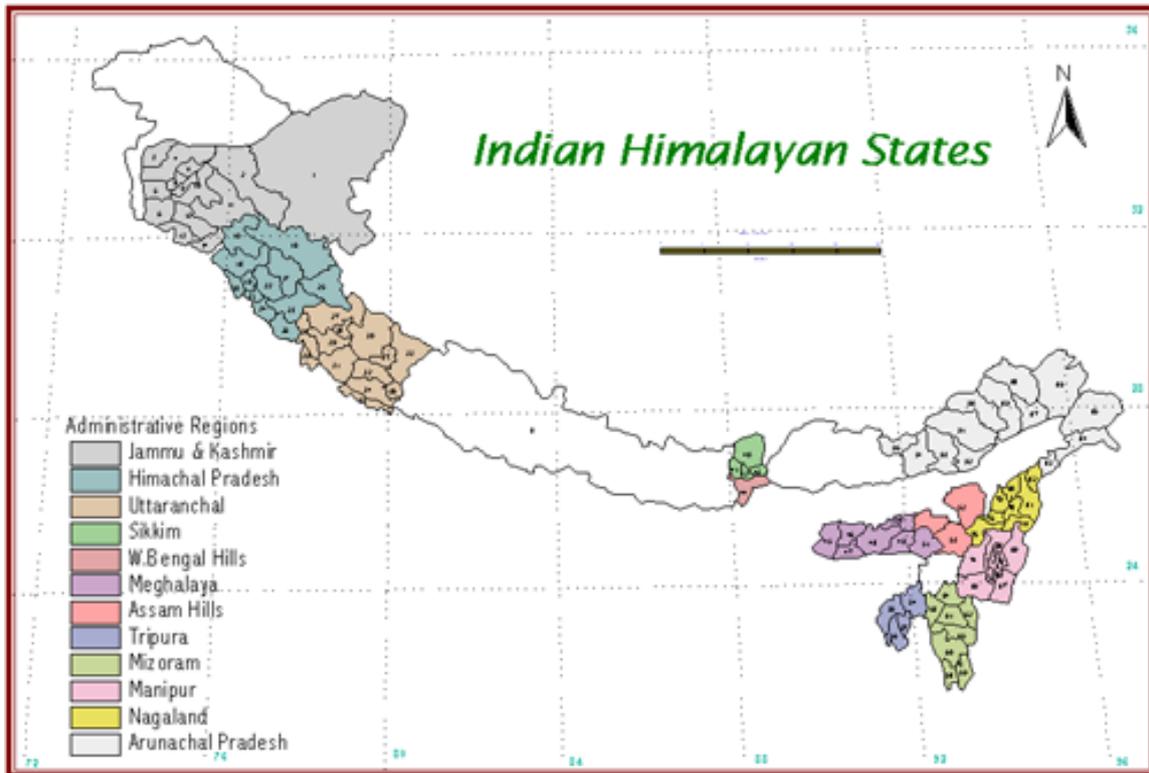
Figure 4 Eastern Himalayan region of India. Source MoDONER, 2008
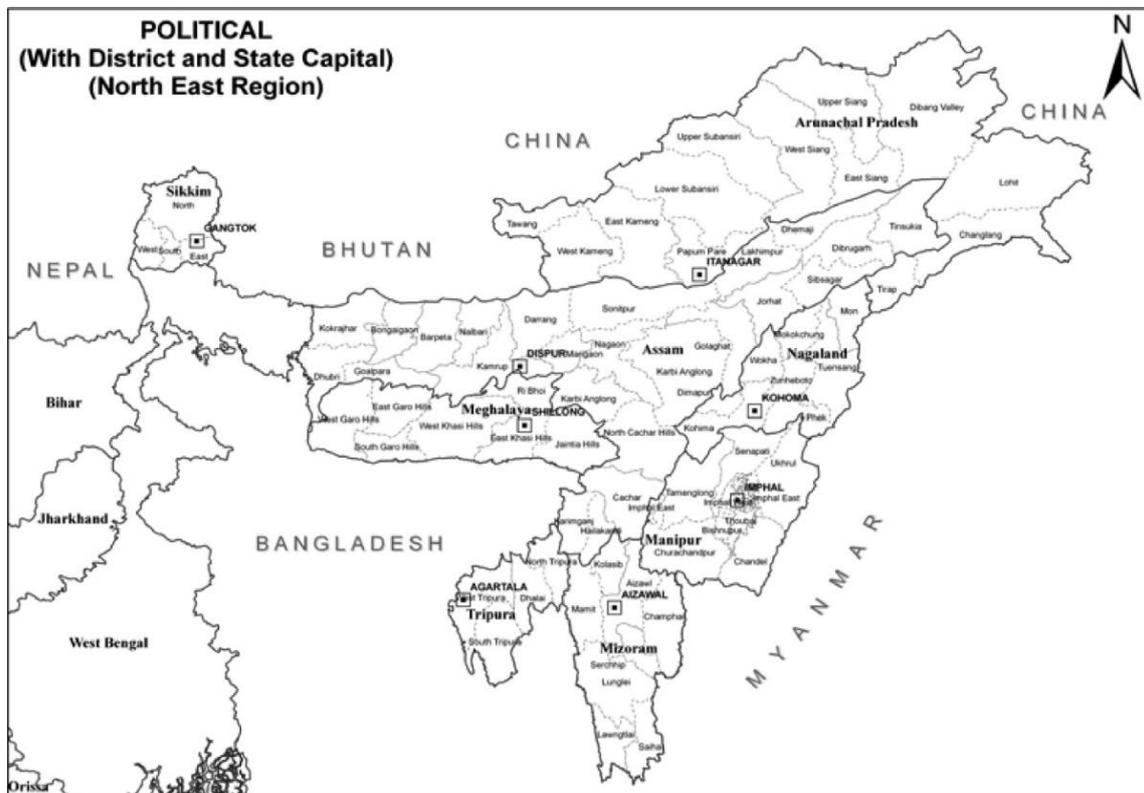
It is one of the least developed regions of the country and a site of deep political instability, ethnic unrest, and various separatist and secessionist movements (Bhaumik, 2004, Shimray, 2004, McDuie-Ra, 2008). The Indian state has undertaken various disputed measures in the region, such as increasing militarisation in some states, under the garb of incorporating remote regions into national structures, rendering the Eastern Himalayas politically fragile (Bhaumik, 2009, Baruah, 2005, Baruah, 2003b).

In national policies, the region is represented as 'resource rich', underdeveloped, and conflict-ridden region, inhabited by tribal communities left behind by India's development (MoDONER, 2008, p. 2).[7] The situation is further complicated by the tendency of the Indian state to treat this region of diverse geographical and cultural features and different levels of economic development as a single entity, 'the north east'. It is an ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous region with more than 145 tribal groups belonging to different ethnic groups as well as a diverse non-tribal population (Ali and Das, 2003). Another distinguishing feature is the cultural diversity, with 220 languages spoken in the region (Baruah, 2007). The result of such notions of homogeneity is that policies embedded within discourses of developmentalism and the larger goal of national integration, tend to overlook complex and differentiated historical, cultural and political contexts (McDuie-Ra, 2008, Chowdhury and Kipgen, 2013, Baruah, 2003a).

The region's contemporary politics are also shaped by its colonial past (Kipgen and Roy Chowdhury, 2016, Zou and Kumar, 2011, Karlsson, 2011). Significant here are the colonial systems of categorising communities into tribal (hills) and non-tribal (plains) populations (Chowdhury and Kipgen, 2013). Colonial policy prohibited entry of plains people to the hill areas to 'protect' the culture of 'indigenous communities' (Pathy, 1999). It has been argued that such protective and divisive measures not only led to the construction of hill tribes as 'isolated', 'backward' and 'primitive' but also resulted in permanent segregation between hills and plains (Das, 1989, Baruah, 1999). The hill areas were demarcated as 'non-regulated areas' and 'backward tracts' and governed as an exception to the rule in India. The Government of India Act of 1919 for example, provided the Governor-General power to 'declare any tract as

---

[7] These policies highlight that 'tribal conflicts' lead to underdevelopment and underdevelopment further leads to increase in 'tribal conflicts' (McDuie-Ra, 2008). It also emphasises that the presence of underdevelopment creates further conflict in the region (MoDONER, 2008: 19).

backward areas' (Bhaumik, 2009, p. 8). Simultaneously such policies also supported colonial control and extraction of resources of the region (Bennike, 2017).

The legacy of territorial and non-territorial forms of recognition of different groups went on become part of the postcolonial classification of the tribal population (Béteille, 1998, Baruah, 2008). After independence, policies for preferential rights to communities presumed to be tribals were envisaged under the Fifth Schedule and the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution to protect 'indigenous' communities. The ethnic groups of the wholly excluded areas of the colonial administration fall under the Sixth Schedule and are categorised as Scheduled Tribes. The provisions of Sixth Schedule (1950) of the Constitution provide for Autonomous District Councils, a decentralised form of governance arrangement (below the level of the state), in certain tribal areas, to administer customary laws over issues like land-use and social customs like marriage, property and inheritance rights (Karlsson, 2011). Hence, claims to indigeneity and ethnic membership are crucial factors as it determines access to rights and resources such as land ownership and access to state and political resources such as reservations in employment and educational institutions (Vandenhelsken and Karlsson, 2016).

The institutionalisation of territorial and non-territorial forms of recognition of different groups has resulted in the exclusions and marginalization of different groups (Nag, 2013, Baruah, 2003a, Sahni, 2002) Besides ethnic tribal groups, the region is also composed of a diverse non-tribal population, a substantial portion of which are migrants from other parts of India as well as the Indian subcontinent) recruited to serve the colonial administration and work on tea plantations by the British during colonial rule.[8] As these groups are not constitutionally recognised as having special provisions like the Scheduled tribes in India, they are denied formal access to land ownership.

It has been argued that cumulative effects of the territorial and non-territorial forms of recognition deployed in the region have contributed to various disputes from ethnic mobilizations for recognition as Scheduled tribes, the extension of the Sixth Schedule to new areas; to calls for ethnic homelands, and even secession from the Indian Union (Baruah, 2013, Middleton, 2015). Such policies have shaped regional political dynamics and mediated local politics of resistance and recognition that involve questions of indigenous rights and access to citizenship rights (Karlsson, 2013).

---

[8] There is also a significant cross border migration from Bangladesh (since the 1971 liberation war from Pakistan).

1.2.3. Research context: Darjeeling

Darjeeling district, where this study is conducted, is located in the northernmost part of the state of West Bengal in India, between the neighbouring countries of Nepal and Bhutan and the Indian state of Sikkim. It is part of the Eastern Himalayan range. It was acquired by the Bengal Presidency of British India in 1835 from Sikkim which was then an autonomous kingdom.[9] After independence, the district was brought under the provincial jurisdiction of the state of West Bengal for administrative convenience.

Darjeeling is a politically fragile region and has been subject to violent subnational struggles for separation from West Bengal for more than four decades. Economically, the majority of the population in the hills are employed as labourers in the tea gardens, with no legal right to land, and remain embedded in endemic poverty and experience disempowerment (Besky, 2014, Chettri, 2013). The region's underdevelopment and economic backwardness of the region are attributed to the ongoing injustices inflicted by the West Bengal administration ever since India gained independence from the British regime (Wenner, 2013). It is broadly divided into physiographic divisions of hills and the plains. The hilly region comes under Gorkha Territorial Administration (GTA) – a semi-autonomous body formed for the development of the area under the control of West Bengal. Section 3.5 in Chapter 3 describes the context of Darjeeling and the case study sites in further detail.

1.3. Research rationale: interrogating local support to hydropower projects in Darjeeling

There has been growing resentment across the Himalayan region against technocratic, top down hydropower development, which has resulted in conflict and contestation, most notably along cultural and ethnic identity lines (Sharma, 2018, Joshi and Huber, 2013, Chowdhury and Kipgen, 2013, Arora, 2008, Arora and Kipgen, 2012, Wangchuk, 2007, Kipgen, 2017). Local resistance has led to reassessment and even cancellation of projects in the Eastern Himalayan

---

[9] Sikkim eventually became incorporated as one of the states of the Indian Union in 1975 and due to its proximity to the North-eastern region and became a part of the Northeastern states in 2002.

states of Manipur, Meghalaya and Sikkim (Sharma, 2018, Arora and Kipgen, 2012, Huber and Joshi, 2015, Chowdhury and Kipgen, 2013). Studies examining these tactics and outcomes of resistance to hydropower development have focused primarily on the role of the state and how its practices in hydropower development shape local resistance. Arguing that looking at governance on the scale of the state alone obscures actors, processes and impacts, this thesis focuses on local governance structures in mediating outcomes and details how local politics and power structures mediate hydropower decision-making, outcomes and local responses. In doing so, the research advances an understanding about community support for hydropower development and sheds light on both localized and wider dynamics of hydropower decision making projects and processes.

While emerging studies of the region have already highlighted the heterogeneous nature of local contestation and responses to hydropower projects that include negotiations and accommodation, indifference and enthusiastic acceptance (Chettri, 2017, Ete, 2017, Dukpa et al., 2018, McDuie-Ra, 2011), the discussion is still centred on how ethnicity and indigeneity are used as a means to resist or establish claims from the projects. This thesis engages with these debates on responses to hydropower development by examining local responses of *support* for hydropower projects in Darjeeling. This is in contrast to the dominant narrative of local resistance to the hydropower projects.

By providing a grassroots perspective on governance and agency, this thesis also contributes to conceptualising wider issues on marginalisation, agency and development in a neglected space in the Himalayan region.

1.4. Conceptual background

This thesis engages with the governance of, and localised impacts and responses to hydropower development in marginalised locations of the Eastern Himalayas. Framed as a study of development and agency in marginal regions, this thesis draws upon human geography, political geography, and post-colonial scholarship in South Asia to situate the empirical research within ongoing debates on hydropower politics and the political ecology of development in the Himalayas.

The thesis takes political ecology as the theoretical entry point in its endeavour to understand context-specific development processes and outcomes (Robbins, 2004). In the history of political ecology, the ideas of frontiers and territoriality (Peluso and Lund, 2011) have been particularly influential in understanding governance of spaces, people and resources at the margins. The fourth chapter takes up these ideas to explore the legitimation of contested hydropower development in the Darjeeling region of the Eastern Himalayan margin. Moving away from the conventional political ecological analyses of environmental governance in relation to ecological conflicts and indigenous resistance and instead, draws on anthropological perspectives on everyday governance and practices (Fuller and Benei, 2009, Blundo and Le Meur, 2009) to link governance with notions of agency.

Everyday governance encompasses the processes through which different actors are motivated toward particular (shared or disparate) goals and the motivations and negotiations against which decisions are taken. This lens of everyday governance guides the fifth and the sixth chapters, which focus on the agency of local actors in supporting and mediating the approval of the hydropower projects. The sixth chapter explores the processes that define local political subjectivities through narratives from local power brokers who mediate hydropower project outcomes. Additionally, this chapter also brings ideas of margins and marginality from political geography to contextualise the study regionally

Finally, the discourse of precarity, described as a sense of insecurity, is a key theme of this thesis and features in all the chapters, receiving various degrees of attention. The concept of precarity (Waite, 2009, Ettlinger, 2007) is adopted to contextualise marginalisation in an experiential way by discussing how historical marginalisation, environmental degradation, and socio-economic deprivation have shaped local lives and livelihoods in Darjeeling. In the fifth chapter, precarity forms the key analytical frame, enabling an exploration of the micro politics underpinning the decisions of the communities who supported the hydropower projects.

1.5. Research objective and questions

The key objective of this thesis is to understand how development is negotiated and agency articulated at the state's margins. Consequently, this study derived three research questions that framed the development of the empirical chapters:

- How do socio-political context and development discourses legitimise top-down development practices in hydropower governance in Darjeeling?

- What are the impacts of and responses to hydropower projects and how is agency exerted in response to these projects?

- How do local governance structures reshape power relations in hydropower governance at the local level?

This thesis answers these questions through three empirical chapters written in the form of papers, each broadly corresponding to one research question. The first empirical chapter (Chapter 4) considers the discourse and socio-political context that legitimises top-down hydropower governance in Darjeeling. Chapter 5 examines local responses and explores how agency is exerted in light of different perspectives on experiences. The third, Chapter 6, examines the role of local politics in mediating hydropower decision-making at the local level. The empirical chapters are briefly summarised in Section 1.7.

1.6. A note on personal motivation

The motivations that underpin this research are a combination of personal objectives, academic interests, and professional experience. This research began as an exploration into understanding community reactions to hydropower development projects in Darjeeling. It was premised on my observation that, unlike in the hydropower projects along the Teesta River in the neighbouring state of Sikkim, there seemed to be no visible concern or resistance against the destructive state-led hydropower agenda in Darjeeling. It was guided by the need to understand why there was a lack of contestation of hydropower projects in Darjeeling despite the livelihood losses and severe environmental degradation that the projects had engendered.

The seeds of this thesis were sown during my work with communities living close to a protected area and a dam project in Darjeeling where I saw that the power extracted from the river went directly to the industrial centres in the plains, while the hill villages continue to live without electricity. I was drawn to investigate such injustices as forced marginalisation and deprivation, but over time, have come to realise that, at least in Darjeeling, concepts like environmental justice and human rights sometimes seem irrelevant to the realities of an area where basic issues

of belonging and recognition, particularly for the poor, are unmet. At a personal level, as someone belonging to Darjeeling, this thesis is a bid to find answers to questions of normalised and internalised notions of marginalisation and a crisis of identity, and how they intersect with the larger political economy of development, conflicting political interests, rhetoric of underdevelopment, and rampant environmental degradation. It is personally relevant to me, as it emerges from lived and shared experiences of a marginalised community.

1.7. Thesis outline

In addition to the introduction, the thesis consists of six chapters.

The first chapter provides an overview of hydropower development in the region and attendant controversies. It focuses on the debates around hydropower governance and responses, to which this thesis makes a contribution.

The second chapter reviews the three sets of theories and concepts framing this thesis, which are subsequently employed in Chapters 3, 4, and 5. It begins by bringing political ecology to the question of environmental governance, in order to explicate the effects of development projects on communities in peripheral locations of the Eastern Himalayas. It then proceeds to explore the concept of everyday governance as understood in postcolonial and anthropological studies, highlighting the crucial relevance of the concept of informality in relation to local practices of governance. It concludes by discussing the concept of precarity from a geographical perspective and its significance to this study.

Chapter 3 presents the research approach and design, detailing the specific methods and data collection processes used to carry out this research. It also details data analysis process to demonstrate the study's methodological rationale. Further considerations on the researcher's positionality, the challenges encountered and negotiated in the field, and the limitations of fieldwork are discussed. The second part of the chapter presents the background of the Darjeeling area, where the study is located, and the hydropower projects in the Teesta River.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 present the empirical findings of the research.

Chapter 4 is an examination of hydropower governance at the margins. It examines the historical and political context of Darjeeling to demonstrate how development projects are legitimised in an economically and politically marginalised space. Drawing on theories of

frontiers and territoriality in political ecology, this chapter forwards the notion of unruly space to locate the ongoing processes of exclusion, political marginalisation, and uneven power relationships. The central argument of this chapter is that, contrary to the dominant narrative of local development through hydropower, top-down uneven modes of governance enable local social and ecological precarity.

Chapter 5 focuses on two hydropower affected communities to understand why they actively supported the hydropower projects. It discusses their practices of agency and describes how and with what implications they supported the projects. In constructing the argument, this paper engages with ideas of precarity and informality drawing on critical geography literature. Drawing on interviews with local communities, this chapter demonstrates that support for the projects was a response mediated by local circumstances of material need, geographical isolation, economic and political marginalisation, and controversial hydropower governance.

Chapter 6 nuances the debate on governance and agency by focusing on the local politics surrounding hydropower development. The central aim of this paper is to unpack the local politics involved in shaping power relations around hydropower governance. It describes the historical trajectory of contested political regimes and the persistence of political affiliations that influence everyday governance in Darjeeling. In the case of hydropower projects such political dynamics served to weaken collective agency. Drawing on narratives of local power brokers, this paper demonstrates that party politics have become a vehicle for acquiring short-term benefits and a medium for people to voice grievances. This chapter locates the research within the geographical and postcolonial literature on margins and marginality.

The final chapter (Chapter 7) summarises the findings of this thesis and discusses the theoretical and empirical contributions of the study. It concludes with some insights for policy and future research in the region.

Chapter 2: Theoretical background and conceptual review

This chapter reviews the theoretical perspectives that underpin this thesis, namely political ecology, everyday governance, and precarity. While the theoretical perspectives of this thesis drew upon a broad range of disciplines such as political geography, anthropology, and critical development studies, the study's scope is bounded by a focus on hydropower governance and local people's agency in a context of marginalisation and precarity.

The chapter is divided into two parts. Part one (Section 2.1) discusses key themes of power and governance in political ecology. These are environmental narratives and modernisation discourses (Section 2.1.1), water governance and political ecology of dams (Section 2.1.2) and centre margin dynamics (Section 2.1.3) in geography. Within Section 2.1.3, ideas of frontiers, margins and territoriality are elaborated upon. Part two of this chapter (Section 2.2.) discusses ideas relating to agency from the margins as understood in postcolonial and anthropological debates on development. Drawing on the literature on everyday state, Section 2.2.2 emphasises the notion of informal networks of power in relation to everyday practices of governance. To conceptualise agency from the margins, Section 2.2.3 delves on the concept of precarity.

These ideas of development discourses, centre margin dynamics, everyday governance and precarity inform the conceptual basis for the three empirical chapters of this thesis. In the final section, these concepts are brought together to explain how these concepts are used to understand the responses to hydropower development and governance in Darjeeling, India.

2.1. Political ecology: understanding governance and power

The rich body of political ecology research is centrally concerned with the study of human-environment relationships (Peet et al., 2011, Robbins, 2004) with a special focus on unequal power relations underlying environmental governance. In contrast to the normative view of governance as a state-centric process of decision-making and regulation, in political ecology, the term 'environmental governance' is used to interrogate the politics of resources with an "explicit consideration of relations of power" (Robbins, 2004, p. 12). Political ecology research developed in the 1970s from the fields of cultural ecology, development geography and natural disasters research (Bryant, 1998). It emerged as a response to apolitical analyses of development and environmental change to challenge popular environmental narratives of

poor land use practices and population growth in the developing countries (Robbins, 2004, Watts and Peet, 2004). Rather than a coherent theory, political ecology is generally considered as a lens or an approach that attempts to explain human-environmental interactions by historical, political, economic, social and cultural contextualisation (Robbins, 2004). It is defined as "an approach, to unravel the political forces at work in environmental access, management and transformation" (Robbins 2012, 3). The idea underlying political ecology is that environmental transformations have social, political, and economic causes (Blaikie, 1989). Consequently, the costs and benefits associated with these changes are unequally distributed among different actors and groups, reinforcing and reproducing existing social and economic inequalities (Bryant and Bailey, 1997).

2.1.1. Environmental narratives and modernisation discourses

Within political ecology, power relations in environmental management and governance are commonly explained through environmental narratives and modernisation discourses in development. Environmental narratives are frequently repeated explanations of environmental problems which are often seen as facts (Forsyth, 2004, Leach and Mearns, 1996). Subsequently, such narratives get reproduced to serve the interests of particular elite groups and influence policymaking (Leach and Mearns, 1996). Similarly, discourses are a set of historically, socially, and institutionally specific structuring of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs of knowledge formations that become ways of acting in the world (Scott, 1998). Discourses are produced under conditions of unequal power, and power is also exercised through discourse (Escobar, 1995).

Early political ecology research had a strong focus on environmental narratives and power relations between the Global North and the South (Stott and Sullivan, 2000). In their foundational work, Blaikie and Brookfield (1987) examined the social and institutional causes of land degradation across developing countries to reveal that broader social and political "chains of explanation" including global markets and access to resources result in excluding poor farmers. They contended that marginality- geographic, political, economic, and social inequality limited the livelihood options of poor farmers and lead them to engage in unsustainable activities (Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987, Robbins, 2004). This deep and contextualised understanding of soil erosion challenged the representation of Nepal's environmental crisis provided by Erik Eckholm's (1976) 'Theory of Himalayan Environmental

Degradation' (THEC) which blamed rapid erosion on farmers' ignorance, population pressure and commercialisation leading to deforestation and environmental degradation (Blaikie et al., 2002). Blaikie and Muldavin (2004, p. 521) argued that theories like THEC "drew upon notions of backwardness, technological incompetence, and neo-Malthusianism." Such arguments were also applied to the Indian Himalayan context where local farming practices like shifting cultivation have been blamed for ecological degradation (Sivaramakrishnan, 1995, Ives, 2004).

Power relations in these early studies was largely analysed from a structural and political economy perspective and political ecology came to be defined as an approach that "combines the concerns of ecology and a broadly defined political economy" (Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987, p. 17). In the 1990s, political ecology started to broaden from political-economic structures to include insights from post-structuralism. These works laid emphasis on knowledge power relations to emphasise that developmental knowledge was produced and shaped by discourse or dominant forms of knowledge (Forsyth, 2004). In development theory these knowledge relations are largely categorised as 'modernisation discourses' and studies focused on the complex and adverse effects of mainstream, neoliberal development in developing countries (Escobar, 1995, Peet et al., 2011). In this approach, development policy and practice is conceptualised as a 'strategy of modern power and social control' (Peet and Hartwick, 2009, p. 198). This perspective held that national and regional development processes and opportunities were frequently shaped by narratives embedded in the broader global environmental and development discourse (Stott and Sullivan, 2000, p. 3).

However, the unidirectional flow of power (and knowledge) from 'developed' to 'developing' countries and depiction of the poor as powerless subjects 'to be developed' were contested by scholars working in South Asia (Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal, 2003). Studies based in India, for example, showed that dominant development discourses were contested by subaltern groups who deployed their subjectivities and actions by co-opting or challenging top-down agendas (Baviskar, 1997, Agrawal, 2005) Furthermore, the assumption of lack of agency among national governments to shape development processes in developing countries the failed to explain environmental issues at local scales (Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal, 2003). Amidst this critique of hegemonic development agenda, political ecology analysis shifted to include the understanding of perspectives and interests of a wide range of actors that may promote more contextually appropriate and marginalised perspectives (Forsyth, 2004). This approach stressed that institutions and actors at different scales are essential to account for "the ways in

which they operate in historically and culturally constituted fields of power" (Peluso and Watts, 2001, p. 5) and that the effect of environmental change on society is always socially mediated (Robbins, 2004).

In the decades following the 1990s, poststructuralist thought has had deep influence on the field of political ecology leading to increasing analyses of multiple forms of power and knowledge relations (Forsyth, 2004). This strand of work explores the ontological and epistemological processes of the construction of environmental knowledge and questions the dominant claims related to the drivers and consequences of environmental issues (Forsyth, 2004, Robbins, 2011). Power in this perspective is not only based on discourse but is seen as exercised through negotiations over discourses, identity and authority (Robbins, 2004, Peet and Watts, 2004, Escobar, 1995). In the context of large infrastructures like dams and hydropower projects, studies inspired by a post-structural approach has led to the development of distinct and diverse field of water governance (Bakker, 2012, Mehta, 2007, Mustafa, 2007, Swyngedouw, 2009, Swyngedouw et al., 2002, Budds, 2013, Mollinga, 2014, Sultana, 2013, Budds and Sultana, 2013, Truelove, 2011). Some of these perspectives are briefly discussed in the next section.

2.1.2. Water governance and the political ecology of dams

Dams are complex infrastructures that control the flow of water and fundamentally transform natural environments with implications for food, water and local livelihoods. Presented as solutions to national energy problems, the planning and development of hydraulic infrastructures (dams and irrigation-based schemes) remains a contested process. Despite opposition and resistance, however, dams continue to remain a central tool for development particularly in the Global South (Dharmadhikary, 2008, Fox and Sneddon, 2019, Dye, 2018). In water governance research, a political ecology lens has helped understand power and governance practices by emphasising the discursive dimension of dam building. These relate to the importance of studying the material and ideological processes that shape construction of these infrastructures.

Large dams for example, are regarded as embodiments of economic development and technological progress (Molle et al., 2009, Sultana, 2013) and intertwined with discourses of

modernity linked to the nation building and state power (Menga and Swyngedouw, 2018, Scott, 2006, Kaika, 2006, Swyngedouw, 2003, Menga, 2015).

For example, hydraulic infrastructures through delivery of irrigation and electricity generation became central to the modernising project of India in the early 1960s. It was linked to the idea of 'national progress' evident through displacement of population by acquisition of land for the purpose of development (Roy, 1999, Somayaji and Talwar, 2011). Simultaneously they also became symbolic of economic and technological progress and was endorsed as long-term strategic investment for achieving water and energy security and multiple social benefits (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2002, Biswas and Tortajada, 2001).[10] Discussions on large-scale hydropower development in Asia shows these projects continuing to assume symbolic significance in the discourse of modernity and state- building (Blaikie and Muldavin, 2004, Baviskar, 1995, Bakker, 1999, Matthews, 2012, D'Souza, 2008).

Large dams are interventions that are inherently political as they straddle a wide range of public interests (e.g. energy sufficiency) and private interests (jobs, local development); as well as affect different groups at different scales differentially. To investigate the knowledge that mediates environmental resource use and access between different groups and interests, critical perspectives on infrastructure in contemporary water governance focus on the politics of scale (Mustafa, 2007, Swyngedouw, 2004). The politics of scale emphasise the necessity of researching dams across multiple, interlinked levels to understand how different actors and their attitudes favour particular courses of action (Molle, 2007, Baghel and Nüsser, 2010). For example, Nusser (2003) in his critical review of the political ecology of large dams considers the promotion, construction, and contesting of large dams as taking place in a politicised environment, which includes multiple actors with different interests that include states and governmental institutions, associations of dam-building industry, funding institutions, non-governmental organisations and well as the affected people. The politics of scale illustrate how power, discourse and knowledge circulate through definite channels to understand how unequal power relations are reproduced as environmental change at all scales (Baghel and Nüsser, 2010).

---

[10] Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, called large dams the" temples of modern India" in his speeches in the early 1950's which expressed a wish of a 'move away from sacred river, to dams as temples, to create a "modern" India' (Baghel 2014, 72) Baghel, R. (2014) 'Misplaced knowledge: Large dams as an Anatopism in South Asia', *Large Dams in Asia*: Springer, pp. 15-31.

More recently, a growing body of critical literature further extends this analysis to include the social and cultural dimensions underpinning power relations arising from large-scale infrastructural development through the notion of 'hydro social cycle' (Swyngedouw, 2009, Linton and Budds, 2014). The hydro-social cycle is defined as a 'socio-natural process by which water and society make and remake each other, over space and time' (Linton and Budds, 2014, p. 175). This body of work argues that the natural and social processes cannot be separated from each other and emphasises the need to study the circulation of water in its social context (Budds, 2009, Bakker, 2012, Swyngedouw, 2009, Mollinga, 2014) to reveal the intertwined 'flows of water and power relations' (Linton and Budds, 2014). The larger literature on hydro social theory aims to combine the historical geographical production process of social nature to provide insights into the wider processes of capital accumulation, uneven development and social inequality, and the power relations therein through which hydraulic infrastructures are justified (Swyngedouw, 2009, Linton and Budds, 2014, Boelens et al., 2016).

While this thesis does not focus on questions of the role of large infrastructures in water governance, it will go on to show that the questions of scale and modernisation discourses in legitimising dams' development are pertinent to understand the factors that mediate hydropower governance and micropolitics, and the local responses of support to hydropower projects. This thesis focuses on the historical and political economic processes and discourses that are constructed and deployed to justify and support hydropower development. Arguments on environmental governance that demonstrate how uneven state–society relations emerge from historical, political, and geographical processes and are linked to parallel debates on centre margin dynamics in geography.

2.1.3. Centre margin dynamics: frontiers, margins and territoriality

The centre margin debates in geography focuses on the historical, spatial, and territorial dimensions of uneven power relations that precede, constitute, shape and transform natural human and natural environments. Such analyses often forefront claims on how space is conceived and rendered as centres of production and extraction and fit into a larger body of literature on resource exploitation, and social and environmental conflicts in political ecology (see for example Peluso and Watts, 2001, Peet and Watts, 2004). Central to these debates is colonialism and the current global economic system based on capitalist modes of production

of transformation of nature into commodified resources (Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987, Escobar, 1995, Peet and Watts, 2004).

In political ecology, the relationship between the margins and the centre is often articulated potently through the ideas of territoriality and frontiers. Territoriality is described as a strategic tool to control a territory or a geographic space by the state (Elden, 2010), while frontiers are characterised as marginal spaces key to state expansion and economic activity (Li, 2014). Frontiers are defined as "areas remote from political centres which hold strategic significance or economic potentials for human exploitation and are contested by social formations of unequal power" (Geiger, 2008, p. 78). Territoriality frames state claims to and practices around land, resources and subjects while the notion of frontiers helps legalise these claims (Elden, 2013).

Frontiers can broadly mean to have two connotations: that of a boundary of a geographic region signifying geopolitical significance or as a resource or a capitalist frontier, although the two ideas are not mutually exclusive and exist together. Political ecology studies primarily explore extractive landscapes or resource frontiers in the rural global South (Peet and Watts, 2004, Peluso and Watts, 2001). Resource frontiers signify contested landscapes where intensive contestation over land and resources occurs due to diverse development trajectories (Tsing, 2003, Barney, 2009, Fold and Hirsch, 2009, Peluso and Lund, 2011, Korf et al., 2013).

The concept of frontiers has been useful to account for various processes of disenfranchisement, dispossession, and marginalisation resulting from capitalist accumulation by states and private sector actors (e.g. Le Billon, 2017, Watts, 2004), which produce dramatic changes in the socio cultural landscapes (Peluso and Lund, 2011) and new patterns of marginalisation and livelihood insecurity (Massey, 1999). These studies have explored, for example, the networks and circuits of labour involved in resource extraction (Bennike, 2017, Li, 2010), or examined how states construct and control forested landscapes in South east Asia (Vandergeest and Peluso, 1995, Barney, 2009).

In the discipline of political geography, the notion of frontiers is defined in relation to the nation-state's jurisdictional limits and is primarily understood in socio-spatial and geopolitical terms (Paasi, 2003). Frontiers represents a space – a boundary of a geographic region such as borderlands and remote areas and forest zones that are often ambiguously

within state control (Harris, 2013, Gellner, 2013) as well as the subjects, things and social process that constitute it (Paasi, 2003). They are described as sites of institutional plurality and patchiness,' (Goodhand et al., 2016, p. 820) and critical zones of state control and national imagination. Hence, the ordering of space into centre and margins in this view is related to sovereign power and used to examine state, society, and space interactions (Baud and Van Schendel, 1997, Scott, 2010).

While frontiers remain keyways to frame marginal and remote spaces, frontier thinking in the scholarship on the political economy of the global South is applied as a figurative approach to borders calling attention to various forms of exclusion from the state. Here, the notion of frontier relates to marginality as understood not only in spatial, territorial or economic terms but more broadly in terms of structures of power that encompass state, economy and institutions within society (Corbridge et al., 2005, Das and Poole, 2004b, Williams et al., 2011). This perspective on the wider literature on the everyday state and governance will be explored in more detail in the subsequent section on agency from the margins (Section 2.2).

The various perspectives on frontiers and margins provide ways of thinking the historically, spatially and economically embedded nature of relations between the region in question and the centre of power in a country. Such an understanding, of contested borderland spaces as frontiers and territoriality as devices of state power, is crucial to the understanding of making of territories and regimes of rule and governance in the region.

In the Eastern Himalayan margins, the complexities of place, space, regimes and rule of governance are deeply entrenched in the centre margin dynamics. These particularities primarily relate to its ethnic distinctiveness to mainland India as well as the geopolitical location and geographical remoteness at the physical margins from India's centre of power (Vandenhelsken et al., 2017). While it became an early example of resource frontier in the colonial era for heavy extraction of commodities like tea and timber for the colonial state (Xaxa, 1985, Bennike, 2017, Majumdar, 2016); its geopolitical location has been a central challenge to state sovereignty and political power in India (Guyot-Réchard, 2013, Zou and Kumar, 2011, Bhaumik, 2009).

The distance to the centre, lack of development, the forcible integration and the governing structures put in place influences the experience of the state and has contributed to the

ambivalence against the Indian state (Karlsson, 2011, Karlsson, 2013, Suykens, 2013, Baruah, 2005) and made it 'one of South Asia's most contested space'(McDuie-Ra, 2009, p. 255). Demand for ethnic homelands and other separatist and conflicts over control of natural resources revolve around these dynamics (Baruah, 2003b, Baruah, 2003a, Bhaumik, 2004, McDuie-Ra, 2008). In return, the framing of the region as difficult to govern, conflict prone and underdeveloped and the communities as backward enhances the legitimacy of the Indian state to unequivocally formulate development policies for the tribals of the region (Baruah, 2007, MoDONER, 2008).

The characterization and implications of centre margins dynamics in the region are key to understand the larger structural context of marginalisation and conflict in the region as well as regimes of rule and governance, and of regional development. The attention to centre margin dynamics provides insights into broader processes at work that imbues the state with the authority and legitimacy to exploit resources from the margins for the benefit of elites at the centre. Hydropower projects are a key part of this development trajectory.

A focus on centre margin dynamics also helps understand how margins are generated, the kinds of dynamics they produce, and how they constitute the state (and vice versa). It offers valuable insights into the ways in which historical power imbalances, geopolitical transformations and complexities of place and current (neoliberal) processes reproduce conflict and territorialised identities in the region. In Chapter 4, this thesis engages with the application of these ideas to discourses of hydropower governance and its implications at the local level.

2.2. Agency from the margins

Broadly, agency can be understood as the human capacity for action. It manifests in various kinds of actions encompassing practical, subjective and embodied factors and operates relationally within and through social cultural contexts (Bourdieu, 1977, Giddens, 1984, Ahearn, 2001). Accounts of agency in political ecology are highly influenced by narratives of community-led environmental conflicts against state or corporate led development initiatives like mining and infrastructure projects. These conflicts largely focus on a broad range of grassroots resistance movements primarily by Indigenous and marginalised groups over

environmental resource use detrimental to them and their livelihoods (Del Bene et al., 2018, Martinez-Alier et al., 2010, Bebbington, 2012). Studies highlight unequal power relations and emphasize the different values and meanings that determine human-nature interactions of differentiated actors (Escobar, 1998, Martinez-Alier, 2003). Given the emphasis on neoliberalism and modernity and the centrality of the state's role in terms of controlling the environment, agency in political ecology is largely conceptualised in terms of resistance against state led agendas of development (Dwivedi, 1999, Somayaji, 2008, Oliver-Smith, 2010, Pattnaik, 2013, Shah et al., 2019).

In India, large-scale development projects such as dams have been accompanied by popular resistance movements by subaltern communities such as *adivasis*. In these cases, the cultural critique of development is commonly evoked to explain the politics of resistance by subaltern groups marginalised by the process of development (Sivaramakrishnan, 1998, Dwivedi, 1999, Baviskar, 2007). However, in recent decades, the one-dimensional viewpoint and development-resistance dichotomy is being increasingly questioned as failing to recognise the intra-community differences (Baviskar, 2003, Agrawal, 1995, Agrawal and Gibson, 1999).

In geography and anthropology, agency is more than resistance to modernity or development but with making do within society in everyday responses to marginality (Das et al., 2004, McNay, 2004). In this view, the idea of lived experience is essential to account for agency as structural powers reveal themselves in the 'lived reality of social relations' (McNay, 2004, p. 177). The next section examines agency from the margins drawing from the wider literature on the everyday state or the anthropology of the state.

To conceptualise power, agency, and the 'state', studies situated in postcolonial states, particularly that of South Asia, have sought to approach the state from 'its margins'
(Das and Poole, 2004a, Fuller and Harriss, 2001, Sharma and Gupta, 2009). This perspective pays attention to how the state is made from its margins through narratives and practices of those that constitute and is governed by the state (Gupta, 1995). It highlights that state actions are not mapped into passive populations and focuses on how people on the margins of the state negotiate the practices and institutions that this situation forces upon them (Das and Poole, 2004a). It decentres the state to emphasise the importance of studying local interactions and processes to focus on how people on the margins of the state negotiate the practices and institutions (Gupta, 1995, Fuller and Harriss, 2001).

The literature on everyday state and governance particularly (but not exclusively) in postcolonial states serves as a conceptual starting point in the debate on understanding agency from the margins. It focuses on the multiple and contradictory ways in which the state is experienced by citizens and draws attention to the forms of agency mobilised by actors that shape access to the state (Sharma and Gupta, 2009, Corbridge et al., 2005). This thesis draws on this perspective to understand the situated hydropower politics in Darjeeling and examine the informal practices of local power brokers who mediate access, claims, and project outcomes.

2.2.1. The everyday state and practices of governance

To examine state-society relations in developing countries, researchers have articulated the concept of the 'everyday state' (Gupta, 1995, Corbridge et al., 2005, Fuller and Benei, 2009), which argues that state-society interactions in Southern contexts cannot be fully captured by conventional theorisations of the state as an undisputed unitary entity distinct from society (Migdal, 2001), but has to be understood through the routine *everyday* practices of bureaucracy and politics (Sharma and Gupta, 2009, Das et al., 2004). Scholars propose cultural explanations to explain underlying differences between modern states as understood in the West and the contradictory practices, norms and representations of the state that occur in the Global South (see Fuller and Harriss, 2001).

The literature on the Indian 'everyday state' (Corbridge et al., 2005, Fuller and Benei, 2009) and the 'anthropology of the state'(Sharma and Gupta, 2009) adopts an ethnographic approach to explore how the state manifests itself in the lives of the people. In the context of rural India, studies have focused on the routine practices of bureaucracy and politics to demonstrate how different forms of authority and power structures intersect with what is perceived as 'the state' (Das et al., 2004, Sharma and Gupta, 2009, Mathur, 2016). Gupta (1995), for example, explores encounters with the state through everyday discourses of corruption and the practices of local level state actors in North India. He creates an image of a fragmented state composed of multiple state actors to demonstrate that political processes that operate within state and society are porous in nature (Gupta, 1995). Similarly (Mathur, 2016), through the continuous bureaucratic performance of state officials through meetings and writing letters, reveals how the state reveals and presents itself through everydayness of bureaucratic life. She navigates

the everyday production of laws and regulations it intends to implement in a remote hill town of a borderland Himalayan district, in the northern Indian state of Uttarakhand.

Corresponding to studies of 'everyday state', a parallel body of work in the concurrent field of 'everyday governance' looks at practices of not just the state but also of non-state actors. Everyday governance is defined as "the actual practices of how interests are pursued and countered, authority exercised and challenged, and power institutionalised and undermined" (Le Meur and Lund, 2001). From this perspective, governance is understood as something that occurs, not just within, but also beyond the sphere of state and demonstrates the multiple and contradictory ways in which the state is experienced by citizens.

Research on everyday governance focuses more on the ambivalent territory of state-society interactions to emphasise themes of 'informality', 'corruption', or 'immigration practices' to document inequalities in access to and provision of basic services, and claims to space and resources (Sharma and Gupta, 2009). It draws attention to a wide and diverse range of often subversive or illegal practices undertaken by people who are engaged in navigating interactions with the state (Witsoe, 2012, Berenschot, 2010). Much of these studies focus on informal networks and brokers as key agents who get state institutions to work in the interest of the marginalised (Corbridge et al., 2005, Berenschot, 2010, Witsoe, 2012).

In the case of development projects, scholars have noted how local governance is mediated by networks of political patronage and bureaucracy (Gupta, 1995, Corbridge et al., 2005). For example, in a detailed exploration of state-society relations in rural India, Corbridge et al. (2005) show how people access and use the state through political intermediaries. In the context of urban informality, Anand (2011) provides an account of the strategies adopted by poor urban residents to access water in Mumbai and demonstrates how settlers successfully liaise with elected councillors to secure access to a piped supply in a locality that was not legally entitled to services. These studies suggest that state and society suggest a false dichotomy and underscore the importance of informal connections in shaping state society relations as the delivery of service continues by informal means in the form of mediators, brokers or fixers (Witsoe, 2012, Piliavsky, 2014).

Focusing on ethnographic explorations of interactions between citizens and different state and non-state actors, this body of work also demonstrates the multiple and contradictory ways in which people experience the state and establish the 'blurred boundaries' between state and society (Gupta, 1995). It is argued, that these blurred boundaries and 'entangled geographies'

of state and society open up spaces for political activity, allowing the agency of various actors to shape and differently negotiate the dynamics of power (Das et al., 2004, p. 19). Intermediaries and brokerage practices such as patron-client relations, are one representation of this blurred boundary (Berenschot, 2010). Critically, state-society relationships have to be understood contextually, with careful consideration to elements of informality, such as patronage or clientelism (Berenschot, 2010, Piliavsky, 2014).

2.2.2. Informal networks of power and political agency

Anthropologists and geographers working on the everyday state in South Asia have advocated for understanding corruption as productive in everyday practice especially in the absence of provisions by the state through formal channels (Berenschot, 2010, Witsoe, 2012, Piliavsky, 2014). This work aims to deconstruct western-oriented assumptions of corruption associated with patronage relationships as an impediment for development and advocates for recognising corruption as culturally and historically produced (Piliavsky, 2014, Doshi and Ranganathan, 2019). Thus, patronage relations are depicted as important avenues for the poor and marginalised to get state institutions to work in their interest of the poor. The implicit conclusion of these studies is that brokers or brokerage practices remains crucial in determining developmental outcomes at the local level. While such informal forms of politics may contain within them inherently unequal structures of power, they are nonetheless expressions of political agency to access the state, rather than deviations from set norms (Piliavsky, 2014, Berenschot, 2011, Berenschot and Van Klinken, 2018).

The scholarship on the everyday state and everyday governance not only contributes to nuanced understandings of the state but also, through its work on practices, draws attention to the forms of agency exercised or mobilised by actors and an understanding of how these actions are constrained and enabled by social and material relations. The state is thus, perceived as an entity with effects that cannot be separated from society and hints as the presence of the 'everyday state', and practices through 'everyday governance'.

Questions of informality are central to the context of the case studies of this thesis, which focuses on hydropower-affected communities living at the margins of society, typically wage labourers with no claim to landownership who are disadvantaged in multiple, mutually reinforcing ways. More broadly, literature on informal networks of power also opens onto a larger strand of research, which fleshes out the politics of precarity by showing how intimately

implicated the state is in the everyday life of India's marginalised class. In that regard, this thesis draws on the concept of precarity to describe the phenomenon experienced and resisted by marginal populations at the geographical and socio-political peripheries of state power.

2.2.3. Precarity and marginality

Precarity is most commonly employed to categorise different aspects of material and psychological vulnerability associated with changing working conditions resulting from neoliberal policies, particularly in the advanced capitalist economies of the global North (Dörre et al., 2006). The term's origin is attributed to Bourdieu (1998), who first used it in his research in Algeria in the 1960s, to distinguish the insecure and exploitative conditions of temporary workers (or the *précarité)* from those of permanent workers. However, it was with the publication of Guy Standing's *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (2011) that the term gained prominence.

Standing (2011) used the term "precariat" to refer to the new precarious proletariat, a "dangerous class in the making", arising from contemporary, post-Fordist labour conditions (see Munck, 2013, Neilson and Rossiter, 2008) and described precarity as a sense of 'teetering on the edge' (Standing 2011, 20) where any security is lost. Consequently, precarity came to be used as a political platform for social movements associated with the structural inequalities of neoliberalism in Western Europe (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008). Waite (2009, p. 417) observes that precarity is used as "a central motif in the search for a link between people's different situations under conditions of neoliberalism, and maybe even as a basis for a shared, radical consciousness." Furthermore, it offers "the possibility of a potentially disruptive socio-political identity linked to a new brand of labour activism" (Waite, 2009, p. 418, Neilson and Rossiter, 2008).

The implicit assumption in precarity as an exceptional condition or something new emerging from the insecurity of work under neoliberal labour conditions has raised various objections. Feminist scholars, for example, challenge the idea of precarity as something new: they argue that it fails to take into account the 'uneven power relations along the lines of gender' which, among other factors, 'meant that societal others were denied access to privileged jobs, collective bargaining, and more generally to a social safety net' in 'Fordism's ephemeral heyday' (Ettlinger, 2007, p. 322).

Scholars such as Munck (2013) assert that precarity in the Global South is not a new phenomenon. He argues that marginalisation, informality, and social exclusion characterise the development experienced first by postcolonial, and subsequently by developmental states in the global South. He observes that precarious livelihoods have been the dominant mode of production rather than a more recent exception in Southern contexts. Thus, to Munck, precarity has been the rule rather than the exception in developing countries: consequently, the word "precariat" advanced by Standing 2011 is "a colonising concept in the South in classic Eurocentric mode" (Munck, 2013, p. 375).

Ettlinger goes on to note that defining precarity in direct relation to the classification of particular accumulation regimes "establishes a norm that obfuscates conditions pertaining to a significant percentage of the world's regions and population (Ettlinger, 2007, p. 323). Similarly, Waite (2009, p. 419) argues, "if we widen the perspective both geographically and historically to countries where informal sector work absorbs the majority of the workforce, then precarity arguably becomes the norm."

The scope and use of the term have since broadened to encompass research on precarious employment, precarious work, precarity as a context and precarity as an experience (for an overview, see Neilson and Rossiter, 2008). Precarity as a context and as an experience, for example, takes a geographical approach specific both to the spatial or locational as well temporal experiences of precariousness (Ettlinger, 2007, Waite, 2009). These studies have looked at the experiences of migrants and refugees among whom insecurity relation to both work and uncertainty of place is a common condition (Isin, 2012). Banki (2013) for example, describes how migrants occupy risky spaces due to a lack of documentation or legal rights while engaging in insecure and often exploitative labour.

The concept of precarity arguably resonates with the notion of "vulnerability", which has been widely used in the context of hazard risk, uneven development, and a lack of entitlements in developing countries (Chambers, 1989, Blaikie et al., 2005). From a political ecology perspective, vulnerability is largely framed as an externally imposed condition (Watts and Bohle, 1993), caused by factors such as natural environmental hazards or a lack of entitlement to material and social resources arising from institutional, political and technological constraints (Sen, 1981, Adger, 2006). In that sense, vulnerability evokes a more inert condition, such as defencelessness, insecurity and exposure to shocks (Chambers, 1989). Blaikie et al. (2005) have further commented that vulnerability is a combination of characteristics of a person or group derived from their social and economic condition. These understandings of

vulnerability, in contrast to precarity, do not allow for actors' subjectivities and ability to navigate opportunities.

Waite (2009), for example, explores the potential of 'a critical geography of precarity', advocating the concept's utility as a potential rallying point of resistance (Waite, 2009, Neilson and Rossiter, 2008). Hence, a geographical understanding of precarity advocates the exploration of the production of precarity while representing it as a possible reference point for mobilization (Waite, 2009). Precarity is often put forth as being broader in scope and capturing lived experiences (Ettlinger, 2007), which are intimately connected to socio-spatial contexts (Waite, 2009). Consequently, precarity can be understood as experiences of insecurity and vulnerability situated within historically and geographically specific contexts (Paret and Gleeson, 2016). In this sense, precarity is both politically constituted and can trigger constitutive change.

In line with these readings, this thesis represents precarity as a historically and socio-materially constituted condition as well as encapsulating political potential (Waite, 2009), i.e. an opportunity for exerting agency and resisting. These aspects of precarity play an important part in the development of hydropower projects, where people who give support and consent exercise their agency through support because they hope to improve their material and socio-economic conditions. These ideas are elaborated on in Chapter 5.

Moving away from original interpretations of the precarity framework, with its focus on labour relations or as an identity or group to which a person belongs for example as Guy Standing's description of the precariat (Standing, 2012), this study understands the concept of precarity as neither new nor limited to conditions of employment. The thesis uses the precarity to examine the articulation of agency in conditions of socio-economic and spatial marginality. It draws in interpretations of precarity as a lived experience and considers the responses to precarity equally important to constituting agency. The concept of precarity (Waite, 2009, Ettlinger, 2007) is adopted to contextualise marginalisation in an experiential way by discussing how historical marginalisation, environmental degradation, and socio-economic deprivation have shaped local lives and livelihoods in Darjeeling. In the fifth chapter, precarity forms the key analytical frame, enabling an exploration of the micro politics underpinning the decisions of the communities who supported the hydropower projects.

2.3. Concluding comments

This chapter provided an overview of the theories and concepts central to this thesis. It draws together literatures on political ecology, everyday state, and precarity in order to understand practices of agency in 'support' of 'top-down' hydropower development in the territorial margins of the state.

Since the broader concern of this thesis is to explicate the effects of development projects on communities in peripheral locations of the Himalayas, part one (Section 2.1) of the chapter examined debates on power and governance in political ecology. The first subsection discussed ideas of environmental narratives and modernisation discourses that legitimise and sustain physical infrastructures as factors of political and economic developments. The second subsection discussed ideas on frontiers and marginality within centre margin debates in political ecology. Centre margin debates focuses on the historical and political economic processes through which sub state and local state structures of domination, exclusion and disempowerment are forged. In Chapter 4, this thesis engages with the application of these ideas to discuss the historical and political economic processes and discourses that are constructed and deployed to justify and support hydropower development. While introduced as a mandate of ensuring energy security and bringing development to the 'underdeveloped' North East, hydropower has emerged as a means of exploiting the rivers of the ecologically fragile and culturally sensitive Eastern Himalayas, with repercussions for local understandings on development trajectories, their effectiveness, antecedent environmental and social costs, and the questions around who constructs and perpetuates these narratives of development.

Political ecology debates on modernisation discourses and centre margin dynamics provides a broad context from which the subsequent chapters on power dynamics that mediate and shape local responses of support to hydropower projects can be examined. It also facilitates an understanding to what extent the local responses to the hydropower projects are shaped by the historically embedded nature of relations between the region and the centre of power. However, to a large extent, in the scholarship of political ecology, the state figures as a dominant, sovereign authority (Robbins, 2008). It tends to overlook local political structures and governance structures and processes at the grassroots level under which negotiations takes place. In Part two of the chapter (Section 2.2), everyday state and everyday governance are introduced to complement and augment the broader lens of political ecology and illustrate the local processes and power dynamics operating at the politically charged Eastern Himalayan

margins. Drawing on anthropological debates on everyday state and practices of governance, this second part examines key factors concerning agency from the margins. The first subsection of Part two (Section 2.2.1.) sets the central premise of the everyday state and governance is about the way the state is experienced by citizens emphasising the multifaceted nature of the state. The idea of everyday state allows for a more empirically grounded perspective on the state without being limited to looking exclusively at discourses. Drawing from this wider literature, the second subsection discusses agency as a set of informal networks of power and brokerage practices. This lens of everyday governance as a set of informal networks of power and brokerage practices guides the fifth and the sixth chapters, which focus on the agency of local actors in supporting and mediating the approval of the hydropower projects. This complements the analysis of hydropower project authorities and state actors and their exclusionary practices in Chapter 4. Together, these two chapters illustrate how systematic exclusions are constituted and materialised and how state practices and informal brokers shape the lives and livelihoods of people.

Finally, the last part of this review engages with the concept of precarity. This thesis uses the concept of 'precarity' to examine the lived experience of insecurity and political exclusion, economic and articulation of agency in conditions of socio-economic and geographical marginality. The concept of informality is conceptually consistent to precarity in the sense that precarity is synonymous to insecurity, however interpretations of precarity emphasise different contexts, experiences, and identities. In this thesis, precarity serves as a lens to provide context specific ways of making sense of agency and support to hydropower projects and their impacts. Apart from offering greater analytical focus for the case studies of this thesis, this conceptualisation reflects the issue of margins – both as spatially as well as everyday governance and informality within which this thesis is based. This framing facilitates insights into how responses to hydropower development are shaped by the intersection of lived experiences of embedded social stratification, alongside the influence of larger, regional socio-political contestations, and the wider political economy of hydropower development. In the fifth chapter of the thesis, precarity forms the key analytical frame, enabling an exploration of the micro politics underpinning the decisions of the communities who supported the hydropower projects.

By engaging with everyday governance in post-colonial contexts, precarity is mediated by informality. Furthermore, an everyday governance perspective nuances and expands the debates on the political ecology of hydropower to consider explicitly issues of governance and

agency that extends beyond the formal state to non-state actors who embody and mobilise different forms of political subjectivity. The neoliberal agenda, on which the literatures on precarity and everyday governance centre, is not the primary subject of this thesis; nevertheless, since the large-scale ecological transformation of the remote Himalayas through hydropower extraction is legitimised in the guise of green development, neoliberal global processes are inevitably part of its context as was discussed in the section on hydropower as a discourse. Even though neoliberalism is not explicitly discussed, it is important to highlight the major roles that past colonial and contemporary trajectories of capitalism and modes of reproduction have played in shaping the developmental and identity politics of the region, including Darjeeling (the study area), as well as its state-society relations.

Chapter 3: Methodology and study area

This chapter presents the research approach and design, including the process and methods used to carry out this research. It consists of two parts. The first part begins with a note on the epistemological and ontological underpinnings that guide the study. It then describes the qualitative tools applied for data collection, the research design and the sampling strategies used to demonstrate the study's methodological rationale. This section also discusses the processes, challenges and limitations involved in fieldwork, addresses questions of researcher positionality and responsibility, and concludes by outlining the process of data analysis. In the second section, a description of the study area of Darjeeling is provided. The socio-economic, political, and geographical context (in terms of environmental vulnerability) are introduced before concluding with an overview of the hydropower projects under study.

3.1. Research approach

This study examines marginalised peoples' experiences and the practices of agency they use to negotiate outcomes and benefits from the hydropower projects. Hence it is exploratory in nature and follows an inductive research approach characterized by research design informed by a constructivist and actor-oriented paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). In contrast to objectivism that asserts the existence of social phenomena independent of social actors, constructivism holds that people construct the reality of their world in everyday activities (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, Silverman, 2013). It acknowledges that social phenomena are not external realities but constructed by social actors' actions and perceptions, which are time and context bound (Bryman, 2012). This epistemological standpoint necessitates a research approach that is inductive and exploratory in nature, thus this study adopted a case study research design (discussed in section 3.4.1).

3.1.1 Research design

Research design refers to the structure of an enquiry (Yin, 2014) that acts as a framework for the collection and analysis of data (Bryman, 2012). As this research is inductive and exploratory in nature, it followed a flexible approach open to revisions before and during data

collection. A case study design was adopted for this research: as Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 3) argue, case study methods "study things within their context and consider the subjective meanings that people bring to their situation." It provides comprehensive accounts of human behaviour and explains the complexities and dynamics of real life contexts (Yin, 2014).

While case studies are good at giving detailed information about the situation, a common criticism of the case study approach is that they cannot be generalised due to small sample sizes (Yin, 2014). However, Yin (2014) notes that case studies are generalizable to theories rather than to sample sizes. With established parameters and objectives, case study methods are able to capture processes and complexities that cannot be observed through other research methods (Yin, 2014). A case study approach was useful for this study because it focussed on the processes and discourses that constructed and mediated precarity rather than seeking to assess the impacts and perceptions of the hydropower projects through a large representative sample.

3.1.2. Selection of research locations and sampling

A week-long scoping study was carried out from 17th-23rd October 2016 in the two hydropower projects sites - Teesta Low Dam IV (TLDP IV) and Teesta Low Dam III (TLDP III) in Darjeeling. During this time, background data on the dams and the affected villagers were collected through introductory interviews and group discussions. These initial exercises helped plan for and design the research, as well identify potential field sites.

29 Mile village (Figure 5), one of the negatively affected sites of TLDP III, was my primary choice for case study, based on the scoping visit. It was a contested location where some households had been forcefully evicted, which allowed insights on direct impacts. Furthermore, the community of 29 Mile was divided on the benefits of the project (particularly in terms of receiving compensation). These differences within the community to resist or support the project was of particular interest and led to choosing the site for further data collection.

Figure 5 One of the demolished houses in 29 Mile. Photo by author

In the course of starting my fieldwork I adopted an open approach towards including other case studies for comparison purposes. I followed a purposive sampling process to choose the research sites, using the researcher's judgement to choose the case studies to satisfy the requirements of the research (Robson, 2002). In 29th Mile, interviews and group meetings were also conducted in other villages falling in the catchment areas on the left and the right bank of the TLDP III site to capture positive views of the dam project. One of this village was a small forest hamlet called Najok of 35 households on the left bank of the Teesta River, close to the TLDP III site. While this was not a village that I initially planned to spend much time on, the narratives that I heard from the villagers there provided me some of the best insights into the contestation around dams. In-depth interviews were also conducted in Kalijhora – the dam affected site of Teesta Low Dam IV (TLDP IV) to compare and contrast findings from the other sites around Teesta Low Dam III (TLDP III).

By conducting interviews in villages that perceived the dam project as beneficial and those that resisted it, the aim was to cover a range of perspectives and narratives of life situations that the dams had shaped. Such an enquiry facilitated understanding of existing contestations among and within communities, thus uncovering the underlying processes and relations that shaped these responses and providing strong contextualization of the issues that led people to support or oppose the projects.

Participants for the study were selected purposively, with a focus on collecting as many perspectives on the two hydropower projects as possible. In cases where purposive sampling was not possible at any point of time, such as in 29th Mile, participants were identified by spending time in shops and restaurants. To identify and access stakeholders and key informants outside, both snowballing and purposive sampling were used.

Within the primary field sites (29th Mile and Kalijhora), interviews and group discussions were conducted (Table 1) with a wide cross-section of the community belonging to different livelihood groups and political affiliations, in order to capture the heterogeneity in perceptions of and responses to the project. This included forest labourers, shop keepers, restaurant owners, former quarry workers, and influential individuals such as local leaders and contractors. Oral histories were conducted with senior members of the village to understand the history and livelihood changes in the village. Gender, age and socioeconomic biases were consciously managed by dividing time and interactions among the different groups.

Table 1 Interview and group discussions conducted in the case study areas

Research tool		Kalijhora	29th Mile	Other pro-project settlements
Individual interviews	Men	19	14	19
	Women	6	7	4
Group discussions		3	3	9

Most interviews and group discussions were recorded, and the observations written in a field diary. Interviews were conducted by the researcher in Nepali, the local language, and facilitated by a local research assistant in 29th Mile. In Kalijhora, data collection happened in a period of intense political conflict in the region (see Section 3.3.2) and interviews were conducted through snowball sampling, with the help of various key informants.

Fieldwork was conducted in three phases, in addition to the week-long scoping study mentioned above. The first period of fieldwork that lasted four months from 15th March to 6th June 2017 was spent in 29th Mile. Work here had to be cut short due to sudden political unrest followed by an indefinite strike that was called by the ruling political party GJM (Gorkha Janamukti Morcha) on the 15th June, 2017. The second phase of fieldwork was undertaken in Kalijhora, the village affected by TLDP IV, during the period of the ongoing strike in September. This fieldwork was designed to facilitate strategic study of positive narratives on

the hydropower project, aimed at comparing and contrasting it with the first case study on a negatively impacted village. Given the ongoing strike, dangerous local conditions, and the uncertainty of the situation, this study was completed within a short period of two and a half weeks.

The last phase of fieldwork was carried out just after the strike was called off on 27th September, 2017, and extended over four months from October 2017 to end of January 2018. During this period of multi-sited fieldwork, I lived in Siliguri and travelled to different parts of the region such as Darjeeling town, Kalimpong town, and Gangtok city, as well as villages and settlements that fell in the region of the two dam sites. While the primary focus of this stage of fieldwork was getting appointments and conducting interviews with institutional stakeholders and wider civil society actors, which had not been possible earlier due to the strike, this time was also spent on visiting and conducting group discussions in catchment villages around and further away from the project sites. Collecting information from these sites was necessary to put the study in the larger context as well as to collect comparative data on the issues identified from two prior case studies. Key informant interviews were also conducted with social and political actors based in different parts of Darjeeling (Table 2).

Table 2 Details of key informant interviews conducted

Details of key informants interviewed	Numbers
NGOs, activists and key public informants	14
State administration officials; Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) and Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) representatives	11
National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC) representatives	6
Political actors	9
Researchers/ Academics/ Journalists	9

Most of the collection of secondary data sources also happened during this time. Appendix 1 and 2 provides the breakdown of complete list of number of individual interviews and focus group discussions conducted during fieldwork and Appendix 3 provides a list of key informant interviewees.

3.2. Applying qualitative methods: data collection tools

As suited to the exploratory and inductive nature of this research, the methods employed in this study were essentially qualitative. Qualitative methods are especially useful in discovering the

meaning that people give to events that they experience (Merriam, 1998). They involve a naturalistic and interpretative approach that allows the researcher to develop a holistic picture of the social phenomenon being researched (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Different qualitative methods were used to collect data, including ethnographic observation during eight months of fieldwork. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) suggest that the use of different methods allows not only for verification but also for in-depth analysis. In the following paragraphs I describe the different qualitative tools used.

3.2.1. Interviews

Primary data collection tools involved conversations that took the form of open ended, semi structured, and narrative interviews (Figure 6). An in-depth and qualitative interview is an effective research tool that can produce rich and valuable data (Punch, 2005) while exploring the views of research subjects (Miller and Glassner, 1997). Interviews can enhance understanding people's perceptions, meanings, definitions and constructions of reality (Punch, 2005). Individuals were asked open-ended questions to tell their stories and encourage their own voices to come through in the data. To do this, I drew on my previous experience with exploratory interviews and probing questions. My aim was to collect a range of illustrative life situations to understand how people's lives were improved or deteriorated because of the dams as well as to understand the conflict and contestation created as a result of these projects.

Key informant interviews were held with wider communities as well as with civil society actors for comparative and contextualisation purposes (see Appendix 3 for a list of key informants interviewed). Narrative interviews were conducted mostly with elderly people, not only from the case study villages of 29th Mile, Kalijhora and Najok but also from other villages of Geilkhola, Deorali, Teesta Bazar, Rambhi, Riyang and Sevoke which enabled the present experience of development and exclusion to be set in a historical context. Narrative enquiry is a process of collecting qualitative data through storytelling (Riessman, 1993). It helps us to understand how people make sense of situations in their daily lives by the stories they construct (Riessman, 1993). As people shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are, and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p. 375), narrative enquiry can help capture people's experience and memories, as well as perceptions of change. These interviews also served the purpose of comparison and contextualisation.

Figure 6 Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted across the case studies.

Photo by Sonu

Finally, interviews with institutional actors, including senior officials of the hydropower projects, were also carried out to triangulate and adequately interpret findings. These interviews were more structured in nature (see Appendix 4 for a sample questionnaire). Valuable input was also derived from informal and impromptu conversations with family and friends, as well as from insightful exchanges with other researchers currently working in the state.

3.2.2. Ethnographic observation

Ethnographic observation provides descriptive and detailed accounts of the behaviours and situations which formed the primary focus of this study (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002). Along with interviews, ethnographic observation was a primary method of data collection. Initially, it provided the foundational context for the development of sampling, interview guidelines, and the identification of different interest groups, actors and key stakeholders. As the aim of this research is to understand people's experiences and perceptions of hydropower projects' effects on their lives and livelihoods, and their non-verbal everyday strategies of agency and resistance, direct observation was particularly useful. By spending time in the two case study sites, I sought to understand social relations and practices if everyday governance. For example,

I captured the means by which the community came together to experience and sometimes challenge dam interventions, or the practices individuals used to exert their voice within and outside the community. These observations were recorded in a field diary maintained throughout the data collection.

3.2.3. Group discussions

Small group discussions were also conducted with gender, age and livelihood differentiated groups, such as women, labourers and contractors, in locations close to the two project sites wherever it was feasible. The group discussions were useful for gaining insights into community practices of exerting agency, contacting local informal brokers, and accessing the state. The discussions also helped chart the evolution of the hydropower projects as seen by specific livelihood groups. The data from the group discussions helped triangulate findings from the interviews and identify individuals for follow-up interviews.

Figure 7 Small group discussion in Najok. Photo by Sonu

3.2.4. Dip-stick survey

Given the communities' official status as illegal settlements, a formal survey was not practical, but basic demographic information was collected in the course of informal interviews to construct a generic profile of the village. My success varied according to the informants' patience or willingness to provide this information. The purpose of collecting such information

was to get an overview of the settlements and basic information about the residents such as livelihood types.

3.3. Ethics, challenges, and limitations of fieldwork

This section highlights the challenges encountered during the fieldwork and how these were navigated by adopting a reflexive and flexible stance. I first discuss the importance of positionality in the context of challenges in the different phases of fieldwork, and provide an example of my experiences in 29th Mile. I then describe the challenge of political unrest that took place during the course of fieldwork.

3.3.1. Positionality and responsibility as a researcher

Part of the responsibilities of the researcher is to acknowledge respondents' positionality and voluntary participation by following ethical principles such as being transparent about the research and ensuring their confidentiality and anonymity. During fieldwork, I led most of the conversations, while the research assistant's primary role was to introduce me to different people in the village. Given the contentious nature of research as well as the community's politically status (and lack of literacy), a written consent form would have been intimidating. Before any formal or informal interview with community members, the respondent was informed of the interview's purpose, the use that might be made of their data, and the expected outcomes from the study; permission was sought to record the conversation. Each interview also addressed issues of consent and confidentiality at the start. Most of the time, the issue of confidentiality did not seem to be a major concern to respondents from the community as they never objected to the use of their names. However, pseudonyms have been used to conceal the identity of all the respondents apart from my research assistant in 29 Mile, who asked me to use his real name. Interviews were audio recorded only if respondents felt comfortable. Most of the direct quotations appearing throughout this thesis come from the recorded interviews. While dealing with key informants and representatives of hydropower and governmental officials, I adopted a more formal approach, presenting them with request letters from the University of Reading.

England (1994) notes that researchers should reflect on their own position within the context of the research setting and the people they study to allow space for objectivity and subjectivity.

An 'insider' researcher is one who has lived familiarity with the context she studies (Griffith, 1998). The many advantages of insider researchers are well discussed in the literature: for example, it easy access to the population facilitates data collection, it makes it easier to build rapport and provides deeper understanding of the context being studied (Chavez, 2008).

In this research, my being an insider came about because I was a native who shared a common language and culture with the participants; I was, however, an outsider at the same time for various reasons. Several aspects of myself, such as a relatively urban upbringing, and different life experiences, including living and studying abroad, conferred a privileged position on me and differentiated me from the group. In reflecting on the challenges that fieldwork poses, Rose (1997) argues that positionality is never static, but rather constituted in response to different audiences, demands and contexts throughout research. Gaining access to most participants at different levels (mostly outside of the community) was much easier because of my position as a doctoral student from a University in the UK. Key informants such as NGOs, activists and civil society actors were happy to share their experiences and thoughts with me as they perceived me as one of them – empathising with the concerns of *'hamro maanchey'* (our community). My identity as an insider and a scholar may have elicited such a response.

Where institutional and higher up stakeholders, including political actors, were concerned, two factors that helped me gain access and interest were the fact that I was the daughter of a person who had worked in the region and had enormous goodwill and, secondly, my foreign university affiliation. My friends and family tapped into their networks, providing personal references and facilitating meetings for me. This was also crucial to my understanding of aspirations and lack of access to educational opportunities in the region. I formed part of an elite group that had gained higher education in a foreign university. And yet in some communities and groups within them, I was considered an outsider because of the same privilege. In one village, most villagers, while willing to participate, seemed to be intimidated, largely because they were illiterate. In this village, all but a handful did not speak much or spoke in monosyllables. While in most cases research participants afforded trust and goodwill during my fieldwork, this was not always so. My ability to obtain access and conduct in-depth interviews was determined by various circumstances at different times and I believe was contingent to a large degree on my perceived identity.

Gaining access to my primary field site was a challenge. It involved continued negotiation and patience. This settlement, located on a busy highway, is a commercial village where people are busy with their shops and hotels. I had a hard time persuading people to rent me a place to stay for few months. After two weeks of failing to secure housing, I finally had to get help through a family member's network to secure a room here. I was also put in touch with a key informant here, through whose help I eventually navigated my way into the community and found one key informant. Random daily conversations with her while sitting in her shop constituted my key source of information in the initial months. While she was a resourceful and knowledgeable lady, outspoken and helpful, she could not show me around the village, as she was busy with her shop. She was also one of the wealthier villagers and a controversial figure, which might be a reason why some people were indifferent to me. I was initially hesitant to take on Sonu, my research assistant, who volunteered to help me after getting to know me and my project, as he belonged to the minority Bihari group. Eventually, however, I accepted his help and realised that caste background was not an issue in 29th Mile.

Over the course of my time in 29th Mile, I learnt that earning a livelihood on a highway is easier than in rural areas. It offers a whole gamut of opportunities to make quick money. Conversations with Sonu revealed the complexity of the issues surrounding the ownership of land, and the risky and unstable local livelihoods. The people of this place were potent and critical resources who were utilised at opportune times by different political parties. I came to know with time that my father (who was then an official working in the Land and Disaster Management department under the GTA headed by the leading local political party) was seen as some sort of risk, as most of the community was affiliated to another political party the ruling party of the State. Individual villagers were so afraid of the power exercised by members of political parties acting in concert that they were driven to seek shelter by affiliation with one party or another, to find safety in numbers. Over time, I came to know there were other underlying reasons: the sale of alcohol, fuelwood or construction materials in 'black' were common livelihood generation activities among the communities living on the highway. Rumours abounded that I was sent to investigate these side businesses in the area. It was important to alter this perception of me: I eventually achieved this by listening and letting them know that I was trying to understand their lives. This also meant I had to adapt research methods to suit the context. Instead of the participatory mapping exercises I had planned beforehand, I adopted a more exploratory and ethnographic approach of observation of people and activities around me. While I was cognisant of my gendered position, I did not get a sense of it hindering

access in any way. Instead, it proved helpful while speaking with women – who in 29ᵗʰ mile formed the majority of the marginalised class as quarry labourers.

Expectations were also projected upon me when they came to know that my father was a senior official looking after the Land Department. While I tried my best to downplay my identity as a person who had access to influential people, it was hard to do so in such a small place. I tried to make them understand my limited role and drew on my 'student' status to attenuate these differences. An insider position also subjected me to the common dilemma of having difficulty maintaining an appropriate emotional distance. Interaction with communities' daily experiences and observing their lives on a daily basis was often uncomfortable. I overcame this is many ways, such as writing in a reflexive journal, avoiding intervening in local matters, refraining from sharing my own perceptions with research participants, and debriefing. Debriefing (sharing findings and elements of the research with others, including peers and supervisors) is described as an effective strategy for overcoming one's own emotional experiences in research (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007). It was also essential to distance myself physically from the study site at regular intervals, and at times to detach myself from the entire fieldwork process to gain objectivity.

3.3.2. The challenge of political unrest

Darjeeling has remained a politically volatile region[11] since the 1980s, when the first violent struggle for separation from West Bengal (WB) was initiated. The homeland movement is driven by the aspirations of a regionally marginalized mountain community that is culturally and socio-ecologically different from the rest of Bengal and whose identity (as Nepali speaking Gorkhas of India distinct from the Nepalese of Nepal) is not acknowledged at the national level. It erupts from time to time and the current wave of protests was provoked by the WB government's proposal, driven by its imperialist policy that the Bengali language be made compulsory in all schools in the Darjeeling hills. It was ironic in the sense that while I was trying to study non-resistance in Darjeeling, this unprecedented and vigorous anti-Bengal movement was taking place in the region.

---

[11] https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/07/india-manufacturing-picture-postcard-darjeeling-170719073904596.html Accessed on 25.08.2018

A key challenge during my fieldwork was the issue of access, brought into sharp focus by the political violence that took place in the region during the course of my fieldwork. Barriers were geographical, when key roads were shut off; practical, when making contact with respondents was difficult during periods of strike; and intangible as people were too busy or hesitant to give me time for an interview. The strike and protests that followed lasted for three and a half months, before being called off on 27th September; they affected my work and I lost time and resources. But even more importantly, it was a period of great instability, uncertainty, risk and emotional upheaval that affected me and indeed the entire community struggling for statehood.

At the time the strike was called (on 15th June), I was four months into my fieldwork, having completed a substantial number of interviews in 29th Mile and key informant interviews in the nearby villages of Geilkhola, Teesta Bazar and Deorali; I was preparing to follow up on some of the narratives I had heard. As the political unrest was brewing and the deployment of the army and police in Darjeeling made news, I rushed to Darjeeling town for safety. Soon a curfew was imposed by local political parties, and schools and public services were shut down. There were reports of indiscriminate killings and random arrests by state police and counter violence by members of local political parties. The violence escalated with time: local TV channels, the internet and phone networks were cut off, and we had to live in fear and despair. After a month, when food supplies were declining, we decided to escape to our house to be with the rest of our family in the plains in Siliguri. Having managed to do so one night, we reached Siliguri in a desperate condition: our car had been vandalised many times on the way. The strike went on indefinitely and violent agitation and its suppression grew in proportion with the increasing deployment of troops by the State government.

At this stage, both logistical concerns and psychological reasons made it impossible to continue fieldwork. After two months, the strike was still continuing and no resolution seemed to be in sight. This made me and my supervisors decide on some alternate course of action. We decided to find another hydropower project unaffected by the political situation and settled on the nearby state of Sikkim. Eventually, however, this plan was abandoned, as over the course of a brief scoping visit I realised that, given the fact that it was now the monsoon season, travelling in this landslide-prone area was not feasible. Furthermore, after interviews with key informants there, I realised that working in Sikkim would be time consuming and expensive, which I could not afford. Hence, despite the strike, I went on to conduct fieldwork in Kalijhora, cognisant of the fact that people would be preoccupied with the movement. Kalijhora was a suitable choice

for collecting positive narratives on the hydropower project. Besides the research rationale, both practical and logistical concerns were taken into consideration in reaching this decision. It was close to Siliguri to which I would be able to return if any danger arose.

Figure 8 Fieldwork in Kalijhora during the strike. Photo by author

In Kalijhora, as an insider researcher, I found reciprocal relationships important. Having limited time, I found a place to stay with distant relatives with whom I had never had previous contact. Here they did not agree to my paying for staying with them and I had to find alternate ways to repay them, which I did by buying books for their granddaughter and helping her in her studies. It was difficult to find research assistance in that period as villagers were busy with party meetings. I decided to eat meals in the only restaurant open at the time, which was the key place for me to gather data. Although this was not an ideal place, as it was a meeting place mostly for men to chat and drink, it helped me familiarise myself with more people much faster. This made it easier to visit them for interviews later. Furthermore, these gatherings also allowed me to observe people's behaviour, and gain insights into their conversations and community dynamics.

The political strife prevented me from accessing key people from the local and state administration, as well as key political actors who were charged by the police and were in hiding. For example, local bureaucrats were not only busy after the long strike but also under pressure from the state government to suppress any kind of dissent. They remained inaccessible

because even after the strike ended in September, it took several months for the situation to return to normal. However, in due course, I sought out key political and institutional stakeholders, using personal networks. Another important group I could not access were the researchers from North Bengal who had carried out assessment studies for the hydropower projects. It has been difficult to set up interviews with them as their work has been controversial.

3.4. Transcribing and analysis

The analytical approach was largely inductive in nature, with theory construction emerging towards the end from the empirical data. During fieldwork, analysis was limited to broad themes that emerged from my field notes which were used to direct further questions and a widening range of actors.

In the field, analysis involved writing detailed case study descriptions for the two settlements studied with reflective on the concepts that form the background of this thesis. Following return to the university, the first step towards data processing included transcribing all the interview and group discussion data. They were translated into English, while noting the vernacular vocabulary of some responses that could not be exactly captured in English. While transcribing, I also referred to my field notes, and developed initial codes and memos. A code is a symbol applied to a group of words to classify or categorise them (Robson, 2002, p. 385).

After transcribing, my analysis started with a close reading of the transcripts and fieldwork notes. Based on this, I developed codes, which emerged through my immersion in the empirical material. Then, through a messy and iterative process (Bryman, 2012) of continuous revisiting of transcripts, I reassessed the codes and linked them to broader ideas (e.g. informal brokering, everyday governance, unruly space, local precarity). The predominant themes that emerged from this iterative coding process consisted of:

1. Exclusionary strategies deployed by hydropower project authorities,
2. Everyday governance practices among institutions and actors at various levels, and
3. The political status and acute precarity of the communities

Each of these themes led to different concepts and theoretical constructs which came together when writing the empirical sections.

3.5. Description of study area

3.5.1. The socio- economic and the political context

Darjeeling is the northernmost district in the state of West Bengal and is located between the countries of Nepal on the west, Bhutan on the east, Bangladesh to the south-east and the state of Sikkim in the north (Figure 9) It is part of the Eastern Himalaya, at an elevation of 300 to 12000 feet above sea level, and is commonly referred to as the "Darjeeling Hills" or "Darjeeling Himalaya". The district formerly comprised four hill subdivisions: Darjeeling or Darjeeling 'sadar', Kalimpong, Kurseong and Siliguri, which is a plains subdivision in the foothills. In February 2017, Kalimpong was made a separate district and a new subdivision of Mirik was added. In this thesis, the Darjeeling region should be taken to include the Kalimpong district, as I quote data from the 2011 census and the hydropower project affected areas fall both in Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts.

The total area of the region is 3,149 km² and the hills occupy about 74% of the total land area. The population is roughly 1.8 million people, with a little over a million people living in rural areas (Census of India, 2011). The population in the Darjeeling hills are diverse in race, caste and ethnicity. The majority of the population is of Nepali heritage (68%) with different ethnic backgrounds; the Lepchas (autochthonous tribes) form 2% of the population and the Bhutias and Tibetans form 9%, while the Bengalis (permanent residents, migrants from south Bengal, and refugees from Bangladesh) form 8% of the population; the rest come from different parts of India

While the West Bengal Human Development Report (HDR) 2004 records that the Darjeeling district has the second highest per capita income (Rs. 18,529) after Kolkata, according to the Indian Planning Commission's Darjeeling is one of India's '100 most backward Districts' (Aiyar, 2003). This situation is due to the development of Siliguri in the plains, which has become a commercial hub in trade and real investment, and the profits from the tea industry, which is owned by private companies based outside Darjeeling and not reflective of the social and economic status of the plantation workers, who live in poverty (the rural poverty ratio is

19.66 per cent and the urban poverty ratio is 15.21 per cent) (UNDP, 2004, p. 80). The Economic Review (2011-12: 112) published by the Finance Department, Government of West Bengal, shows a large percentage of the working population (75.20 percent) in the Darjeeling district is engaged in non-agricultural work (including tea-estate workers) while only 14.59 percent of the working population are engaged as cultivators, with an even lower percentage (10.21 percent) working as agricultural labourers.

Figure 9 Map showing the location Darjeeling in West Bengal, India. Map by Sonam Lama
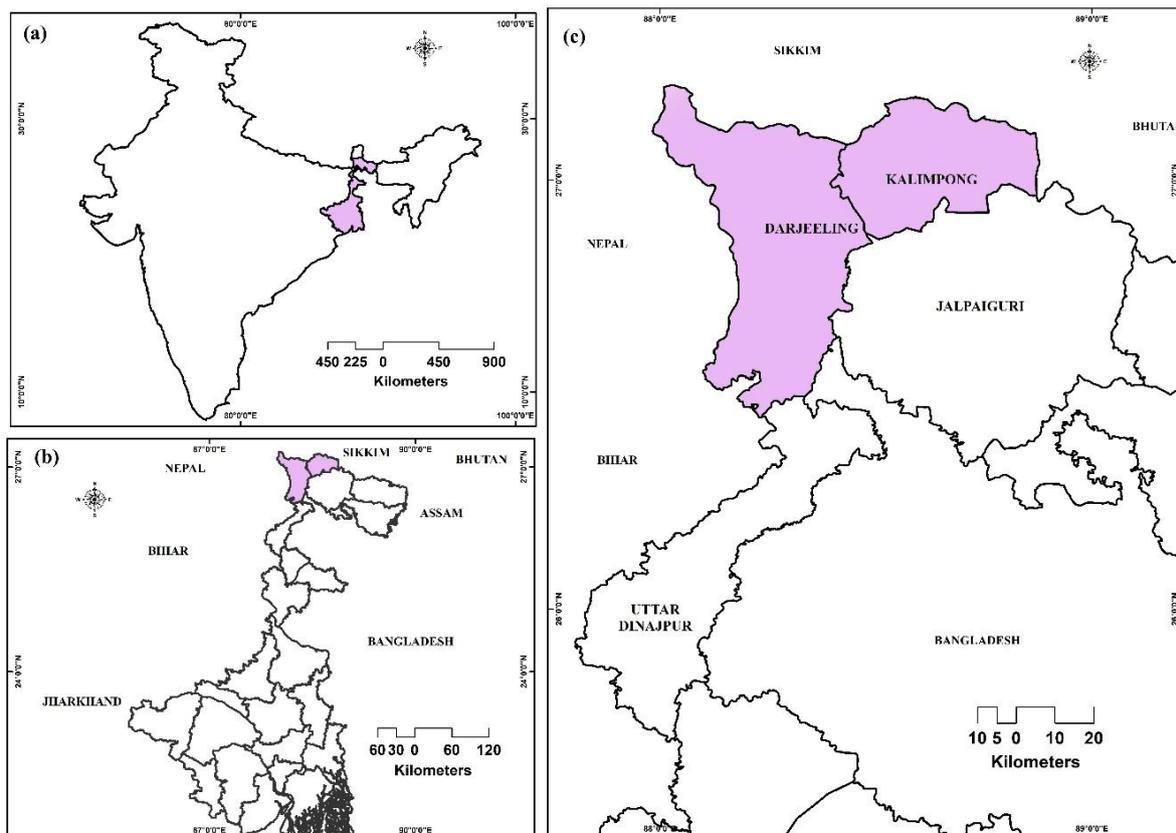
Historically, the tea industry has been the main source of livelihood for the people of Darjeeling. More than 70% of the total population of the district is associated with the tea industry in various capacities. While the tea industry is concentrated on Darjeeling and Kurseong, agriculture is the main source of income in Kalimpong. Other rural sources of income are timber and cinchona plantations. As per the guidelines of Census 2011, every worker engaged in the production of tea and cinchona etc. is recorded as 'other worker': thus, other workers constitute the main work force, i.e. 76.8 percent of total workers of the region. About 4.56% of the population lives in forest villages and forest fringe areas. In the tea

plantations and forest villages, communities have very small land holdings and practise subsistence agriculture. In the urban areas, tourism is a major economic activity.

It is important to highlight the fragile political context of the region (discussed above in section 3.4.2). For more than four decades, it has been embroiled in a struggle to achieve separation from the state of West Bengal through the creation of a union state of 'Gorkhaland' within India for the Gorkhas (Indian Nepalis). The statehood demand stands in a broader historical context: its development was influenced by specific events at the national level as well as the prevailing socio-political and economic conditions of the region. Darjeeling district was once part of the Kingdom of Sikkim, Bhutan and the Gorkha Kingdom (currently Nepal), prior to being annexed to the Bengal Presidency of British India in late 1835 (Poddar and Prasad, 2009).

In the mid-1980s, a violent agitation for separation led to the death of hundreds of people when the state responded with police and military forces. In 1988, a tripartite agreement between the Government of India, West Bengal, and the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), the political party leading the agitation, granted Darjeeling a semi-autonomous administrative arrangement within the state with the establishment of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) (Datta, 1991, Bagchi, 2012, Sarkar, 2012). The DGHC was granted selected administrative, financial, and executive powers. It was succeeded by the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) after demands for statehood were revived in 2011 by another party, Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM), through mass rallies, protests, and bandhs (general strikes) (Ghosh, 2009, Gazette, (2012). Following the strike of 2017, discussed in the section above, the GTA was reformed to form GTA 2. The hilly regions of both the Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts come under this arrangement.

3.5.2. Natural hazards and environmental issues

The Darjeeling Himalayas are vulnerable to a number of geological and hydrological hazards, including a high risk of earthquakes and increasing landslides (Rumbach and Németh, 2018). A 6.9 magnitude earthquake with an epicentre in neighbouring Sikkim killed 111 people and destroyed thousands of buildings in 2011 (Rajendran et al., 2011). Landslides are a common phenomenon in the monsoon season (Figure 10). In 2015, heavy rainfall triggered landslides and killed more than forty people, as well as destroying roads and acres of farmland (Ali, 2015). In the past several decades, such incidents have cost thousands of lives, destroyed infrastructure

and environment and impacted the local economy (Petley, 2013). Besides these concerns, water scarcity and regular power supply are common in Darjeeling. Because of rapid and unplanned urbanisation, population pressure is adding to the problems in the town areas (Rumbach and Németh, 2018). Climate change predictions in the region indicate that, even though total annual precipitation is expected to remain the same, heavy precipitation events are likely to become more common (Sharma et al., 2009, Bengal, 2010). Such variability in precipitation patterns, glacial melt and the plausible threat of glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) obfuscate the relationship between climate change and hydropower development in Himalayan regions (Bhushal, 2016, Palmer et al., 2008, Grumbine and Pandit, 2013).

Figure 10 Landslide-prone stretch of National Highway 10 close to 29th Mile and Geilkhola.
Picture by author

3.5.3. Hydropower projects in Darjeeling

Teesta is the main river of the Sikkim and Darjeeling region in the Eastern Himalayas. It is a perennial, snow-fed river originating from a glacial lake in the Himalayas in the state of Sikkim (Choudhury, 2007). The river flows through the entire length of Sikkim, bisects the Darjeeling district and joins the Brahmaputra in Bangladesh. In the stretches of Teesta along Sikkim and Darjeeling, the river is a source of livelihood security and ethno-cultural and religious identity for many social groups; in the plains, it provides livelihood security to agrarian communities

in North Bengal and Bangladesh (Khawas, 2016). Since 2002, major hydropower projects have been started and are in various stages of construction all along the river (Figure 11).

In Sikkim, thirty dams are at different stages of construction or have been commissioned (GoS, 2016) and in Darjeeling, two low dams have been commissioned in 2013 and 2014. While they are officially called low dams, in terms of the official technical definition they are substantially large at 132 MW and 160 MW, respectively.[12] The river is dammed along a stretch approximately 15 km long NH 10 that connects Sikkim to West Bengal and other parts of India. Other planned projects in Teesta in Darjeeling are TLDP I & II combined (81 MW), TLDP V (80 MW), and Teesta Intermediate Stage (84 MW), for which a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the West Bengal State has been signed in 2015, but the location is yet to be finalised.

Figure 11 Location of the Teesta Lower Dam Projects (TLDP III and IV) in Darjeeling.
Map by Sonam Lama

---
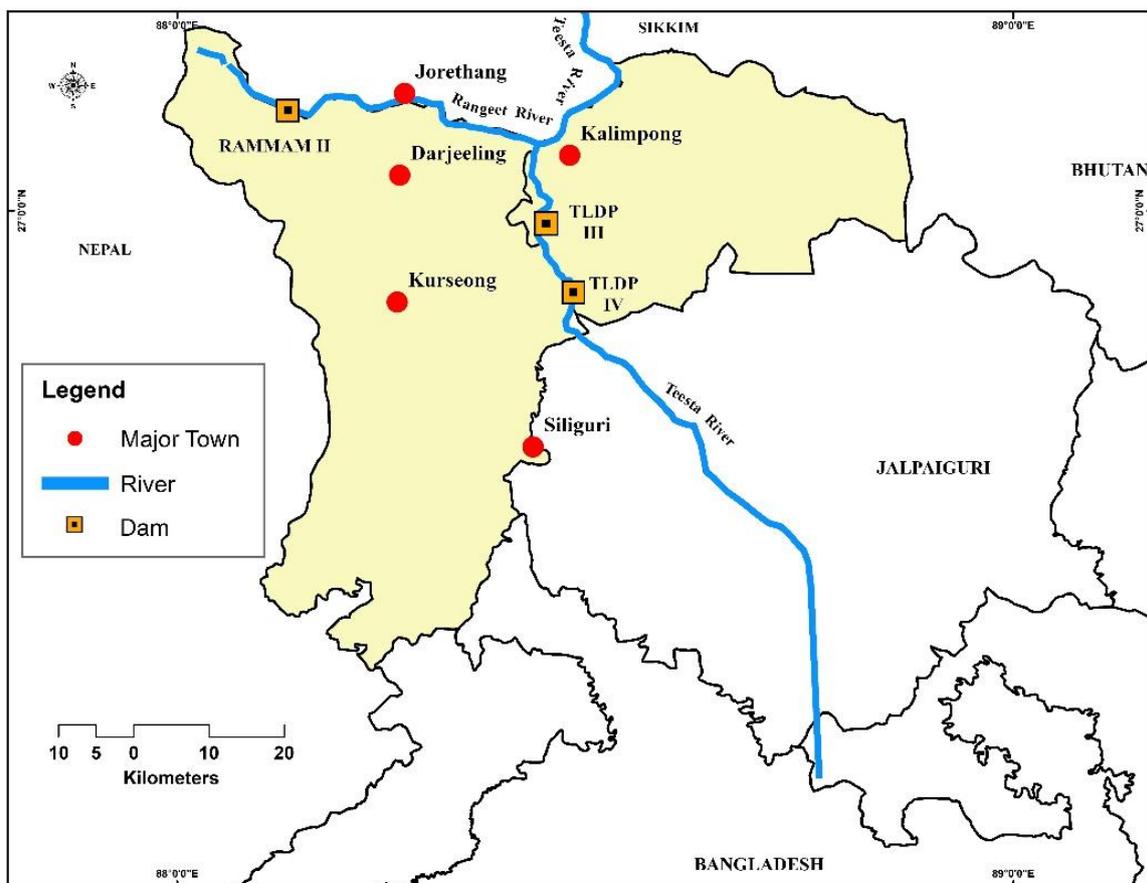
[12] 1 The International Commission on Large Dams defines a "large dam" as a dam with a height of 15 metres or more from the foundation (World Commission on Dams 2000: 11). Teesta Low Dam Power III and IV are 32.5 and 45 metres high respectively, and are still classified as low dams.

3.6. Summary

This chapter presented the research approach and design, detailing the field process and specific methods used to carry out this research and their subsequent analysis in order to demonstrate the study's methodological rationale. Given the nature of the research, the methods used are essentially qualitative. Further considerations on the researcher's positionality, the challenges encountered and negotiated, and the limitations of fieldwork are addressed. The second part of the chapter presents the background of Darjeeling area, where the study is located, and the hydropower projects in the Teesta River. The next chapter presents the empirical findings on the first topic: hydropower governance.

Chapter 4: Territory, politics and unruly spaces: examining hydropower governance in the Eastern Himalayan margins

Abstract

In the last two decades, the Eastern Himalayan region of India has become India's 'future energy powerhouse'. Hydropower development is promoted by central government as a promising option to meet the urgent energy needs of India's growing economy, provide development in the economically 'backward' Eastern Himalayan states, and meet climate mitigation goals. However, hydropower-led regional and socio-ecological transformations have been marked by concerns of top-down governance, poor inclusion, and negative environmental and socio-cultural impacts. This paper examines the case of hydropower projects in Darjeeling, to demonstrate how exclusionary and arbitrary governance practices have dismissed local people and livelihoods as illegal, accelerated environmental degradation, and encouraged corruption. This paper examines how this seemingly 'unruly' context of Darjeeling was produced as a result of colonial and postcolonial governance of people and resources and is perpetuated and legitimised by top-down state agendas of hydropower development. Based on a qualitative methodology involving interviews with hydropower affected communities, project developers, NGOs, state and non-state governance actors, I find that decontextualized development perpetuates social and ecological precarity in the region, which are enforced through historically rooted dependencies and unequal power relations.

Keywords: Unruly space, governance, legitimacy, underdevelopment, hydropower, Himalayas

4.1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, the Eastern Himalayan region of India has been identified by the central government as India's 'future powerhouse' (Vagholikar and Das, 2010, Menon et al., 2003). With over 160 hydropower dams planned and in various stages of construction across all major rivers basins,[13] the region has been established as the hydropower frontier that fuels the economic growth of the country (Dharmadhikary, 2008, Alley et al., 2014). Hydropower is promoted by National and State governments as a legitimate 'green energy' option that will meet the urgent energy needs of India's growing economy and accelerate development in the economically backward Eastern Himalayan states (Ahlers et al., 2015). The renewed focus on hydropower dams for the development of 'economically backward' areas has also been supported by multilateral funding organisations.[14]

The World Bank has previously argued that the Himalayas are the most socially and environmentally benign hydropower area in the world (Briscoe and Malik, 2006). However, there has been increasing critique of the manner in which these projects have been planned, approved, and implemented, with evidence that the approach represents only a privileged, mainstream, and top-down development perspective (Ahlers et al., 2015, Kohli, 2011). These studies emphasise that in disregarding earlier dam-related critiques, hydropower development in the Himalayas is now presented as a means to secure energy security for the rapidly developing national economy and accelerate development in otherwise 'backward' areas (ibid).

Projects in the north-eastern states of Sikkim, Assam, Tripura, and Arunachal Pradesh have been stalled or awaiting clearances owing to prolonged struggles between the project developers and communities (Rivers, 2016, Huber and Joshi, 2015, Duarah, 2017). Research from the region shows that established norms and procedures have been violated while popular

---

[13] Thirty-seven percent of India's river waters is estimated to be in the Eastern Himalayan region (Mahanta, 2010).

[14] Following the social and environmental concerns raised by World Commission on Dams, Report 2000, multilateral organisations like the World Bank had substantially reduced funding for dams in developing countries.

opinion and community consent have been ignored (ADB, 2007, Huber et al., 2017, Vagholikar and Das, 2010). Hydropower-led large-scale, regional and socio-ecological transformations and their uneven outcomes have produced diverse local responses including social conflict, resistance, and/or support to these projects.

This paper investigates how national and state discourses of development translate at the local level, and particularly in economically and politically marginalised contexts such as the Eastern Himalayas. Drawing on theories of frontiers and territoriality in political ecology and anthropology (Rasmussen and Lund, 2018, Geiger, 2009, Karlsson, 2011), the paper forwards the notion of 'unruly space' to examine the historical and contemporary trajectories of governance of people and resources at the margins. The idea of unruly space is also put forth as a lens to interrogate how and why hydropower interventions lead to differentiated outcomes for people in the Eastern Himalayan states. Taking the case of hydropower projects in Darjeeling, the paper examines the production of unruly space at the intersection of governance, resource exploitation and development to explore questions about governance in economically marginalized and politically contested settings.

This paper is structured as follows. Section 2 describes the research method and provides a background to hydropower projects and their impacts. Building on the theories of frontiers and territoriality in political ecology, Section 3 describes the conceptual framework of 'unruly space' that guides this paper. Section 4 offers a detailed reflection on the historical, social and political context of Darjeeling, highlighting how resource governance shapes how people affected by hydropower development exercise their rights. Section 5 uses this background on hydropower governance to report how project outcomes place out in unruly spaces. It elaborates the practices around decision-making, approval and implementation of hydropower projects and focuses on the way different stakeholders articulate their claims over resources and justify hydropower projects. In the final section, I discuss how contested hydropower projects are legitimised in an unruly space and reflect on the usefulness of the concept of unruly space in interpreting the structural context, the state's exclusionary governance practices and their effects on marginalised places and peoples.

4.2. Research context and methods

Darjeeling District is located in the northernmost area of West Bengal, between Nepal and Bhutan, and the Indian state of Sikkim (Figure 1). Two hydropower projects, the Teesta 'Low Dam' Project (TLDP) III and TLDP IV were constructed by the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC)[15] , a central government agency in Darjeeling. The projects were completed in 2013 and 2014, respectively and are promoted as environmentally sustainable "run-of-the-river" (R-o-R) schemes (International Rivers, 2016a).[16] The clearance and approval of the two hydropower projects initially generated a lot of controversy among national and regional environmental NGO groups and activists. They opposed the projects on grounds of inadequate and non-transparent assessment of possible environmental impacts as well as the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) project documents not being made available to public. They reported that only EIA summaries were only made available at locations distant from project-affected regions and then too, they were not in the local language (Dubey et al., 2005).[17] As I will demonstrate through interview data, corruption was rampant in getting projects approval and implementation, and several coercive strategies such as sharing selective information with communities and distributing petty contractual jobs or handouts to local elites to subdue protests and acceptance of projects were common.

This study is based on data collected through multi-sited fieldwork in the hydropower project sites in Darjeeling between March and December 2017, using a qualitative methodological approach. Fieldwork included onsite observations and interviews with affected communities (n=69), 6 hydropower developers, 11 officials from different state-level government departments, 5 local political leaders, and 6 NGOs and activists. Additionally, through snowball sampling, 12 key informants (local historians, politicians, academics, researchers,

---

[15] NHPC is the largest central government agency responsible for hydropower projects in India, particularly in the Himalayan regions.

[16] Run-of-river schemes attract less scrutiny as it is argued as being more benign as they work with the running water unlike traditional schemes that impound large volumes of water. However, the permanent 'pondage' has destroyed the riverine ecology, led to submergence of riverbanks and the forest areas adjacent to and has become a threat to the communities living along National Highway 10 that runs parallel to the Teesta.

[17] Statements from members of Teesta Sangharsh Samity and North Eastern Society for the Preservation of Nature and Wildlife (NESPON). Local NGOs working on dams in Darjeeling.

and journalists), provided insights about the region's history of environmental governance and socio-political conflict.

4.3. Unruly space at the margins of the state

At the margins, the reconfiguration of frontier spaces through the deployment of institutional debris – rules and histories – defines new patterns of access and control (Rasmussen and Lund, 2018, p. 396).

The debates on frontiers and territoriality are linked to the dynamics of destructive and constructive projects commodifying nature through processes of land control and local disenfranchisement (Rasmussen and Lund, 2018). In a general sense, frontiers denote remote spaces related to the expansion of capitalism (Rasmussen and Lund, 2018). These spaces are defined in relation to state powers and characterised by groups living in "states of insecurity" (Lorey, 2015 in Watts, 2017). Territoriality involves systems and strategies of establishing control to regulate resources and people (Sack, 1986 cited in Rasmussen and Lund, 2018). These two concepts are counteractive yet complementary as *frontiers create conditions for territoriality* (Lund and Rachman, 2016). Traditionally linked to ideas of state expansion to physically remote areas, contemporary understandings of these terms extend not only to spatial and resource control but also to specific (re)configurations of values and institutions (Rasmussen and Lund, 2018). These reconfigurations are towards a commodification of nature through the accumulation or the dis-accumulation process (Watts, 2017).

Territoriality and frontierness are recurrent themes in the colonial and postcolonial politics of the Eastern Himalayan states in India. The significance of these notions can be explained by the social and political construction of the region as 'underdeveloped' and conflict-ridden, inhabited by 'backward' tribal communities left behind in India's development (McDuie-Ra, 2008). Such notions are encouraged by reports on the region, such as the Northeastern Region Vision 2020, that states, 'troubled by history and geopolitics, the Northeast has remained one of the most backwards regions of the country' (MoDONER, 2008, p. 2).

Rasmussen and Lund (2018, p. 391) maintain that frontiers indicate not only a geographical space but also a particular epistemological and political distinction. In the case of Eastern Himalayan states in India, the political dynamics of the region with the nation state is of particular importance where recognition as a distinct tribal entity, assertion of political identity for various settlements outside or within the parameters of the Indian nation state continue to be raised and is one of the most critical political issues in this region today (McDuie-Ra, 2008, Karlsson, 2013).

However, the framing of the demographically diverse Eastern Himalayan region as a homogeneous frontier is problematic, as each state is a highly differentiated space of different colonial and postcolonial experiences and political struggles. Nevertheless, Karlsson (2011) points out that the concept is helpful in examining a common dynamics of a history of regional political and socio-cultural marginalisation. As a major development intervention in this region, the dynamics of frontiers and territoriality are particularly effective to interrogate outcomes of large-scale hydropower construction in spaces characterised by complex land tenure systems, dynamic local livelihoods, and political and environmental fragility. In illustrating the contemporary frontier phenomenon, Geiger (2009, p. 9) explains, 'Just as it describes the raw edges of the state domains, the frontier concept also connotes residual wilderness.' New acts of frontier making are as much about making as they are about destroying institutional order through the deployment of already existing institutional ideas (Rasmussen and Lund, 2018, p. 395). Working on similar lines, this paper examines the production of unruly space at the state's margins in the case of hydropower projects in Darjeeling.

Unruly space is understood as a function of the local political and socio-economic context, produced by colonial and postcolonial territorialisation of people and extraction of resources that lead to unequal and unjust outcomes such as a prevailing identity crisis, poor provision of basic services and infrastructure such as roads, environmental degradation, skewed political power, precarious livelihoods, political and governance disorder. When taken together, these colonial histories of extraction and postcolonial perpetuation of marginalisation are used to legitimise new state agendas. In the case of the Darjeeling Hills, I argue, state agendas such as hydropower development serve to reproduce marginalisation and perpetuate precarity.

4.4. Constituting an unruly space: colonial and postcolonial governance of Darjeeling

The significance of Darjeeling as an economically and politically marginalised region, marked by poverty, underdevelopment and political conflict, is underscored by many studies (Chettri, 2013, Ganguly, 2005, Besky, 2017, Middleton and Shneiderman, 2018, Subba, 1992, Khawas, 2011). It has remained a politically volatile region since the 1980s, when the first violent movement for political autonomy from West Bengal was raised.

In Darjeeling, capital accumulation, underdevelopment, and economic marginalization are entangled with non-recognition of rights to land and a crisis of political identity. Deprived of legal ownership of land, the majority of the population works as wage labourers in plantations and forest villages, which, in turn, results in economic disempowerment and exploitation (Chettri, 2013, Khawas, 2011, Chatterjee, 2001). This economic marginalisation, historical deprivation of land rights combined with repeated claims of citizenship recognition, creates conditions for an 'unruly space.' Crucially, the legacy of non-recognition of land rights and the uncertainty of belonging has its roots in colonial capitalist practices (Bennike, 2017, Middleton, 2013) and has been perpetuated by the postcolonial state (Bomjan, 2008, Ganguly, 2005) through territorial control, resource extraction and poor systems of governance. These historical trajectories of marginalisation are explored in the following section.

4.4.1. Darjeeling as a frontier: resource histories and colonial capitalism

> *Across both historical watersheds and political movements, Darjeeling somehow persistently appears as a frontier—incorporated into global capitalism from early on, but always on the periphery (Bennike, 2017, p. 271).*

Land and labour

Since the time it was annexed by the East India Company from the Kingdom of Sikkim in 1835, Darjeeling's existence has been centred on the commodification of its resources, disenfranchisement of its people, and exploitation of labour for the benefit of people who live elsewhere (Bennike, 2017, Besky, 2017). When it was acquired, the colonial state considered Darjeeling as 'terra incognita', a place with no inhabitants (Bennike, 2017), obliterating the

existence of the Lepcha people who sporadically inhabited the place for centuries (Besky, 2017). It was conceived as the base for exploring the potential for trans-Himalayan trade in the Eastern Himalayan frontiers (Bhattacharya, 2013, Bennike, 2017). However, under the control of the East India Company, the area soon became an important commercial frontier for capitalist modes of production, emerging as a site for vast investment by British tea planters, as well as extensive timber extraction (Bennike, 2017, Middleton, 2013b).

Throughout colonial rule, Darjeeling was treated as an 'exceptional' space and was subject to ad-hoc policies that exempted it from general land rules, in a bid to attract the capital needed to extract commercial value from the area (Besky, 2017, Bennike, 2017).[18] To meet the international market's high demand for the growing tea industry and to clear forests, and build bungalows, labour availability was of paramount concern (Xaxa, 1985, Besky, 2014, Chatterjee, 2001). Consequently, the colonial planters recruited thousands of labourers from the oppressed and impoverished farmers of eastern Nepal (Chatterjee, 2001, Besky, 2017, Warner, 2014, Hutt, 1998). However, due to territorial disputes with Nepal, the recruitment was done through 'sardars' or brokers acting as agents. This process of migration through informal patron-client networks prevented any opportunity to obtain formal papers and legal acknowledgment as British subjects (Middleton, 2013, Besky, 2017).[19]

4.4.2. Territorial governance and postcolonial underdevelopment

If we become a state then we can start our own system – rules.[20]

After independence, the district was brought under the provincial jurisdiction of the state of West Bengal, which introduced more revenue-centred policies to bring more land under its control. Under the State Land Acquisition Act of 1953, for example, all forests in West Bengal

---

[18] Under the wasteland provision, land was routinely leased or auctioned to British companies at bargain prices, and valuable forest lands were sold and cleared for the growing tea industry. The Laws Local Extent Act, 1874 (also known as Scheduled District Act) Part III, declared Darjeeling as a 'Scheduled District'; with the Government of India Act 1919 Darjeeling was brought under the 'Backward Tract'; and from 1935 till independence, Darjeeling remained a Partially Excluded Area. These provisions sealed the distinct identity of the region and the people and further separated it from the rest of Bengal (Middleton, 2013).

[19] The tea plantation workers, for example, were paid very low wages and in order to supplement this they were allotted plots of land, but with no tenancy rights (Chhetri, 2013).

[20] Key informant, male, 50 years old, government staff, Soil department, Kurseong.

became the property of the State (Banerjee et al., 2010). In the hills of Darjeeling, the forests became classified as 'Reserved' due to their high timber value, and all local rights of use were automatically abolished (ibid). Adopting a policy similar to the colonial administration's principle of 'scientific' colonial forestry, the West Bengal Forest Corporation (WBFDC) in 1974 introduced mechanised logging in order to prevent the 'unproductive' and 'wasteful' handling of forests through manual felling. A retired Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) rationalised such forestry policy in this manner:

> *We were poor; we needed infrastructure like roads. In the hills we had valuable forest resources, so the forests were used to generate revenue for development purposes.*

What remains unsaid is that 'revenue for development purposes' was often siphoned to the state with negligible benefits for local communities dependent on the forests now demarcated as 'reserved' (Bomjan, 2008, Khawas, 2009). Besides destroying the region's natural resources, deforestation caused additional problems of soil erosion, heavy landslides, and acute water scarcity, which are the defining socio-environmental realities of present-day Darjeeling (Ganguly, 2005). Over its post-colonial lifespan, the processes of commodification of resources and exploitation and precarity of people of Darjeeling have intensified, leading to a crisis of development and governance in the region. Even today, the tea and timber industries, for which Darjeeling is celebrated, are directly controlled and exploitatively harnessed by the state government and private enterprises (Subba, 1992, Khawas, 2006).

In the 1980s, for example, many tea gardens, which sustained the largest part of the rural population, closed down due to low productivity and labour unrest, as the private owners were not interested in investing in the labourers' welfare. This left approximately 50,000 workers unemployed (Khawas, 2006, Ganguly, 2005). Economic marginalisation, landlessness, underdevelopment, and sustained state neglect prompted the political mobilisation of a regional identity through the violent separatist political movement for 'Gorkhaland' in 1986.

As mainstream ideas of conservation and protection came to be applied through policies such as the 1988 Forest Policy Act, that stopped and criminalised felling of trees, people dependent on forest resources for their livelihoods found themselves out of waged employment (Banerjee

et al., 2010). Forest villagers from Najok and Deorali villages, located around the hydropower sites, say that they were totally dependent on the forests in the past, but now they are less than 40% dependent on the forest department. *Every once in a while, work is available to clean forests or do some planting projects. Now we work as drivers or find work as labourers in construction work if available or in the neighbouring Sikkim.*[21]

As Sivaramakrishnan (1999) has observed, territorialisation of forests and the processes of resource control has been necessarily exclusionary, privileging state and private actors, whilst delegitimising the rights to livelihoods of those dependent on the forests. High unemployment and deep-rooted poverty forced communities to depend on illegal extraction of fuel, fodder, and timber from forests, thus placing them on the wrong side of law (Ganguly, 2005). This period also coincided with the violent Gorkhaland agitation that led to many negative repercussions on the economy in general, and people's livelihoods in particular.

In the last four decades, the struggle for Gorkhaland has been marked by a series of compromises with the West Bengal state, eventually conceding to different semi-autonomous local governments. At present, the Darjeeling region is governed as the Gorkha Territorial Administration (GTA), a semi-autonomous political body under the administrative control of the state of West Bengal. This structure of governance, with no legislative but limited financial and executive powers, is the outcome of prolonged and complicated processes of violent and nonviolent political struggle for separation from West Bengal. However, the Gorkhaland movement has not led to a separate state, brought the expected level of development, or met the aspirations of the people (Ganguly, 2005, Middleton, 2013).

The demand for Gorkhaland has itself undergone significant transformations, under different manipulative state governments and corrupt political leaders, from a claim for a regional political identity to demands for different ethnic and tribal identities. Ethnic differences within the pan- Gorkha identity have been galvanised by the present state government through the establishment of tribal development boards for the uplift and economic wellbeing of individual ethnic groups. This policy, accompanied by doling out grants to different ethnic groups, has

---

[21] Group conversation with men, Najok forest village

enabled the present state government to manage minority groups and contain the demand for Gorkhaland (Chhetri, 2017)[22]. Under the present state government, the movement has significantly weakened and divided by conflicting ethnic, tribal and political affiliations. While ethnic politics are not so pronounced in the hydropower-affected areas in Darjeeling, political affiliations are highly influential. In a region experiencing continuous political turmoil and lacking major industrial or infrastructural projects, the NHPC has become a key development actor.

To provide a broader range of understanding on frontier and the issues of power, agency and accountability, (Geiger, 2009, pp. 98-98), suggests three principal frontier types – *frontiers of settlement* where the state establishes power through introduction of settlers, *resource frontiers* formed for the purpose of extraction of natural resources, and *frontiers of control* where the major objective of ingression is essentially state control of borderland regions. Geiger (2008) notes that these categories are not exclusive but coexist and overlap with each other to constitute unique geographical, political, social and cultural spaces. Regardless of their specific types, Geiger characterises frontiers as conflict- ridden by their very nature: they are known for exhibiting conflicts over "meaning, space, territory and power" (Hvalkof, 2008, p. 277 cited in Geiger, 2009).

This is true in the case of Darjeeling, which is a settlement frontier, resource frontier, and frontier of control all at the same time, which ties with the argument about an unequal and exploitative relation maintained by the Indian state. Furthermore, in Darjeeling, questions of resource control, unequal and inadequate development, and economic marginalization are thoroughly entangled with non-recognition of rights to land and a crisis of political identity.

Against this backdrop of Darjeeling as an unruly space, the following section discusses how land rights deprivation, informality, economic precarity, and politics interconnect to shape the lives of hydropower-affected communities.

---

[22] The evolution of the Gorkhaland movement and what it has meant for regional politics and development is detailed in Chapter 6.

4.4.3. Contested claims: the politics of precarity and informality

We live in a no man's land[23]

There are many categories of land in the Darjeeling hills and exact definitions are disputed. There are, for example, tea and cinchona plantation lands, forest villages and revenue villages. Most of these categories of land are government owned, even when people have been living on them for many generations. Historically, authority over development decision-making lay with the Forest Department. However, when infrastructure was being built to facilitate revenue generation, land was given on lease both to public departments, such as the Railway and Public Works Department, and to commercial enterprises such as tea gardens, for periods ranging from 30 to 99 years. The lease agreements, however, are poorly recorded: since they have not been updated, documented or revised regularly, confusion remains about the real ownership of these variously designated lands. A former senior Land Revenue officer highlighted state neglect, suggesting that the administration continued to make inadvertent mistakes. He observed,

> *Although records have to be reviewed and updated every 15 years, that does not happen in Darjeeling. This is (the) government's lethargy – when older technical hands were retired, new technical experts were not recruited to take their place.*

Thus, poor management meant technical requirements for different land records were often outdated or worse, ignored. The lack of legal land rights is a critical issue defining the vulnerability of most rural people such as the tea plantation workers in Darjeeling. However, this issue applies especially starkly to hydropower-affected communities, as they are overtly labelled as 'encroachers' by the authorities. These settlements grew informally as a consequence of becoming victims of the natural disaster of 1968 when the Teesta River flooded and killed and displaced hundreds of people in the area. Consequently, those displaced and dispossessed because of landslides found livelihoods as labourers in the highway reconstruction efforts. As one key informant noted:

---

[23] Interviews in Kalijhora and Sevoke, September 2017.

The highway people are mainly General Reserve Engineer Force (GREF)[24] settlements, they came to work for GREF and settled there- but they have been staying there for a long time.[25]

This issue is compounded by ongoing uncertainty about which government department owns land along highways. For example, the Forest Department and the Public Works Department (PWD) both lay claim to Kalijhora Bazaar – a highway settlement close the TLDP IV site. Caught in between these claims are residents of Kalijhora, who have been living there since 50 years, but regularly identified in government documents and discussions as 'encroachers'.

Continual denial of local people's land rights, accompanied by poor documentation of any other formal rights, have become the foundation upon which hydropower projects, intended for economic development, are constructed. A 70-year-old resident of Sevoke (another highway settlement of approximately 300 households close to Kalijhora), reported being repeatedly threatened by the Railway Department:

Last year, more than 100 families here were served (a legal) notice asking us to move from here. Once they (railway officials) came armed with railway police. But when we ask them to show us proof that this land belongs to them, they are not able to do that. We keep saying that if you consider that we are living in encroached land then give us some parja patta[26]. I tried all my life to get documentation and am this old now, what should we do if our requests are ignored?

The quote is illustrative of the interviews across Kalijhora, Sevoke, and other highway settlements. Interviews with old local residents and academics of Darjeeling documented how most of the people settled along the highway became dispossessed and displaced because of the Teesta River floods of 1968. No rehabilitation or livelihood assistance was provided by the state administration at that time. The settlements grew informally as a consequence of affected people finding new livelihoods as labourers in the years of repair and rebuilding work

---

[24] GREF is staffed by officers and troops drawn from the Indian Army's Corps of Engineers and works to develops and maintains road networks in India's border areas.

[25] Conversation with local academic, Sikkim University, Gangtok

[26] A government tenure document, recognising the stated rights of the holder, in a specified area.

following the natural disaster in 1968. With time, livelihood diversification opportunities were created by urbanisation brought about by a merger of the kingdom of Sikkim with India in 1975.[27] With the development of the towns of Kalimpong and Siliguri, small groups of construction contractors began to manage quarries with temporary permits from the government.

In the project-affected riverside villages of 29th Mile, Geilkhola and Teesta Bazar, the highway and the river are the livelihood base for most people. People work as quarry labourers, breaking stone boulders in the riverbed, or carrying out small businesses, such as wayside shops and restaurants. However, it is important to highlight the fact that the informal status of these settlements is equally a product of regional political rivalry, as these settlements are encouraged and exploited by different political parties to leverage electoral politics and power at opportune times and junctures. Residents of Kalijhora and Sevoke recount that whether settlements are considered illegal or legal depends on the government in power.[28] A resident of Kalijhora elaborated: *"during the time of the CPIM party in 1974-75, given their ideology of protecting the labouring class, people were allowed to earn a livelihood on the highway"*.

Thus, at the heart of precarious livelihoods in highway settlements, lies deprivation of tenancy rights, state neglect, and regional party politics. This situation that excludes highway communities from officially recognized legal processes, triggers them to engage in precarious lifestyles and shifting political affiliations as a way to fight for recognition of their rights. People reported getting psychological security from affiliating with a political party: *"if I am connected to a political party, then you will not be removed from here"*.[29] Hence, a discussion of present livelihood precarity has to be understood in this context of contestation and resource politics – informed by a history of appropriation and commodification of natural resources spanning colonial and postcolonial rule in Darjeeling.

---

[27] After Sikkim became part of India, the highway developed as a main link road and with the growth of tourism in Sikkim, people were able to engage in small businesses there.

[28] Field research Kalijhora and Sevoke, September, 2017.

[29] Key informant interviews Kalijhora, female, 49 years old, September, 2017; 29 Mile, female 55 years old, May 2017

Moving from the history of extraction and present-day precarity, the following section examines the politicised space of hydropower development in the Teesta River in Darjeeling, to illustrate how contested resource-based projects unfold in unruly space.

4.5. Governance in unruly spaces: hydropower practices and outcomes

Governance is of an entirely different quality at the state's margins, and so are the many aspects of the moral, social, and economic behaviour of those who have come to set up shop here—temporarily or for good (Geiger, 2009, p. 45).

4.5.1. Practices of coercion

On July 2016, two years after the TLDP III completed construction, a row of houses and shops in 29 Mile along the Teesta River were demolished by the district administration (Mungpoo News, 2016). This was undertaken as a 'precautionary' move following the torrential rains that damaged the houses, and put them at risk of inundation (Darjeeling Chronicle, 2016). However, claims for damage and livelihood losses were ignored or inadequate, as there is no defined mechanism for these people to engage with the district administration because of their 'illegal' status. The quarry (Figure 12), which provided a livelihood to the majority of the people, was totally submerged after the construction of the dam. The extent of loss is evident from the following quote:

> *The quarry was our security blanket. Breaking the stones would earn about Rs. 150/200 per day. We could pay bills and send children to school from quarry income. After the quarry was submerged, we faced a lot of difficulty. At one point, we did not have enough to eat. Now we run here and there in search of labour work.* [30]

The quarry, described as a 'security blanket' assured people of a livelihood, even if poorly paid. The impacts of the quarry submergence not only affected incomes but also ability of families to eat and send their children to school.

---

[30] Quarry meeting, 29th Mile, 29 Mile, 25th March 2017.

Figure 12 A typical quarry work. Picture by author

In Teesta Bazar, the occupation of river rafting – a popular tourist sport – has been affected as the speed of the river flow has been drastically reduced by the dam construction. This has had a negative impact on the associated livelihoods of tourist guides, small shopkeepers and providers of local transport. Compensation talks have been routed through political parties and have become a politicised topic.

In 29th Mile, six of the families who had their houses demolished in July 2016, run makeshift fast food stalls (Figure 13). They argue they were tricked by the hydropower company into accepting meagre compensation to prevent them from obstructing the construction of the project.

> *We were asked to accept a small amount of compensation as a formality as our house was in the danger zone. In return, we were assured that we wouldn't have to leave. We were told that they were going to build a small project – a 'low dam' – and it would be helpful for us. We were made to sign an agreement which was written in English; later we came to know that it said we were receiving full and final settlement for our property.[31]*

Similar to the above process of inadequate information, other communities also reported that they were lured and coerced into accepting meagre compensation. According to Bobby, one of the stall

---

[31] Group discussion, 2 females (35-45 years), 2 males (40-45 years), 29 Mile, May 2017.

owners, *'compensation would not be offered if we didn't sign.'* Quarry labourers also attest to this: *'Word got around that compensation would not be offered and later, if they didn't accept the money, the money would have to be returned.'* Hence, people reported having no option but to accept the poor terms offered, without any opportunity for negotiation.

Figure 13. Fast food stalls in place of demolished houses in 29 Mile. Picture by author

For the quarry workers, who lost their livelihoods after the quarry got submerged by the dam, compensation was brokered though party middlemen after their claims went ignored. After more than two years of running around they were finally compensated with the meagre sum of Rs. 48,000 per person. For Bobby, the immediate effects of the eviction have been severe. She explained:

> *We received a total of 6 lakh rupees for both our house and shop. We accepted the money because we were told that we didn't have to move. The money I received went for my sister's cancer treatment and her final rites after she died. Just when the money was spent, we were made to move. For one and a half months I had no income and a large amount of debt. Then I bought this 'thela gaari' (mobile cart) for twelve thousand rupees and have been running it since.*[32]

---

[32] Interview, female, 35 years old, 29th Mile, May 2017.

Throughout the interviews, narratives from hydropower-affected communities reported how NHPC 'tricked' and 'victimised' people into signing agreements for the construction of the dam. They attested to underhand negotiations being employed to divide communities and expedite project interests. One such strategy, reported by respondents both within and outside the communities, was hiring 'promoters' to scope out and handpick potential aides to confuse people and persuade them to support the project by giving bribes. For example, a conversation with two residents of the 29th Mile settlement elaborated:

> Two middle-aged men working with NHPC rented a house in 29th Mile months before the public hearing for TLDP III was conducted. I was part of the youth club of 10-12 youth and these men caught onto our club to get their work done. For six to seven months, they spoke to us about how NHPC would make us rich. They acted like father figures to us by giving ideas on making money, like acquiring contractor documents. They never talked about the consequences of the project, saying that the dam would be far and it would be a 'low dam'. They then got us to sign the public hearing document.[33]

The NHPC's strategic use of knowledge gaps is evident from its exclusionary and arbitrary practices of selective mobilisation of people, framing the project as a 'low' dam, and manipulating local political divisions. Such practices raise critical ethical concerns for people living in remote areas, especially the poorer and less educated who have limited access to information and remain oblivious of the effects of such projects (Huber and Joshi, 2015). These communities did not comprehend the implications for environmental and structural changes the project entailed and its various direct and future consequences.

Across the interviews, people often referred to themselves as backward, uneducated, and powerless; terms familiar from colonial documents and postcolonial state narratives. The project authorities, leaders, and brokers manipulated these perceptions by playing on individual and collective fears of the people. In an obviously corrupt environment, where people displayed having limited political agency with which to negotiate, and power developers and political/elite actors leveraged this to make decisions without being subject to scrutiny or being held accountable. The people's informal status legitimised exploitation, eviction and dispossession, narrowing the space for negotiation, leaving them dependent on brokers and

---

[33] Conversation with 2 men (40-45 years old), female (55 years old), 27th Mile, May 2017.

middlemen, and rendering them vulnerable to political and economic exploitation. In the next section, we will see how these politics and practices are rationalised by the hydropower developers and other institutional actors as necessary for 'development.'

4.5.2. Constructing legitimacy – apolitical discourses of hydropower development

> *We are building hydropower in regions where no other industry exists. We are facilitating local development either directly or indirectly. Our primary aim is to complete the project and generate energy for the state - other activities are not mandatory.* [34]

> *NHPC is a big company; they will do all the necessary paperwork required for the clearance of the project. It has provided lot of benefits to the local people.*[35]

The above statements from a representative of a hydropower development company and a state government official in Darjeeling reflect an objective view of 'development' in an economically marginalised and politically fragile area is used to rationalise hydropower interventions. The hydropower representatives interviewed made it clear that their primary concern was energy generation for India and concurrent development for the Eastern Himalayas. When NHPC officials were asked about people being not informed or being inadequately or arbitrarily compensated, they categorically rejected the idea that this was their job, and reported that they directed people to the administrative systems to whom they had paid the required concessions.

> *Surveys of households and project impacts are carried out by the DM's (District Magistrate) office, not by NHPC. (The) DM directs us about how many households and families are to be compensated and all payments are disbursed through the DM office. The compensation committee too is headed by the DM.* [36]

The quote highlights how NHPC, with its government mandate, saw itself as an implementing agency and less as one concerned with pre- and post-project concerns such as local acceptance

---

[34] Interview with two senior NHPC officials, Mungpoo, 14, October 2017

[35] Interview with forest official, Kalijhora, 18 October 2017

[36] Interview with two senior NHPC officials, Mungpoo, 14, October 2017

or transparent and fair compensation. Moreover, NHPC officials noted that affected villagers were 'encroachers' and making their living from illegal sand mining. Consequently, their consent for or involvement in the project did not seem necessary. When asked if they had any component of local development (e.g. restoring affected livelihoods or rebuilding damaged houses), NHPC respondents stated they tried to follow norms set by the government. Repeatedly, they maintained that the main responsibility of post-project issues lay with the state government, to whom they paid a percentage of the hydropower project's revenue as royalty. Further, they argued that government records of 29ᵗʰ Mile showed only three households as permanent and thus claims by other 'encroachers' were void.

Contrastingly, one senior engineer from NHPC reflected that the decision to invest in the region had been wrong. Speaking about the ongoing political turmoil that had brought the project to a standstill he said, *"This project has become very expensive for us. If we had been a private company, then we would have run away".*[37] However, he did not think the negative economic, ethical, and environmental outcomes of the project of concern. [38]

Local NGOs cited their lack of ability to oppose central government projects in a politically contested space and attested that the bureaucracy and project authorities served each other's interests by adopting an apolitical and administrative stance. In interviews, many state-level bureaucrats and politicians, including the local councillors, placed the blame on the affected people: '*Who asked them to build the house near the river?'* A local councillor who was part of the Resettlement Committee said, *'We did a fair survey for compensation using a technical group. We helped people get compensation – they did not actually deserve it*.' Another senior officer from the Land Reforms Department, also part of the Resettlement Committee, mentioned that he was not interested in compensating households: *They were sitting on government space. They were not supposed to get any compensation but we decided that they were our people so we agreed to compensate them.'*

---

[37] Chief Engineer, male, 50 years old, Mungpoo, 14October 2017

[38]https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/energy/power/nhpc-is-losing-rs-2-5-crore-a-day-in-tldp-iii-and-iv-in-darjeeling/articleshow/59757868.cms?from=mdr

In this way, government narratives around compensation were hinged on their perceptions of largesse for a community that was seen as less deserving or encroachers. Although quarrying was going on for more than 30 years, and revenue from this was being received by the government, the quarry labourers nevertheless remained largely invisible to the project developers and the institutional authorities. Consequently, there was no mechanism in place for them to claim compensation.

4.6. Discussion and conclusion: producing governable spaces and subjects

Present claims of spaces and resources are underpinned by institutional debris from past practices, and rules, often actively and selectively remembered, offering justification for future claims (Stoler, 2013 cited in Lund 2018).

4.6.1. Questioning top-down development

This paper examined the historical, political, and structural context of Darjeeling, to demonstrate how hydropower development projects get legitimised in an economically and politically marginalised space. In the case of Darjeeling, exclusionary and arbitrary practices of hydropower development have been rationalised through national and local development priorities that have dismissed local people and livelihoods as illegal, accelerated environmental degradation, increased ecological and social precarity, and reinforced inequality. Importantly, it has encouraged the spread of corruption, widening fissures in an already divided society. In contrast to the dominant narrative of local development, uneven modes of hydropower governance have provided opportunities for local elites, perpetuated marginalisation, and increased dependence on the rent-seeking political class, while crucial questions concerning historical deprivation of land rights have been depoliticised.

In an economically marginalised, politically contested, and corrupt environment, I showed how formal and informal governance undermine environmental and social concerns, erode local livelihoods, and perpetuate precarity. Using overt and covert means such as information deficits, arbitrary compensation, disingenuous impact assessments, and labelling people and livelihoods as illegal, hydropower projects were set up and even supported because they were presented as vehicles of development in a 'backward' region.

The informal status of the affected communities' in the highway settlements was manipulated at opportune times by state government and project authorities, who used inclusionary and exclusionary practices to serve their own needs. Consequently, these settlements became casualties of misgovernment, neglect and divisive regional politics. Denigratory labelling and ahistorical descriptions of affected communities not only legitimised top-down development agendas like hydropower development but also diverted attention from the state's responsibility to grant due rights to these communities.

Decades of political and economic marginalization have inculcated an entrenched culture of political and societal marginalisation in the EH, where internal constructions of backwardness run deep. Such constructions of illegality are constitutive of the enduring precarity, political instability, and endemic corruption that results in ordinary people finding themselves deprived of control over their own lives and their vested rights unrecognised.

4.6.2. The making and unmaking of unruly spaces

The metaphor of unruly space at the interstices of territorial rule, resource exploitation, underdevelopment, and identity politics captures the area's character, in the micro spaces around the hydropower project sites as well as the larger portrait of the Darjeeling region and the Eastern Himalayas as a whole. It provides a lens through which Darjeeling appears as a marginal and neglected yet economically critical space which was unevenly made, unmade, and marginalised through, first by the colonial and then by the West Bengal state. From the perspective of an unruly space, it is possible to maintain a focus on the historical efforts made at different times by the state to govern people and resources, and to interpret the role of the structural context in legitimizing the state's present-day exclusionary governance practices. This historically informed reading also allows deeper insights into the area's uneven development outcomes. Hence, a focus on context through an unruly space frame provides a lens to explore depoliticised discourses of hydropower developments, their governance practices, and their effects on marginalised places and peoples.

Unruly space provides a different starting point for investigating questions of governance, allowing deeper explorations of the foundations of inequalities and unequal power relations.

Such a framing helps to locate the complex and cumulative nature of the local, social and environmental outcomes that reproduce inequality and marginality. It showcases how unruly spaces set the stage for the enactment of unruly governance; in the case of hydropower development in Darjeeling, this is characterised by a slew of exclusionary and selectively inclusionary implementation practices. In constructing the idea of unruly space, this paper contributes to literature on the political ecology of hydropower projects by showing that the impacts of large infrastructural projects and the resulting resource transformations require complex understandings of ongoing 'structural' processes of accumulation through dispossession (De Angelis, 2004). In particular, the conceptual construction of Himalayan areas as 'backward' and its implications for the practices and implementation of state-led interventions challenge us to question this framing and its complicity in development practice.

This paper argues that development without regard of context perpetuate precarity as they are enforced through historically rooted dependencies and unequal power relations. While it is important to note the sociocultural and environmental impacts of development, it is also necessary to discuss the contextual complexity of the processes that legitimise such practices. Bearing in mind the reorientation of hydropower as a green development, and debates on India's need for regional development and climate change mitigation, the relevance of a historically informed idea of development is particularly wide-ranging.

Hydropower development in the Himalayas is linked to debates that relate not only to questions of ecological vulnerability and heightened climate variability (Dharmadhikary, 2008, Tambe et al., 2012) but also deeper concerns about existing institutional and political marginalisation and the rights of many distinct ethnic communities that inhabit the region. This issue is exacerbated by the decisions and policies undertaken by the state and private companies that do not involve public participation or are exclusionary in nature, and the implications that such processes entail for their rights with regard to land tenure systems, tribal autonomy and ethnic identity (Baruah, 2003b, McDuie-Ra, 2008). While one can hardly overemphasise the region's need for development and for state intervention to bring it about, development must be in tune with local social, cultural, economic and physical specificities, as well as the participation of those who live there and are most immediately affected by it.

Chapter 5: The politics of precarity: exploring local agency in hydropower development projects in the Darjeeling Himalayas

Abstract

In the last two decades, a proliferation of hydropower projects in the Eastern Himalayas has garnered significant attention in academic debate and the popular media. Empirical accounts of local agency responding to the impact of hydropower projects in the region have largely focused on resistance to the impact on culture. Further, they have highlighted the role of indigeneity and ethnicity in the resistance strategies of local people. In contrast to the dominant narrative of resistance in the literature, I explore the reasons for local support for hydropower projects, and the resulting implications, by examining lived experiences of the affected communities. Drawing on eight months of qualitative research, I examine how hydropower-affected communities in the Darjeeling region, India, exercise agency despite having no recourse to land ownership or claims of indigeneity. I use the concept of 'precarity' to analyse how vulnerabilities are shaped, experienced and resisted in marginalised settings. I argue that support for the projects is a response mediated by local circumstances of material need, geographical isolation, economic and political marginalisation and controversial hydropower governance. This article contributes to the growing scholarship on contentious politics of hydropower development in marginal locations of the Himalayas.

Keywords: precarity, lived experiences, negotiation, hydropower, Himalayas, India

5.1. Introduction

As I approach the gate to the reservoir of Teesta Low Dam Project III (TLDP III), security guards stationed at the entrance look at me suspiciously. Arjun39, a key informant from Samthar Gram Panchayat (GP), arrives and tells the guards that I am a relative visiting his family for a few days. The new bridge, built as part of the TLDP III across the Teesta River in Darjeeling, has transformed mountain villages on its left bank by providing access to towns

---

[39] All respondents' names are pseudonyms to preserve anonymity.

and markets. From here, a one-kilometre walk leads to Najok forest village and a five-kilometre uphill drive leads to the villages of Samthar GP (Figure 14). We drive uphill amidst forests, scattered houses, high valleys and largely barren fields, and reach Dong, Arjun's village in Samthar GP. As we sit down to talk, Arjun describes how, during construction, locals were able to get employment and the left bank of Teesta River 'developed' with improved communication and electricity, lifting people out of their geographical isolation and poverty. Arjun's story was one I heard repeatedly in different villages within Samthar GP during fieldwork. Twelve kilometres downstream, residents of Kalijhora Bazar, living close to the second hydropower project – Teesta Low Dam Project IV (TLDP IV), narrated similar stories of deprivation, neglect and economic hardship when asked why they supported the project.

Figure 14 TLDPIII and the left bank of area of villages in Samthar Gram Panchayat.
Picture by author
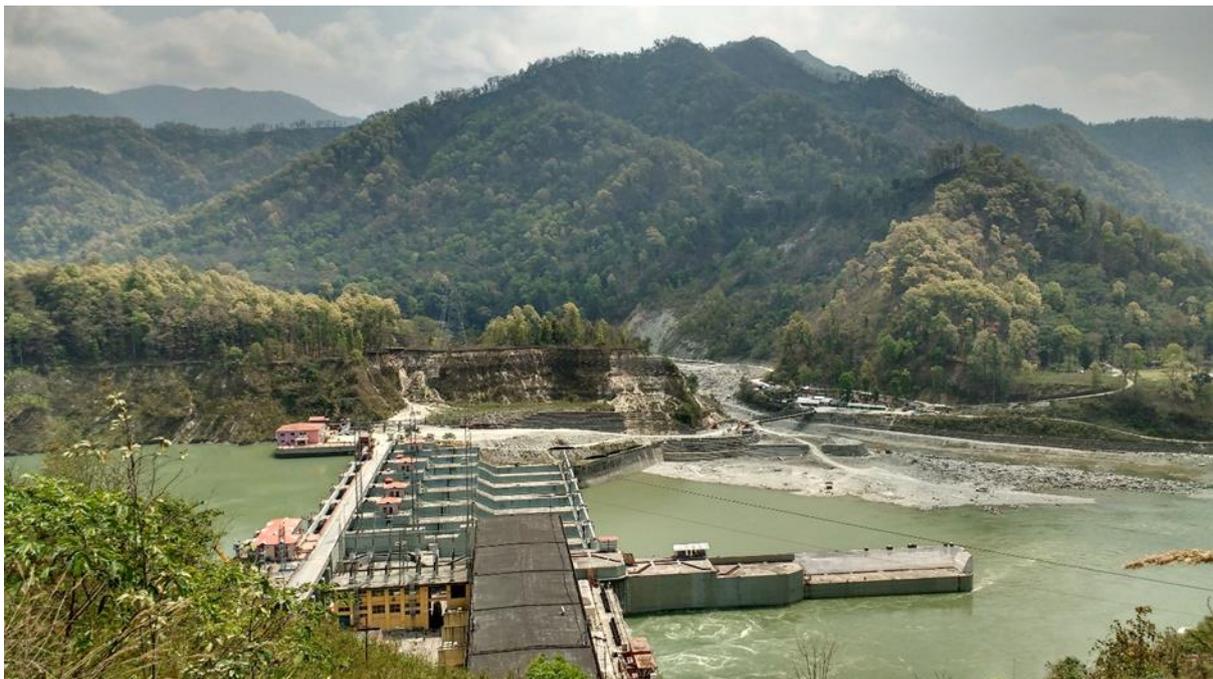
Despite non-governmental organisations (NGOs) efforts to dissuade people from supporting hydropower projects because of incomplete and non-transparent assessment studies, the groups I interviewed supported the project because of the perceived opportunity for 'development'. In this article, I draw attention to such responses of support and negotiation by communities living alongside hydropower sites on the Teesta River in the Darjeeling region. I examine their agency

by exploring their lived experiences to reveal how and why they supported the construction of hydropower projects.

I use the analytical frame of precarity to explore why these groups actively negotiated for benefits, cooperated with project authorities, and even confronted anti-dam NGOs and activists in order to get the projects implemented. As an analytical concept, precarity encapsulates both a condition and a point of mobilisation in response to that condition (Waite, 2009). In this article, I use the concept of precarity to examine how the lived experiences of marginalised people have led to bottom-up support for these projects and to explore how perceived vulnerabilities are shaped, experienced and resisted. In contrast to the dominant narrative in the literature on large-scale hydropower projects, I focus on relatively smaller-scale dams and examine the agency of communities who have no recourse to land ownership and indigeneity to support these projects. While supporting hydropower projects to receive local development and new economic opportunities normally benefit certain elite or ethnic groups (Ete, 2017, McDuie-Ra, 2011), Darjeeling's case is different. As I will argue, affected communities are highway residents and forest communities who unlike other groups in the region do not have claims to land ownership or indigeneity that would give them bargaining power.

In examining the responses and agency of these communities, this article makes three key arguments, which are relevant to debates about development and agency in similarly geographically remote and economically and politically marginalised contexts. First, bottom-up support for hydro-power projects is a result of material need, relative underdevelopment and isolation, and internalised constructions of relative 'backwardness'. Second, the lived experience of exclusion, such as economic insecurity, political marginalisation, and neglect endows marginalised groups with experiential knowledge of working with the project authorities to their advantage through negotiation; however, negotiations are rarely productive because of unequal power dynamics. Third, the vulnerabilities introduced by resource transformation and contestation drive local people to actions that exacerbate vulnerabilities and ecological degradation.

These arguments highlight how the support of hydropower projects in Darjeeling in the Eastern Himalayas is shaped by local precarity. Thus, these responses are symptomatic of increasing

local and regional vulnerability and sharply question the view that hydropower interventions are justified because they enable local development. Ultimately I challenge the dominant framing of agency in the face of imposed development projects to argue that agency can encapsulate resistance, compliance and complicity, often co-occurring in marginalised communities.

This article consists of five sections, beginning with a discussion of the context of hydropower development in the Eastern Himalayan states and the diverse responses it has elicited. I then develop the concept of precarity as a framework for local agency, in order to provide explanations for responses to hydropower projects in marginalised settings. This is followed by an overview of the historical, political, and socio-economic context of Darjeeling against which hydropower development has unfolded. The third section describes the research methods, researcher positionality, and provides a background for the case studies. The remaining two sections detail empirical accounts of responses and negotiation practices, highlighting how and why people support hydropower projects. In the final section, I discuss the implications of these responses and practices for local precarity, uneven development, and sustainable futures.

5.2. Agency, resistance and support: responses to hydropower projects in the Himalayas

Most accounts of hydropower project contestations in India's Eastern Himalayan region focus on large projects and the various cultural and identity-orientated conflicts that these projects produce (Arora, 2009, Arora and Kipgen, 2012, Chowdhury and Kipgen, 2013, Kohli, 2011, Sharma, 2018). Chaudhury and Kigpen (2013, p. 196) point out how both the presence and absence of development reflect identity-based, cultural, religious, and ethnic divisions, issues of control of land, natural resources, and conflict in the region. This contention results from a dominant framing of the region as 'backward'[40] which has consequences for development

---

[40] In the common imaginary, the Northeastern Himalayan region is constructed as a 'backward' region. This idea is guided by national policies such as the 1981 Report on Development of the North-eastern Region which categorises it is as a region of "fundamental backwardness:" where the primitive tribal communities that inhabit the area are by left behind in India's development due to political conflicts and ethnic strife. A World Bank report (2007: 16) states that 'the region could be seen as a victim of a low-level equilibrium where poverty and lack of development (compared with the remainder of India and other Southeast Asian nations) lead to civil conflict, lack

practice, because mainstream Indian policies do not always capture this dynamism of inequality (Chowdhury and Kipgen, 2013). In the context of hydropower development in the Teesta River basin, a lot of studies have focused on the unprecedented scale of protests by the indigenous Lepcha communities against hydropower projects in their sacred landscape of Dzongu in North Sikkim (Huber and Joshi, 2015, Arora, 2008, Gergan, 2014, Little, 2008). The Lepchas have objected on the grounds of violation of environmental and socio-cultural rights (Arora, 2008).

Accounts of local resistance, leading to the reassessment and cancellation of projects, have been discussed in other Eastern Himalayan states of Manipur and Meghalaya (Arora and Kipgen, 2012, Chowdhury and Kipgen, 2013). A small but growing number of studies (Ete, 2017, McDuie-Ra, 2011, Dukpa et al., 2018, Karlsson, 2016) also highlight the complexity of responses, of both support and opposition towards hydropower projects. These studies have shown that of the different factors that motivate support, local perceptions of underdevelopment and/or marginalisation are key and demonstrate that supporters hoped to benefit by selling land, securing employment, or getting better services and infrastructure. For example, Ete (2017) analysed pro-project attitudes among the *Ramos* community in Sii Valley, Arunachal Pradesh, and concluded that motivations driving support for hydropower projects are a reflection of a prevailing sense of underdevelopment and relative deprivation compared to other elite tribes. McDuie-Ra (2011) made a similar argument when examining pro-development stances within the ethnic Lepcha community of Sikkim, who reported long-term experiences of underdevelopment. Both these studies looked at inter and intra community conflicts, and problematize singular portrayal of local movements as well as romanticised notions of indigenous resistance to development.

In this article, I contribute to debates on community support for hydropower development by exploring the agency of marginalised hydropower affected communities in Darjeeling region of Eastern Himalayas. By exploring the pragmatic motivations that led to grassroots support for these projects, I highlight the implications for development in these marginalised settings.

---

of political leadership and government, and, therefore, to a politically unstable situation.' Similarly, The Northeast Vision 2020 document for the Northeast, notes, 'troubled by history and geopolitics, the Northeast has remained one of the most backwards regions of the country' (MoDONER 2008: 2).

In the following section, I discuss 'precarity' as a lens to examine the different ways agency is exercised - through negotiation, compliance, and complicity by marginalised communities.

5.3. Precarity: conceptualising agency at the margins

Precarity implies a condition of uncertainty and unpredictability (Ettlinger, 2007) and a 'possible rallying cry for resistance' (Waite, 2009, p. 412). While precariousness refers to a shared condition of uncertainty and instability, the term *precarity* encapsulates both a condition and a point of mobilisation in response to that condition and is seen as constitutively double-edged (Waite, 2009). Most academic writings have applied the concept of precarity to explore issues related to economic security specific to labour and migrant conditions under neoliberalism in the Global North, and to consider whether such conditions can serve as the grounds for mobilization (Dörre et al., 2006). Despite its absence from academic debates on the countries of the Global South until recently, scholars such as Munck (2013) note that the concept of precarity has its origins in these countries where marginality, informality, and social exclusion more accurately describe class relations.

While precarity is not substantially different from notions of vulnerability or insecurity, Waite (2009) argues that the potential of precarity lies in its political role. To interpret precarity is to discern the structural context in which relations are forged (Anderson, 2007). The analytical advantage of the concept of precarity, therefore, is that it explicitly incorporates the political and institutional context in which the *production* of precarity occurs (Waite, 2009). Consequently, experiences of precarity are closely connected to socio-spatial contexts (ibid), thus relating situated experiences of individual insecurity and vulnerability within historic and geographic contexts, as well as wider political and economic structures (Paret and Gleeson, 2016, p. 280). The political framing of precarity as influenced by structural inequalities and power relations provides enables this study to examine the lived experiences of marginalisation faced by landless communities.

This framing facilitates insights into how responses to hydropower development are shaped by the intersection of lived experiences of embedded social stratification, alongside the influence of larger, regional socio-political contestations, and the wider political economy of hydropower development. It represents the durability of existing state/society power relations, particularly the politics of marginality in postcolonial contexts, where the process and practices of

development are essentially about the production and reproduction of inequalities (Williams et al., 2011). Millar (2017) makes the case that one can link shifts in political economy with culture, subjectivity, and experience. This relational approach provides a method of inquiry, opening up space to understand what precarity *does* rather than *where* it occurs (Millar, 2017, p. 5). These points are especially important when considering the responses of marginalised hydropower affected communities in Darjeeling who are highway and forest-dwellers living at the margins of society, typically labourers with no claim to landownership who are disadvantaged in multiple, mutually reinforcing ways.

Here, I conceptualize precarity both as a politically-induced relational condition of marginalisation and deprivation (Waite, 2009) and a practice of agency (Millar, 2017) to show how precarity and precarious living shapes responses to development projects in 'backward' and marginal areas.

5.4. Research method and researcher positionality

This article draws on eight months of fieldwork carried out between March and December 2017 in Kalijhora Bazar (a highway settlement) and Najok (a forest village) which are in the immediate area of the two hydropower sites and whose support was instrumental in facilitating project approval. In these two villages, I conducted five small group discussions[41], 40 in-depth unstructured interviews with labourers, shopkeepers, restaurant owners, former quarry workers, and members of local elites such as leaders and contractors, in these two villages. To embed these experiences into broader dynamics, I also conducted interviews with bureaucratic, political, and civil society actors to capture views about the projects, as well as interviewing people in other villages in the catchment areas in order to understand existing contestations among and within communities to uncover the underlying processes and relations that shaped responses.

Interviews were conducted in Nepali with the assistance of research assistants who acted as gate keepers and key informants. As someone who has grown up and worked with rural communities in Darjeeling, my positionality is one of "insider-outsider:" I share a common

---

[41] Five group discussions – three with women, men (contractors), and youth; two mixed group discussions in Kalijhora. In Najok, one each with youth, senior men and women. Total 40 individual interviews: 10 in Najok and 30 in Kalijhora.

language and culture with the respondents yet my experiences and the privilege of working, living and studying abroad differentiate me from them. Direct quotes in this article come from self-transcribed interviews and field notes.

5.5. States of precarity: the socioeconomic and political context of Darjeeling

5.5.1. Overview of Darjeeling District

Darjeeling district[42] is located in the northernmost part of West Bengal in India (Figure 15) between the neighbouring countries of Nepal and Bhutan and the Indian state of Sikkim. Acquired by the Bengal Presidency of British India from the Kingdom of Sikkim in 1835, the rugged forested landscape of Darjeeling was radically transformed in the 19th Century. Colonial administrators encouraged the large-scale migration of poor farmers from neighbouring Nepal to clear the forested landscape, harvest timber and labour in the region's growing tea industry (Besky, 2014). These migrating populations were given no legal recognition or right to the land they laboured on and this situation continues today. The majority of the working labour force in the area is still employed in the tea gardens, with no legal right to land, and continue to experience economic underdevelopment and disempowerment (Besky, 2014, Chettri, 2013). The benefits from the revenue generated by the tea estates, many owned by businesses from other places in India and abroad do not trickle down to the majority of the people (Chettri, 2013).

---

[42] Darjeeling region is broadly divided into physiographic divisions of hills and the plains. The hilly region comes under Gorkha Territorial Administration – a semi-autonomous body formed for the development of the area.

Figure 15 Location of Darjeeling in India. Source: http://www.kreisels.com/darj/darjeeling-maps.htm

Economic deprivation and non-development are viewed by the people of the Darjeeling hills in terms of unequal power relations vis-a-vis the nation state, which has failed to acknowledge their identity,[43] and the state of West Bengal, which has kept the Darjeeling hills politically and economically subordinate to the majority Bengali community (Ganguly, 2005). While the West Bengal state fails to provide basic infrastructure, such as adequate roads, drinking water and health centres, its control of resources can be witnessed in every sector of development (Tanka, 1992). For example, the tea and timber industries that Darjeeling is well-known for are directly controlled and exploitatively harnessed by the state government (ibid). These instances of discrimination have prompted the political mobilisation of a Nepali identity through a separatist political movement for "Gorkhaland" that has been ongoing for more than four decades (Ganguly, 2005, Khawas, 2009, Tanka, 1992). However, the movement projects an exclusionary identity and ethnicity frame of ''Gorkhaland for Gorkhas'' and ignores complex

---

[43] As Nepali-speaking Gorkhas of India are distinct from the Nepalese of Nepal, mainstream India repeatedly confuses the two, as a consequence of which Indian Nepali speakers suffer psychological and physical insecurity (Khawas, 2009).

ethnic, class, and caste identities that divide Darjeeling society (Wenner, 2013).[44] Yet, the idea of 'Gorkhaland' as a resolution of political and cultural identity and a solution to all problems of material and economic security has become entrenched in Darjeeling society, especially among the rural poor. Chettri (2013, p. 298) explains that, historically, landless labourers of the region have formed the backbone of the separatist political movement, which thrives on a culture of "poverty, dependency and subservience".

Regional marginalisation and disregard for socio-political history are typical of the Darjeeling region, and the scenario of economic, political, and environmental precariousness and power relationships is underscored by the policies and processes of two hydropower projects constructed in the region which I discuss below.

5.5.2. Hydropower projects in Darjeeling

Since 2002, a series of major hydropower projects have been initiated and are currently in various stages of construction along the Teesta River. While most of these projects are in Sikkim, two projects, the Teesta Low Dam[45] III (TLDP III) and Teesta Low Dam IV (TLDP IV), are in the Darjeeling region. TLDP IIII at 27th Mile and TLDP IV at Kalijhora started construction in 2003 and 2004, and were completed in 2013 and 2014, respectively. These are central government projects implemented by its agency, the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC) in agreement with the State of West Bengal. The state government benefits from these projects by receiving a 12% royalty and 30% of the tariff for electricity generated.

The dams are located within a stretch of 15 kilometres along the Teesta River, which runs parallel to National Highway 10 (NH10) that links India with border state of Sikkim (Figure

---

[44] The ethnic groups mostly have a Tibeto Burmese origin; more than 15 Nepalese castes constitute the majority of the hill population. There are Lepchas (the indigenous tribe of the region), Bhutias (who migrated from Bhutan, Sikkim and Tibet both during colonial and postcolonial area) and the Tibetans (who fled Tibet in 1959 and after the Sino-Indian War of 1962). Finally, there are other groups of Bengalis (both permanent settlers and migrant Bengalis of south Bengal, and refugees and migrants from Bangladesh), Biharis and Marwaris Subba, T. B. (1992) *Ethnicity, state and development: A case study of Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling.*

[45] The globally accepted definition framed by the International Commission on Large Dams (ICOLD) categorises dams above 15 meters as large (World Commission on Dams 2000: 11). The two dams are called low dams even when their height are 32.5 and 30 metres tall respectively.

16). Along the highway and valleys, there are many small settlements that have been directly and indirectly affected by the construction of these projects, primarily through the loss of livelihoods or the risk of inundation by the reservoir. For example, in settlements along the highway, many people earned a livelihood as quarry labourers, breaking stone boulders in the riverbeds of the Teesta. After the project was constructed, the dam submerged the quarry sites of the settlements upstream of TLDP III. Moreover, during the monsoon of July 2016, one year after the TLDP III project was completed, demolished by the local administration as a precautionary measure (Darjeeling Chronicle, 2016). However, as the affected people had no right to land, the administration has either compensated them inadequately or ignored their claims completely.

Figure 16 Location of two hydropower sites, TLDPIII and TLDP IV in Darjeeling.
Source: Google Maps (modified by author)
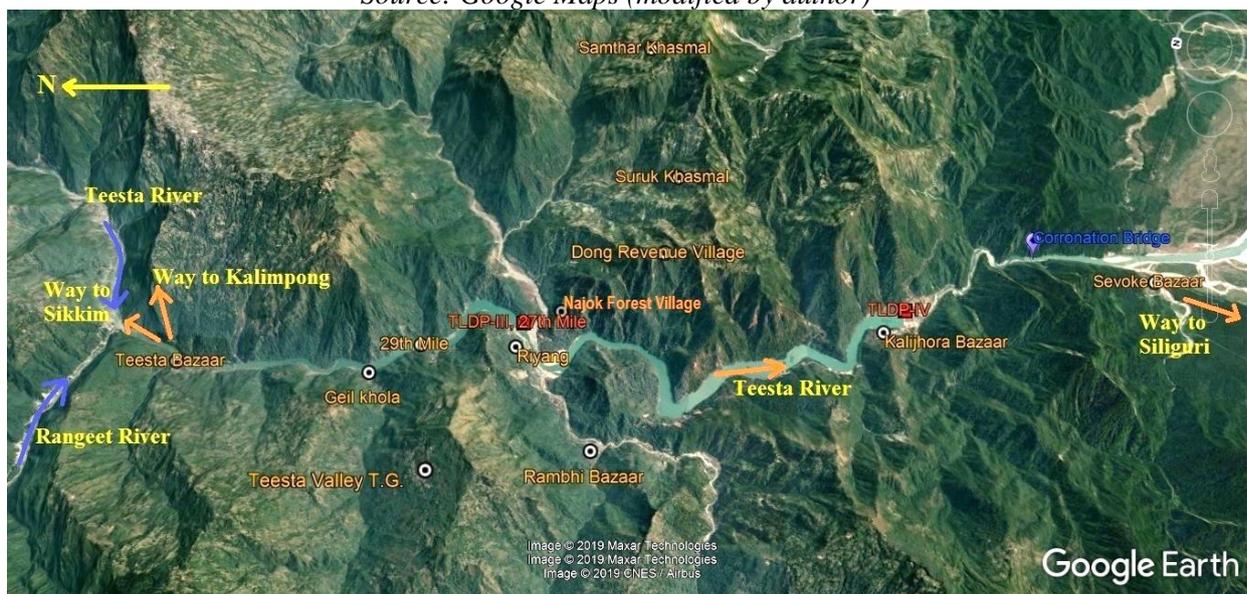
5.6. A tale of two settlements: highway and forest villages

In this section, I describe the livelihood and socio-economic context of Kalijhora Bazar and Najok forest village. Drawing on key informant interviews and narratives of social and environmental changes in the region, I describe changes in two settlements. I examine the connection between the local socio-economic circumstances, hydropower governance and regional politics to make sense of the responses that led to grassroots support for hydropower projects.

5.6.1. Kalijhora bazar

Kalijhora is a highway settlement of approximately 150 households along National Highway 10 close to the TLDP IV project site. Most settlements along the highway in Darjeeling grew in the wake of the Teesta floods that hit the region in October 1968 which caused considerable social and geographical turmoil in the region. A lot of internal displacement and settlement happened around this time. People from different parts of Darjeeling found work as temporary labourers in the many years reconstruction work carried out and over time settled along the roadside. Like most villages in Darjeeling, Kalijhora suffered neglect and underdevelopment. *We are just vote banks; leaders only come here during election time to seek votes*[46] is a common saying among villagers in rural and remote communities in Darjeeling.

Until the mid-1980s the people of Kalijhora were partly dependent on two government establishments for their livelihoods- a Public Works Department (PWD) office and a Forest Range Office —where they worked as labourers and petty contractors. However, conditions changed after the violent Gorkhaland agitation which broke out in 1986.[47] The agitation, which lasted for three years, disrupted local livelihoods and the little security people possessed, resulting in increased poverty. Many respondents recalled conditions of economic hardships after this period. They recount that unemployment was rife and forests became victims as deep rooted poverty among people forced them to depend on forests for fuel and illegal felling of timber to eke out a livelihood.

It is in this context that the Central Government agency, NHPC, entered the area in 2002 and changed the landscape of the area physically and socioeconomically. Respondents state that the prosperity is owed to the Hindustan Construction Company (HCC), the contracting company of NHPC for the construction of the project. Most interviewees agreed that because of the project there has been economic improvement. *Before the project came there were only two pukkah houses in Kalijhora: now everyone has cemented buildings*[48] is a common saying

---

[46] Field notes, Darjeeling, June 2017

[47] For a history of this protest see Subba, T. B. (1992) Ethnicity, state and development: A case study of Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling.

[48] Group conversation with three middle aged men – a contractor, a labourer and a government employee, Kalijhora, 25 September, 2017

among the locals, indicating the economic transformation of the village. After the construction of the dam was completed in 2014, the number of contractual jobs reduced significantly and, once again, an employment crisis has emerged. Despite this, the people of Kalijhora believe the project was beneficial because it lifted them out of poverty and improved their economic condition.

Figure 17 A view of Kalijhora bazaar. Picture by author

5.6.2. Najok forest village

Najok, 15 kilometres away from Kalijhora, is a small forest hamlet of 35 households settled in 1945 along the left bank of the Teesta River and close to the TLDP III site. Forest villages like Najok are labour settlements established by colonial forest departments for labourers working in forestry operations but lacking secure legal rights or social provisions. As unregulated felling of trees for their industry threatened timber supplies, forest management policies such as the Indian Forest Act 1927 were used by the colonial administrators to 'scientifically' manage forests by declaring large areas of forests as reserved and protected and settling communities in 'forest villages' all the while denying any rights to them (Banerjee et al., 2010).

After independence, control of forest areas for processes of resource extraction was carried forward by the state of West Bengal. Since the early 1990s, with more stringent forestry and conservation policies, few employment opportunities are available in the forests.

Consequently, forest villagers of Darjeeling now depend on wage labour, such as road construction and the National Rural Employment Schemes. The youth, who have had little education, migrate to work in hotels and showrooms in malls in cities such as Delhi and Bangalore and even Dubai, while others continue to work as daily wage labourers. The majority of the respondents of Najok and other villages in Samthar GP consider the project as a blessing to their village. The common story narrated in Najok is of their isolation and deprivation. Before their village was connected to the opposite river bank by a bridge constructed by the hydropower company, they defined their world as '*kaala paani*'.[49]

In the following sections, I provide detailed empirical accounts of lived experiences of communities from Kalijhora and Najok to illuminate local support for the hydropower projects practices and examine their agency to describe how and with implications they supported the projects.

5.7. Examining responses of support

5.7.1. Economic precarity and aspirations for development

Respondents in Najok highlighted conditions of isolation prior to the arrival of the bridge. Their desire for the bridge was linked to isolation due to their physical remoteness, limited connectivity and limited livelihood opportunities in the village. Three elderly men of Najok, including a former *Mandal* (village head), told me of their experience of alienation, poverty and deprivation.

> *We lived in an isolated state amidst dense forests and wild animals. We had trouble accessing food and had to walk a whole day to get our weekly ration. Sick people had to be carried on the backs of young men to get to the town hospital. In 1965, a Father (pastor), seeing our difficulty, constructed a manual ropeway for us to cross the river. We undertook the risky ordeal, mounted it and travelled like goods.*
>
> *In the past, we used to get work from the forest department in the cutting and planting of trees but with time that slowly stopped. We had to find work as wage labourers in*

---

[49] The British Indian prison on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands was known as Kala Pani- the term is used as a metaphor to denote geographical and social exclusion or literally 'living in the dark ages.'

neighbouring towns. Times changed but our situation remained the same. After bearing that difficulty for so long, we finally could get justice now (after the bridge was constructed).

Once the dam infrastructure was built, the villagers reported being able to use the newly constructed bridge, improving accessibility to towns and markets.

Our village has developed after the construction of the bridge. Before the project came, if we had to go to Kalimpong (town), we had to wake up at 3am and walk for 3 hours through the forest to catch a vehicle. Now the roads come to our houses. [50]

As the area became more accessible, other development work such as road construction followed. In these construction projects, locals secured employment as labourers and petty contractors. Young men of the area like Arjun, who became my research assistant, were particularly unequivocal in their support of the project due to these opportunities. Arjun explained how, before the project, young men like him would work as daily wage labourers carrying sacks of oranges from the Teesta Valley to Sikkim. Additionally, due to the physical changes wrought by the dam, a swathe of the riverbed had become exposed on the riverbank close to Najok and a new livelihood of sand mining emerged for the villagers. These benefits were more than any 'development' the area had ever experienced previously.

Figure 18 A view of Najok forest village. Picture by author

---

[50] Group conversation with three elderly men, Najok, 21 December, 2017.

In her seminal article on rural people desiring development in Nepal, Pigg (1992) indicates that processes of development and the aspirations to be 'developed' were connected to a sense of self and social status. These local accounts of aspirations for development producing compliance and support for hydropower projects resonate with the desire for infrastructure development in similar remote locales in the Himalayas (Lord, 2014, Rest, 2012).

While communities from remote Najok cited the need for a bridge as a key reason to support a project, the residents of Kalijhora, living close to the second hydropower project, perceived it as an opportunity to escape their precarious conditions and persistent economic hardship. Accounts of poverty, such as the one below given by a middle-aged restaurant owner, Maya, were common:

> *There was so much unemployment and poverty here. Most of us lived in shacks.*

This is a common perception even among the general public outside of Kalijhora. *People of Kalijhora have got a new life* (after the project).[51] Another common rejoinder, distinct to Kalijhora in this regard, is that many youths who had gone out to cities in search of work came back to find employment in the project.

> *After the NHPC project came and people got employment, many made buildings; every house has a minimum of one motorcycle and one car. Young people did not have to go out to earn. Rather many who had gone out came back and found a job here in the project.[52]*

In the ten years that the HCC has been in Kalijhora, local people were given contractual employment with the company as labourers, contractors and subcontractors. A former labourer, Bishal, who worked in the construction of the dam project, told me,

> *In my opinion the project has been beneficial. Most people of Kalijhora were employed with HCC at the time. HCC paid a good salary. With overtime work etc. I earned about Rs. 20,000 – 22,000 per month.[53]*

In a group discussion with four women aged between 35-58 years old in Kalijhora, all of whom were the breadwinners of their family in Kalijhora, all agreed when Rashmi, a 45-year-old

---

[51] Field notes, Darjeeling, June 2017

[52] Interview with 35-year-old man, Driver with NHPC. Kalijhora, 10 September, 2017

[53] 1 USD=appx 45 INR in 2010

widowed lady who ran a restaurant, told me how she responded to environmentally conscious urban activists from Siliguri who rebuked them for 'trading the environment' for material benefits:

> *Some people taunt us even now- they say we have destroyed the environment. I say, yes, we traded the environment. We did not have the means or the capability to reserve an ambulance to take a person to hospital in the past in times of emergency. At such a time, how can we think about preserving the environment?*

Even though residents of Kalijhora acknowledge that the project's short-term benefits lifted them out of poverty, their improved standard of living is insecure, because their land rights are not recognised. Maya elaborated this situation to me:

> *Although I am building this house, it is like gambling. We do not have rights to the land even though we have been living here for more than fifty years.*

Such responses demonstrate how people, despite recognising that their long-term conditions might not improve, have weighed their options and decided that this short-term benefit is worth taking. Furthermore, the local political economy sharply mediates local practices of resistance and support, as well as the delivery of development, both of hydropower and wider development interventions.

5.7.2. Lack of land rights and discourses of illegality

A critical issue is the lack of land rights for the people residing in forest villages or highway settlements and the people working in cinchona and tea plantations (who form a majority of the rural population of Darjeeling), even when they have been living there for many generations. This lack of formal tenurial rights legitimises exploitation, eviction and dispossession as it gives people very little option for negotiations. Given their informal status, the highway settlements are labelled as encroachers by authorities. In discussions with Forest and State government officials, the highway residents were described as encroachments. *The highway falls under the jurisdiction of the forest department. Most of the settlements are encroachments. The public bully us (the Forest department). If we go and try to dissuade people from illegal construction, they will bring in a political party and make it a political issue.*[54] However, the issue of land ownership itself is contested among different departments.

---

[54] Interview with a state government official, man, 48 years old, Forest department, Riyang, 20 June, 2017.

> *Recorded land is very rare in Darjeeling. There is confusion with regard to ownership of highway. Not even the Forest department can say with certainty that it's their land, but that land is not recorded. [55]*

For example, although the Kalijhora area is supposed to belong to PWD, the forest and railway departments also claim it as theirs.[56] The people of Kalijhora frequently proclaim '*We live in a "no man's land".*'[57] This 'illegality' make the people vulnerable to manipulation at opportune times by different political parties. While issues of caste and ethnicity are less pronounced in the highway settlements, their social categorisation as encroachers by the government institutions and wider Darjeeling society has had an adverse bearing on their everyday lives and responses.

Over the course of my fieldwork, and conversations with wide range of people, the complexity of the issues surrounding the question of land ownership and unstable and illegal livelihoods that people carried out on the highway was revealed. For example, subsidiary businesses involving sale of alcohol or of construction materials on the black market are common among the communities living there. Frequent comments were made about their illegal activities, mainly motivated by financial gain. In one exchange in Darjeeling town, a highly respected resident of the region told me:

> *Don't go by their faces- they are very smart. This is the system on the highway – they do not want original documents - they just want to do business. Once the commercial factor comes in people do not want to move.*

The question of commercial interest is indeed a serious, connected with the perceived backwardness of the highway residents. Rajesh, a middle aged grocery store owner from 29th Mile educates his two daughters in Kalimpong town, told me:

> *In the highway, you will find people are only educated at the most up to class four; there are only five youngsters who have reached college. Earlier we were poor so education was not affordable but most youngsters see it's easy to make money in the highway through black business and because of this logic people don't show interest in education. And we are so backward due to lack of education.*

---

[55] Interview with a state government official, woman, 40-year-old, Land Reforms department, Kalimpong, 15 October, 2017.

[56] Before the flooding of Teesta River in 1968 there was a railway line running through the length of the highway.

[57] Field notes, Kalijhora, 22 September, 2017

Lack of education, associated with the pursuit of easy money, is a strong marker of backwardness in highway settlements both within and outside the community. This lived experience of differentiation, marginalisation and lack of tenurial rights is clearly an incentive to support the dams rather than oppose them.

The issue of land rights deprivation, a history of state neglect, precarity and underdevelopment ties in with the larger issue of separation from West Bengal through the creation of a separate state of Gorkhaland. At the same time, people's informal status also made easy the politicisation and exploitation of their precarity by powerful actors, including local politicians and NHPC, the company responsible for the hydropower projects.

My ensuing discussion of the local and regional politics and the practices of NHPC will reveal the connection between local conditions, hydropower governance and regional politics that elicited the responses leading to bottom-up support for the projects.

5.7.3. Regional politics and hydropower governance

In Darjeeling, prolonged political conflict[58] conceals everyday needs and challenges. The uneven dynamics of power sharing between local political administration and state government complicates the situation for local people to seeking recourse and redress for grievances. While the state government is blamed for the political conflict resulting from non-development of the region, problems also arise from the corruption of successive local political administration that is corrupt (Wenner, 2013).

The disenchantment generated within local communities in the case studies and the Darjeeling region in general is immense, feeding into a more general local sense of disillusionment arising from neglect by the state and distrust of local political administration. A common grievance among the community is how, after the agitation ended, Kalijhora was not included within the administrative purview of the new semi-autonomous Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC), but merged with the plains in the sub-division of Siliguri.

---

[58] The demand to separate from West Bengal has taken several violent turns over the last four decades. This has resulted in different semi-autonomous arrangements to oversee the region's administration.

Kalijhora was a hotbed for agitation during the Gorkhaland movement of 1986. Many people from this area were killed, not even pregnant women were spared. But after the agitation was over and the local leaders settled for DGHC, we were excluded from the purview of Darjeeling and merged with Gram Panchayat (GP) in the plains. It is costly for us to get the smallest official documentation work done because of the distance. No Block Development Officer has ever visited here, because it is so far: hence no development work has ever been undertaken.

The above responses reflect strong reactions against political and economic marginalisation and perhaps their own lived experience of being placeless: their situation unlike other contexts in the Eastern Himalayas, produces compliance rather than translating into resistance. While they may not make claims based on indigeneity, they are historically and culturally connected to the land; I found the need for everyday subsistence took precedence and shaped responses to development projects.

The political and socio economic context of Darjeeling has resulted in parallel mechanisms of governance: institutional mechanisms run contrary and overlap with each other, leaving the forest and land rights issues still unsettled. A retired army man, a resident of Sevoke, another highway settlement close to Kalijhora, explained their situation:

It's mainly due to the plains and hills politics. If the political leadership of state government want it then they can settle our situation (by granting land rights). Whether the forest department is allowing you to stay or not depends on the government. In the time when the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPIM) came to power in Bengal in 1974-75, because of their ideology of protecting the labouring class people were allowed to earn a livelihood on the highway.

I have fought all my life, chasing different authorities to get rights to my land, and now I have lost hope. So this is how it is for us – despite not owning rights to land people continue to build houses, because it's everyone's dream to have a house of their own.

These quotations highlight a common narrative of everyday vulnerability among people living in the highway settlements. Acts like building houses without tenure security can be read as

manifestations of precarity and a common strategy, combining appeals to practical justice with resistance to conventional authority, among the people living in marginal conditions. Hence marginalised people work on the assumption that long term benefits won't be delivered by the state government or the local leaders. They perceive any possibility of development, even short term or destructive, as a way to negotiate entitlements such as roads, electricity and temporary economic opportunities from the state.

Given the informal tenurial rights of local people, labelled as 'encroachers,' critical aspects of social and environmental assessments relating to information and consent were violated by the project developers. Instead, consent was manufactured through selective dissemination of inadequate information. For example, the higher catchment villages in Samthar GP were mobilised by NHPC because the area would inevitably profit from the fringe benefits of the project due to their physical location, but the settlements of 29th Mile and Geilkhola, upstream of the projects, both of which subsequently faced livelihood losses, were neither consulted nor adequately informed. Officials of NHPC, whom I interviewed, said they did not deem their consent necessary as they were not legal settlements.[59] Given their elevated location in the hills, villages such as Najok in Samthar GP, faced no direct risk. However, after the project was constructed, these communities were ecologically worse off as more than 70,000 trees were cut and 338.05 hectares of forestland, rich in biodiversity, were submerged for the construction of the TLDP III, making them more susceptible to natural hazards like landslides (Petley, 2013), Hence responses of support and cooperation are not only informed by poverty and underdevelopment but are also influenced by the respondents' politicised status: they are exploited by actors at power including hydropower developers.

5.8. Negotiation, mediation and implications of support

Bhisan, a prominent local leader from one of the villages in Suruk GP, was instrumental in facilitating support for the project during the public hearing, which then allowed construction of the TLDP III project. When I asked him how he negotiated with the project authorities, he replied:

---

[59] Interview, NHPC senior official, Mungpoo, 14 October 2017

> *I had made a condition for the bridge with NHPC. NHPC gave me the opportunity to speak on behalf of the communities and I welcomed the project in front of everyone.*

Meetings and agreements were largely mediated by influential locals and brokers who set the conditions for terms and benefits like Bhisan. However, he also indicated to me that later he realised that NHPC had merely used him to get the public hearing cleared. While there are definitely such powerful voices within the communities with links to political representative or institutional authorities, in the two case studies cited here it cannot be entirely called a patronage relationship because the desire for a bridge in the case of Najok and unemployment and economic hardship in Kalijhora was articulated by most respondents.

Public hearings are perceived locally as key markers of public consultation and approval for hydropower projects. Through the accounts of respondents, the public hearing of TLDP III was orchestrated: NGOs and activists were granted no opportunity to voice concerns or negotiate terms of approval. Discussion was dominated by representatives from NHPC, a few state administration officials and cadres of 'representatives' of affected villages who were handpicked and mobilised by NHPC 'promoters' who decided who could and who could not speak.

Unlike the TLDP III villages, the community of Kalijhora learned from the experience of other groups and began to exercise their agency from the start. They did this by thwarting the public hearings twice and negotiating collectively to gain concessions. Vocal community members formed an organisation to negotiate terms and conditions which included assurance of employment opportunities, and development schemes such as upgrading school and health care facilities. Most importantly, communities demanded the provision of various unskilled and semi-skilled jobs for manual labourers, drivers and contractors, which would be first made available to the people of Kalijhora. Hence, support for these projects did not come entirely from the elite, but to a large extent was the result of collective, yet internally fractioned, bargaining.

However, most of the promises made during both public hearings (such as free electricity connection) were broken. Najok's inhabitants received tertiary benefits from infrastructure development, such as the bridge and roads, and Kalijhora's secured temporary employment opportunities, which significantly reduced after the project construction ended. Most villagers now complain how, after the project started, NHPC disregarded the people who supported the projects. *NHPC used to send cars to get us to their meetings. After their work was done, a security guard was placed in the gate and now we cannot enter without a special pass.[60]* A key informant, a 45-year old community worker from Deorali, a forest village in the other side of Najok, told me:

> *NHPC and neta (political leaders) work in the same fashion. They make promises to get their work done. Once that is done, they turn their backs on you.*

Opportunities and benefits for the people of Kalijhora have mostly been in the form of '*thika bika*' or temporary contractual employment. These opportunities have created a large class of '*thekedaar,*' or contractors in the area. Collective development for the village, such as health and infrastructural facilities, has been meagre. Economic opportunities have mostly benefited the contractor class. Narayan, a 35-year-old teacher from Kalijhora, observed:

> *A contractor's job is not for development – it is for personal benefit. The common people are just doing alright - maybe a little better than before. We work, get paid and live on a daily basis – I don't think that is called development.*

Another frequently cited issue associated with contractor-based work is that the project made 'thieves out of people', diminishing communal sharing and social cohesion as people pursued individual financial gain. Narayan further elaborated this:

> *A regular labourer made about 20,000 rupees per month while drivers earned around Rs. 50,000 because they could deal in business on the side like selling*

---

[60] Interview, retired PWD government employee, Kalijhora, 21 September, 2017.

petrol etc. The contractors made the most as they took the largest share of the cut from the contract. The people who can negotiate are the higher ups and influential ones among the villagers. The lower class are left behind, so if there is an option to make quick money then they will.

After the construction phase was over, life for most people in Kalijhora returned to its pre-project uncertainty (although some, including local leaders or contractors, enjoy marginally improved economic status). The settlements along the highway and their catchment area remain in constant danger from flooding, erosion and other natural calamities. Communities believe that seepage (due to the damming of the river) as well as large-scale deforestation for hydropower construction has weakened the natural and built infrastructure of the area, resulting in an increased frequency of landslides. Subjective opinions among those living around the project sites are reflected on the statement that, 'In the future our villages will eventually sink.' In Kalijhora, people fear for their safety as a result, because protection walls are locally perceived to be of substandard quality, and many are already eroded (Figure 19). In Najok and other villages in Samthar GP, people provided anecdotal evidence of tension wires from the dam towers affecting agricultural productivity.

Figure 19 Eroded riverbeds and protection walls in Kalijhora. Picture by author

While people resented the project authorities' failure to deliver on the promised benefits, the project itself was welcomed as a way of making up for what institutions and the political administration had failed to deliver, and as a result had led to counterproductive grassroots support for hydropower projects. People perceived these projects as a way to negotiate entitlement to roads, electricity and temporary economic opportunities from the state. For example, while people expressed some concern about a large 45 kilometre railway project (intended to run through tunnels in the forest connecting Sevoke in West Bengal with Rangpo in Sikkim), there was enthusiasm about the prospects for development, connectivity and temporary employment opportunities.

While their lived experience endowed them with experiential knowledge enabling them to negotiate with powerful actors for short-term, temporary benefits, these negotiations did not deliver productive long-term development outcomes. A political system where any contracts agreed by the projects or state to be reneged upon has been reinforced by unequal power dynamics. Risk and precarity form a way of life for those living in the rural communities of the Darjeeling hills. Long-term political volatility, underdevelopment, and state neglect have created widespread livelihood insecurity. The hydropower projects have provided an alternative and perhaps unlikely source of hope at a time when marginalised rural communities have few options.

Their supportive responses reflect material needs and internalised constructions of relative underdevelopment or backwardness relative to other hydropower affected communities in the Eastern Himalayas who can bargain on grounds of indigeneity.

5.9. Discussion and conclusion

The responses and practices of the rural communities in Kalijhora and Najok allow us to reflect on the different ways in which trajectories of action and values, forged by lived experiences of precarity (historical, economic, and political), inform responses towards environmentally harmful hydropower projects. For people living in the literal and socio-political margins, development, even in its destructive forms, is a welcome intervention for the sake of short-term benefits. This study contributes to literature on agency and everyday resistance, by highlighting how, contrary to expectations of resistance, pre-existing and current vulnerability drives local

support. Precarity as a politically-induced situation enables examination of these responses as shaped by lived experiences embedded in social historical or socio-spatial contexts (Waite, 2009). As an analytical concept for agency, it is well-suited to explore mobilisation not only in neoliberal spaces but also in everyday experiences of precarity in marginalised settings, like those this study has highlighted. While there are some examples of studies that apply ideas of precarity in the global South, they mostly address precarity in the context of migrant labour conditions (e.g. see Rigg et al., 2016, Sunam and McCarthy, 2016). However, as I have shown, the lens of precarity can also be useful to analyse diverse contexts of everyday vulnerability. A precarity framing of agency accommodates nuanced and differentiated experiences of the legacies and processes of marginalisation, whilst also accounting for acts of resistance.

In the literature on hydropower impacts in the Eastern Himalayas and India in general, the overwhelming narrative has been on bottom-up resistance as seen through discourses of losses, displacement, and indigenous rights. However, I demonstrate that equally important is the need to understand how pre-existing vulnerabilities, experiences of sharp material need, and aspirations of development shape local action, tipping it towards support of ecologically damaging hydropower projects. Overemphasis on ethnic and cultural aspects limits our understanding of the ways contentious projects affect lives, livelihoods, social relations, and the environment. Hence, responses have to be examined as embedded in the dynamics of broader social and historical processes of marginalisation and dispossession.

This study examined the politics of the marginalised in order to understand the nature of support for and cooperation with hydropower projects in the Darjeeling Himalayas. Using precarity as an analytical lens, I provided an account of local conditions, hydropower governance, and regional politics, showing how experience and aspirations shaped bottom-up support for contentious Darjeeling projects. I demonstrated why, contrary to expectations, marginalised people may support environmentally harmful development projects, even when encouraged by elite actors to protest against them. Despite the temporary nature of direct benefits, and potential environmental risks, local accounts from both case studies recorder an eager welcome for the projects in the hope of antecedent benefits, such as infrastructure development and material security.

The respondents' hopes were shaped by their lived experience of economic insecurity, grounded in local historical and political conditions of exclusion, and the wider political economy of non-development. Therefore, the findings strengthen calls for focussing on the role of structural socio-political divides in shaping local responses of resistance and support (e.g.

Dukpa et al., 2018 in Sikkim). It highlights the importance of acknowledging the complex realities of development projects and supportive responses by appreciating the complexity of local economic conditions that lead to detrimental outcomes, such as ecological externalities.

The contentions and local responses (of support) that are expressed towards the construction of hydropower projects reflect of the larger struggles that the people are confronting in the region. These unique and pressing vulnerabilities drive local people to contestation and action, leading to further vulnerabilities and marginalisation, thereby creating potentially unsustainable and inequitable futures.

Chapter 6: Constructing consent and legitimacy for hydropower projects: brokers and local governance in Darjeeling, India

Abstract

In the rapidly expanding arena of hydropower development, research has focussed on encounterings between state-led, predominantly technocratic governance and the ensuing conflict and grassroots resistance. Relatively little attention has been paid to how local political structures and governance affecting hydropower processes and outcomes at the grassroots level. Taking the case of hydropower projects in Darjeeling, this paper addresses this empirical gap by drawing attention to the role of local governance in shaping decision-making and mediating hydropower project outcomes. This paper explores the micro politics of hydropower projects through the practices of local brokers to unpack the local politics in re(shaping) power relations in hydropower governance in Darjeeling. Drawing on literature from political geography and postcolonial scholarship in South Asia and empirical qualitative research, this paper demonstrates that in undermining successive demands for political autonomy, local governance structures in Darjeeling have devolved into institutions of political patronage. In such a context, party politics become a way for small time leaders and brokers to exercise political agency and claim benefits from hydropower projects. While such practices weaken collective agency and perpetuate unequal power relationships, it also offers a degree of redress to disempowered groups in the short term.

Keywords: hydropower governance, local governance, patronage politics, brokers, political agency, Darjeeling

6.1. Introduction

On 3rd March 2003, the public consultation meeting of the Teesta Low Dam Project III (TLDP III), a central government hydropower project, was conducted in Deorali, a small forest village, ten kilometres away from the planned construction site (see Figure 18- Teesta valley tea garden). Binay (name changed), a prominent community leader from the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) party from Suruk, was instrumental in facilitating the approval of the project. He admits that he mobilised people from his area to approve the project.[61] Similarly, after one year, the public hearing of Teesta Low Dam Project IV (TLDP IV), a second hydropower project, was approved amidst NGO opposition by community leaders of Kalijhora living close to the planned project site. Here, a group of youth, mostly petty contractors[62], had formed a pressure group to negotiate terms for project approval. They strategized to thwart public hearings until an agreement of contractual work for locals was reached with the project developers. Meetings in both these hydropower project sites in Darjeeling were mediated by influential locals and groups embedded in local communities acting as informal brokers and representatives of the people who set the conditions for terms and benefits from the hydropower projects. As this paper will show, their political affiliations significantly influenced their positioning in negotiating with hydropower authorities and affecting community action and response.

Since 2003, large-scale hydropower development promoted by the central and state governments in the Eastern Himalayan border region has been a topic of many academic debates (Joy et al., 2017, Vagholikar and Das, 2010, Menon and Kohli, 2005, Ahlers et al., 2015). Within this, the conflicts and grassroots resistances that have emerged in opposition to such top-down governance practices have been the focus of much research (Gergan, 2014, Chowdhury and Kipgen, 2013, Huber and Joshi, 2015, Arora, 2009). There have been claims of a lack of transparency in decision–making processes by project developers, inadequate environmental and social impact assessments, and a neglect of environmental and socio-cultural concerns (Menon and Kohli, 2005, Kohli, 2011, Huber, 2019, Ahlers et al., 2015, Baruah, 2017). These studies have made valuable contributions to the understanding of broader concerns about hydropower development in a geopolitically sensitive, ecologically fragile and

---

[61] Personal interview, male, 52-years-old, Suruk, December, 2017. The area refers to the left bank of Teesta.

[62] Untrained or poorly trained contractors

culturally diverse such as the Eastern Himalaya. However, relatively little attention has been paid to how local political structures and governance affect hydropower processes and outcomes at the grassroots level. For example, questions of the role of corruption and political patronage in mediating such contested processes, while increasingly discussed in informal discourse, have received cursory attention in academic debates on hydropower in the region (Huber and Joshi, 2015, Joshi et al., 2019).

Routinely characterised as backward, conflict ridden and remote, the local politics of the Eastern Himalayan region (EH) states often gets subsumed by larger debates about sub-regional ethnic and territorial nationalism, which have been the main themes of study (Karlsson, 2013, McDuie-Ra, 2008). The circumstances of everyday precarity that are shaped by these conflicts often gets a backseat, if not completely ignored. Taking the case of hydropower projects in Darjeeling, this paper addresses this empirical gap by drawing attention to the role of local governance in mediating hydropower decision-making and outcomes.

Darjeeling is a politically contested region in the Eastern Himalayan region and has been subject to subnational struggles for more than four decades for autonomy from West Bengal through the formation of Gorkhaland, a separate state within India, for its majority population of Indian-Nepalis or Gorkhas.[63] Since the 1980s, different regionalist political parties of Darjeeling have led agitations for separation from West Bengal and successive state governments have responded with a mixture of violent force and attempts to pacify leading political parties. These attempts at pacification have invited various experiments in governance such as the establishment of local autonomous councils such as the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) and Gorkha Territorial Administration (GTA) and more recently, tribal development boards such as the Lepcha Development Board, Tamang Development Board and Bhutia Development Board (Sarkar, 2014, Darjeeling Chronicle, 2018, Chhetri, 2017). The result has been to render Darjeeling an unruly space. This form of rule, as this paper will demonstrate has many implications for political legitimacy and local governance in the region.

---

[63] The name 'Gorkhaland' was first coined by Subhash Ghising, a leader of the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), who led a violent campaign for its formation. 'Gorkha', itself a contested term, is used to distinguish Indian Nepalis who form Darjeeling's majority population from citizens of Nepalis. Although the term "Gorkha" refers specifically to one ethnic Nepali community, it is often used as an umbrella term for Nepalese in India. While this Nepali majority includes distinct caste and tribal communities, a shared experience of marginalization in India has led them to identify as a relatively cohesive ethnic group.

As recently as September 2017, the region was one again in the grip of a violent agitation which lasted for 104 days.[64] In contrast to the intense conflict over statehood demands, however, there has been no political mobilisation against the area's hydropower projects. Yet, in contexts such as Darjeeling, such non-state practices and the political agency or lack of it, have to be understood in the context of the ongoing contestation of territorial rule and governance, as well as broader constructions of identity and belonging the statehood demand espouses.

This paper examines the politicised space of hydropower projects to unpack the local politics in re(shaping) the production of power in hydropower governance in Darjeeling. It explores the micro politics of hydropower through the lens of local brokers and their practices towards hydropower projects, in order to illustrate the processes and power dynamics operating at the politically charged Eastern Himalayan margins. In the context of the historically contested political relationship between this borderland region and the nation state such an inquiry is particularly valuable to improve an understanding of the challenges and outcomes of environmental governance in general and hydropower development in particular.

Drawing on literature from political geography (Baud and Van Schendel, 1997, Cons and Sanyal, 2013) and postcolonial scholarship in South Asia (Das et al., 2004, Williams et al., 2011) that focuses on agentive practices at the margins, this study, sheds light on the practices of brokers as enabling stability for disempowered groups in the short term. While mediators and brokers are often dismissed as corrupt and self-serving (Bierschenk et al., 2002), this paper argues that a focus on their practices offers crucial insights into their influence on environmental governance. This focus on brokers and their practices also provides a more comprehensive view of development outcomes of hydropower projects such as impediments and encouragements to collective oversight and in/action.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section introduces the research sites and describes the research methodology. Section 3 situates the study conceptually within the scholarship of margins and agency as understood in political geography and postcolonial debates in South Asia. Section 4 details the political context of Darjeeling, focussing on the discourse of separatism and demands of Gorkhaland. Next comes two empirical sections. The first empirical

---

[64] https://www.orfonline.org/research/fire-in-hills-as-darjeeling-burns-bad-news-india/. Accessed on 15.09.19

section (Section 5) discusses the politicised context of hydropower development in Darjeeling. Section 6 provides illustrative accounts of brokers, demonstrating how informal networks underpin and shape local governance. Section 7 concludes by linking the empirical material to debates on governance and revisiting the relevance of brokerage at the margins.

6.2. Study sites and methodology

Darjeeling, located in the northernmost part of the state of West Bengal in India, is part of the Eastern Himalayan range (Figure 21) In 2003 and 2004, two hydropower projects the Teesta 'Low Dam' TLDP III in 27 Mile and TLDP IV in Kalijhora was granted clearance by the MoEF. These projects are implemented by the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC), a central government agency, in agreement with West Bengal. The projects' construction was completed in 2013 and 2014 and both are now operational. The two dams are located at a stretch of 15 kilometres along the Teesta River, which runs parallel to National Highway 10 (NH10) that links West Bengal and Sikkim. There are many settlements and forest villages along the highway that runs along the bottom of the Teesta Valley.

Figure 20 Location of Darjeeling in India. Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File

Figure 21 Settlements along and around the two hydropower projects in Darjeeling.
Source: Google maps, modified by author
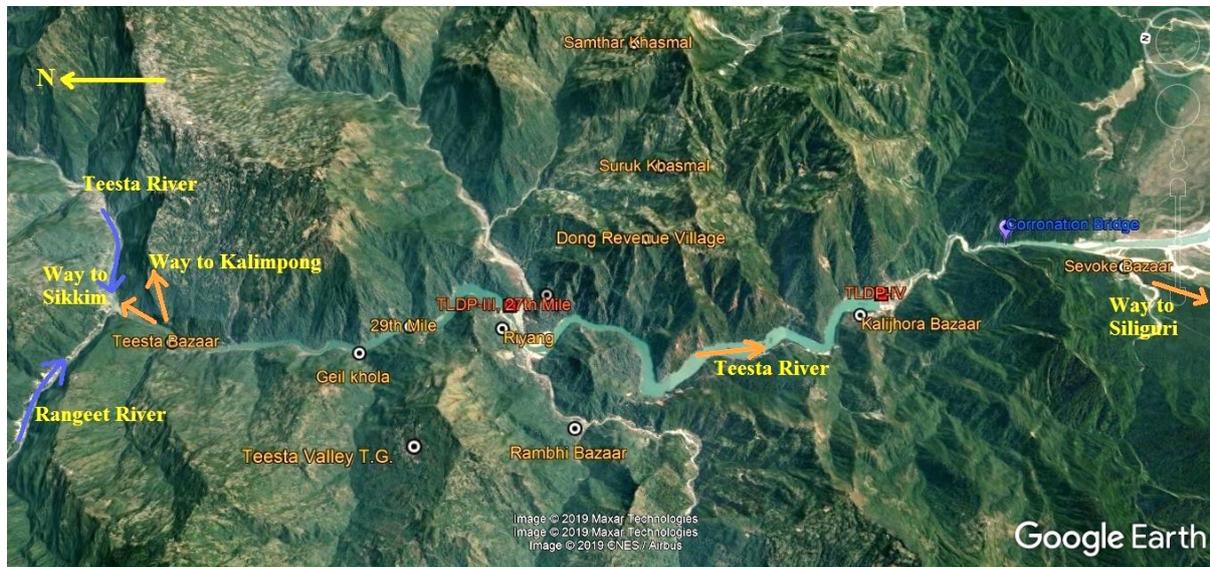
Since 2014, the roadside villages of 29 Mile, 27 Mile, Geilkhola and Teesta Bazar, upstream of TLDP III, have been facing the impact of loss of livelihoods and danger to life and property because of the river's rising water levels. Before construction of the project, the local livelihood was source roadside shops and restaurants, and temporary jobs in road construction. Extraction of stones and sand from the river bed, locally known as quarry work was one of the main source of livelihood in the roadside villages of 29 Mile and Geilkhola. The quarry workers were the majority and among the poorest in these two villages. Despite the relatively small surface of the flooded area due to the dams being run- of –river and the absence of large-scale resettlement, they have lost their livelihoods and sense of security. However, and consequently their claims for damages have been ignored, or met with arbitrary compensation, by the state administration. This was because despite living there for over 70 years, these settlements have no legal rights to land.[65] Furthermore, despite the government earning revenues from these river beds there were no unions and or no compensation mechanisms in place for the quarry labourers earning a livelihood breaking stones in the river beds. The local political administration, the GTA was not responsive to the issue, as these dams are the projects of

---

[65] It is also important to note that the ownership of land itself is contested among different departments.

central and state government, which do not allow local political administration in decision making.

This research is based on field work carried out from March to December, 2017 in different catchment and riverside settlements along the two hydropower sites in Teesta River in Darjeeling. This paper is based primarily on a set of 17 unstructured interviews conducted in the villages of 29th Mile, Kalijhora, Suruk and Teesta Bazar as in Darjeeling and Kalimpong towns. This paper presents an iterative, largely narrative-driven analysis, shedding light on the contested notions of party politics and corruption in hydropower projects and in the Darjeeling region in general.

6.3. Conceptual notions: margins, marginality and agency

> *'Marginalization therefore occurs where the possibility of belonging to the wider society exists, but is denied or unrealized, resulting in experiences of partial belonging, or incomplete citizenship' (Williams et al., 2011, p. 16)*

The notion of margins has been central to academic debates on state, nation and political power in South Asia (Das et al., 2004, Williams et al., 2011). Within the discipline of political geography, the notion of marginality, particularly in the case of South Asia implies relational thinking about place and power (Baud and Van Schendel, 1997, Cons and Sanyal, 2013). Margins are understood in socio-spatial terms and described as critical zones of state control and national imagination (Harris, 2013, Gellner, 2013). In postcolonial scholarship in South Asia, margins are more expansively understood with respect to structures of power encompassing the state, economy and institutions within society

(Corbridge et al., 2005, Williams et al., 2011, Das et al., 2004). In this literature, it has been argued that the state is experienced by citizens in multiple and contradictory ways and attention is drawn to forms of agency mobilised by actors that shape access to the state (Sharma and Gupta, 2009, Corbridge et al., 2005, Gupta, 1995). Much of these studies also focus on informal networks and brokers as key agents who get state institutions to work in the interest of the marginalised (Corbridge et al., 2005, Berenschot, 2010).

Moving away from established notions of state, society and space interactions (Baud and Van Schendel, 1997), in political geography the state's margins are described as 'sites of institutional plurality and patchiness,' (Goodhand et al., 2016, p. 820); where borders are understood as 'margins of the state and nation, places at once removed from and central to debates about identity, security, risk, and survival' (Cons and Sanyal, 2013, p. 6). A common underlying argument in both these perspectives is an emphasis on different forms of exclusion and the multiple forms of agency that emerge from the marginalised positions (Das et al., 2004, Williams et al., 2011). However, it has been argued that much of this scholarship is insufficiently sensitive to the spatial dynamics of these practices, such as the ways in which brokerage is defined by the specific spaces they mediate, or how the brokers' actions shape these spaces and the dynamics they produce (Meehan and Plonski, 2017, Goodhand et al., 2016). Therefore, there is a need for a nuanced examination of local governance that 'exposes the complex political topography of the state and the uneven processes of rule and development unfolding within and across its territory' (Goodhand et al., 2016, p. 819).

This paper draws on these insights and adopts a relational and negotiated view of margins and centres that considers agency as a lived negotiation of strategic and resourceful positioning (Baud and Van Schendel, 1997, Gellner, 2013). In the geography of India, the Eastern Himalayan region of India has been a site of deep political instability, of ethnic unrest, and various separatist and secessionist movements. These contemporary politics were heavily shaped by colonial policies of dividing hills and plains communities through different strategies of governance (Kipgen and Roy Chowdhury, 2016, Zou and Kumar, 2011) and sub-regional conflicts continue to define identity and communal politics throughout much of the region (Bhaumik, 2004, Baruah, 2003a, Baruah, 2005, Shimray, 2004). Such a politicised context of the sub-Himalayan region of Darjeeling is essentially the same, yet unique, owing to the deep-rooted complexities of its history and geographic location.

By foregrounding marginality at the state's borders, this paper contributes to understanding the spatial dynamics of brokerage and local networks of governance (Goodhand et al., 2016, Meehan and Plonski, 2017, Cons and Sanyal, 2013). As Cons and Sanyal (2013, p. 7) argue, '*Understanding marginality, particularly in South Asia, thus requires adopting a relational and negotiated view of margins and centers, broad and local histories, and regional politics—*

a view that embodies, rather than demarcates, a varied terrain of power.' In the following section, I briefly describe the political context of Darjeeling to contextualise the stabilities, anxieties and precarities that govern the everyday life of the people.

6.4. Political background

6.4.1. The quest for Gorkhaland: land, identity and development

Local politics and governance in Darjeeling have long been dominated by the sub-regional conflict for Gorkhaland, a separate state for the Nepali speaking population (the region's majority community) of the hilly areas of West Bengal. This demand for separate entity for the Indian Nepali community has a long history, but only emerged as a serious political movement since the 1980s, when different regional political parties started agitating, often violently, for separation from West Bengal with identity crisis at the heart of this conflict (Besky, 2017, Middleton, 2015, Ganguly, 2005). The quest for recognition and contested sense of identity, started with the annexation of the region from Sikkim and the introduction of tea plantations 180 years ago, when thousands of impoverished farmers from Nepal were encouraged by the British to migrate and labour in the newly established tea plantations in Darjeeling (Subba, 1992). The descendants of these migrants, who form the majority of the Darjeeling's population still have no legal right to the land they live on. Although formally recognised as Indian citizens with voting rights in 1950, they continue to feel they are victims of prejudice, being frequently labelled as outsiders by other Indians due to their historical, cultural and linguistic ties with Nepal. Furthermore, after independence, India has continued to maintain an open boundary with Nepal under the Nepal India Friendship treaty Act of 1950, whereby, besides having voting rights, Nepali citizens can work and live in India, and *vice versa* (Samanta, 1996, Subba, 1992, Middleton, 2015). Additionally, the Gorkhaland demand is positioned as a resistance against the West Bengal administration, its apparent indifference and neglect and the tyrannical control of local resources such as land, water and forests (Ganguly, 2005, Sarkar, 2010, p. 114). Gorkhaland, thus is imagined as the ultimate solution to the problems faced by people in daily life that will guarantee them full recognition as Indian nationals and mark the end of exploitation and neglect by the state government. It is an 'imaginative geography', a space of security and a powerful counter-vision to socio-economic hardship, marginalization and oppression (Wenner, 2013) and a possibility not only of development and self-government but also of national recognition, participation, and respect. (Middleton, 2015, Besky, 2017).

However, as will be discussed below, the Gorkhaland movement is not a homogeneous struggle over a single regional identity, but a combination of heterogeneous contestations among different political factions and groups, including demands for diverse tribal and ethnic identities.[66]

Aspects of identity, ethnic politics, recognition and belonging underlying the Gorkhaland issue have been widely explored in the literature (Tanka, 1992, Ganguly, 2005, Middleton, 2013). In this paper, however, discussion is limited to party politics and political affiliations in Darjeeling, in order to highlight the ways in which local governance and political affiliations shape everyday precarity, affecting environmental governance in general and hydropower outcomes in particular.

6.4.2. Local politics in Darjeeling: erosion of legitimacy and shifting political affiliations

Since the inception of political consciousness in the hills, the idea of the Gorkhaland has been exploited by all political parties (Chettri, 2013, p. 299). The demand for a separate entity for the Nepali speaking population of Darjeeling is one of the oldest in the country, having been first raised in 1907 under the British colonial administration.[67] Since then, different political parties have oriented their agenda around the attainment of Gorkhaland. An organized separatist demand began in 1986, when Subhas Ghisingh's Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) led a violent campaign for separate statehood. The agitations were also in part provoked by the eviction of tens of thousands of Nepalis from Bhutan as well as from other parts of North East India (Hutt, 2003).[68] The agitation for Gorkhaland was not only a call for self-rule involving questions of 'identity and land' but also a call to end the constant anxiety of eviction (Middleton, 2013). Opposing this demand, the ruling state government's Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M) reacted with the deployment of state and paramilitary forces. The agitation turned violent and lasted for two years: hundreds of houses

---

[66] Despite this pan-Gorkha identity, the population of the Darjeeling Hills are divided by ethnicity, class, caste and religion. For example, there are there are other ethnic groups like Lepchas, Bhutias, Sherpas, and other plains' people such as Marwaris, Bengalis and Biharis. Such a pan-Gorkha identity has also given rise to a feeling of 'other' among non-Nepali groups and has inadvertently galvanized ethnic identity politics (Subba 1992).

[67] Since 1907 until 1986, around 30 demands for statehood have been raised time and again by a loose federation of different political parties and all of these demands have failed (Bagchi, 2012).

[68] Formerly, beginning in the 1960s, following a series of Indo-Chinese border disputes, thousands of Nepalis and other "foreign" groups were ousted by local militia groups from Northeast India, where they had been living for generations (Besky, 2017).

were burned down, more than 1200 protestors and activists were killed, and huge damage was inflicted on the local economy (Samanta, 2000, Subba, 1992).

After a violent struggle in 1986 and 1987, the Government of India, the West Bengal Government and the GNLF agreed to the formation of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC), a semi-autonomous body intended to provide a level of regional autonomy with development funding and selected administrative, financial, and executive functions but no legislative power (Subba, 1992, Ganguly, 2005). The agreement and the establishment of the DGHC had serious implications for the legitimacy of the GNLF as the latter did not fulfil people's aspirations, but went on to enable a dominant regime to secure its own legitimacy, turning into an institution of patronage in the hands of the newly established local elites (Lacina, 2009, Wenner, 2013). This morphing of the DGHC into the local elite was bolstered by the state government's silent acceptance (Lacina, 2009, Wenner, 2015).

As public dissatisfaction against the GNLF party intensified, in 2007, a new political party, the Gorkhaland Jana Mukti Morcha (GJM), renewed the demand for statehood and led a second agitation for Gorkhaland.[69] Between 2008 and 2015 there were massive protests, tax boycotts, mass demonstrations, and more than a month of *bandhs* (total shutdowns) (Ghosh, 2009) that paralysed life and engendered acute political instability in the region. The call for statehood was supported by a fragmented regional political parties and many followers from the GNLF shifted affiliation to the new GJM in the cause of an immediate demand for Gorkhaland (Wenner, 2013). However, in 2011, after three and a half years of agitation, a new party, the Trinamool Congress (TMC), led by Mamata Banerjee, came to power in West Bengal and the GJM settled for another semi-autonomous arrangement, named Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA),[70] which would administer the Darjeeling hills in place of the DGHC (Indian Express, 2011)[71] Although increased autonomy and local control over Darjeeling's resources were promised, for example, 59 departments and offices typically reserved for the

---

[69] The major discord came in 2005 when the GNLF leader attempted to establish a Sixth Schedule tribal council called the Gorkha Hill Council in the DGHC which would enhance powers for the Hill Council but would cease the demand for statehood.

[70] GTA presently has three hill subdivisions Darjeeling, Kurseong and Mirik and some areas of Siliguri subdivision of Darjeeling district and the Kalimpong district under its authority.

[71] The CPIM had been the dominant political coalition in West Bengal since 1977, when the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) won the West Bengal Assembly elections and came to power 2011.

state government were assigned to the broad administrative, financial, and executive authority of the GTA (GTA Act, 2011, Chapter 2, Article 26) allegedly this was only on paper: the GTA continued to be headed by leaders appointed by the state government. [72] Moreover, since 2005, there has been no local-level panchayat (village council) election in the rural areas of the Darjeeling Himalayas; in lieu of elected village councils, district and subdivision level officials have taken on the roles and responsibilities of rural governance, including approval of plans for land use and development. Consequently, the control of the GTA, like the DGHC before it, proved to be a means of consolidating power and resources for GJM councillors (Lacina, 2009).

After the TMC won control of the state, a dramatic shift in power relations ensued and the dynamics of identity politics have heightened and taken a different turn due to new policies of the government. While capitalising on the dissatisfaction of excluded political parties and disgruntled party members, [73] the chief minister, Mamta Banerjee spread its own party in the hills through the constitution of different development welfare boards supposedly for the upliftment of different tribal and ethnic minorities.[74]

This exacerbated communal divisions along lines of culture and ethnicity and contained the demands for Gorkhaland. Leveraging these identity-based politics, in 2017, the Trinamool Congress became the first plains-based party to gain a foothold in hill politics by winning some wards in Darjeeling's civic elections (Economic Times, 2017). Party and ethnic affiliations in Darjeeling are therefore deeply entrenched in the historical, political and local socio economic contexts and guide the daily lives of the people. It has thus become a vehicle for addressing the concerns of the majority of Darjeeling's population.

Although the Gorkhaland debate has continued to define the political issues in Darjeeling for more than four decades, the power that the national and the state government parties

---

[72] Interviews with GTA officials, GTA forest ranger, and GTA Land reforms official.

[73] In 2015, a former Kalimpong MLA and senior GJMM leader established a new party, the Jana Andolan Party (People's Movement Party, JAP) and called for creation of a separate Kalimpong district which was established in 2017 (Wenner, 2013).

[74] Since 2011, 19 tribal welfare boards for various hill communities have been formed. For a detailed discussion on the tribal politics see *Middleton, T., 2015. The demands of recognition: state anthropology and ethnopolitics in Darjeeling.*

(previously the Congress and CPIM and now the BJP and TMC) have exerted in experimentation with autonomous councils plays an even larger role in shaping local governance and politics. For example, the GJM sought to negotiate Gorkhaland through electoral politics by supporting anon local candidate of the central ruling party of BJP in Parliamentary elections of 2009 and 2014. This was because ahead of the 2014 general election, the BJP had promised to "sympathetically examine and appropriately consider the long-pending demand of the Gorkhas," which ensured that its candidate won the Darjeeling seat. But that promise was side-lined after it came to power as it wanted to expand its base in West Bengal (Economic Times, 2014). In the 1940s and 1950s, the CPI (M) party had similarly made promises to grant meaningful autonomy to Darjeeling if it came to power in West Bengal and used the propaganda to create a base in the hill areas (Ganguly, 2005).

This section described the historical trajectory of contested political regimes in Darjeeling to provide a backdrop on how political contestations affect regional development and governance. The following empirical sections discuss the politicised space of hydropower projects by examining the role and leadership of local governance bodies such as the DGHC and GTA, and the practices of the local brokers in decision-making, negotiating and claim seeking from hydropower projects.

6.5. The politicised space of hydropower projects

6.5.1. Party rule, coercion and the politics of short-term gain

In 2003, when the hydropower projects were approved, the GNLF party was in power in the hills while Kalijhora, close to the plains, supported the CPIM party. The public consultation meeting for the proposed TLDP III (as described in the introduction) gave rise to many forms of contestation at the local level. Representatives of NHPC, the hydropower company had tactically mobilised community support by selecting leaders like Binay to speak for the project in the meeting. Also, through political patronage, it gained the support of key DGHC councillors and members of the GNLF party, to get the projects approved without any objections. Small, localised protests mounted by villagers from the excluded villages were successfully supressed by the project developers collaborating with local councillors. Kamal,

a resident of Teesta Bazar and CRPM[75] leader of Darjeeling, reported that neither he nor NGOs were allowed space to voice their concerns against the project in the meeting, a key forum to do so. He describes the public hearing as entirely political, largely attended by GNLF members who demanded incentives for their support mostly by seeking construction contracts. Kamal recounts the public meeting as *'a scene of 'total terror': the local councillor had his team of thugs who decided who spoke in the meeting.'*[76]

In an interview with one of these former DGHC councillors, they explained why they did they not speak against the project.

> *DGHC held no power to have a say on the use of the resources of the hills. (The) Bengal Government gives the central government whatever they need: we are just bystanders in this context. We could not contest the project because it's a central government project.*[77]

After the GNLF lost power and GTA came into being in 2011 on the leadership of GJM party; the GTA *sabhasads* (councillors) continued the patronage relationship with NHPC and deployed similar arguments of being powerless in the face of central and state government policies. Other representatives of GTA and government officials confirmed that while there is no procedural recourse enabling the GTA to oppose state or central government decisions, it had the right to deny a No Objection Certificate (NOC) before the commencement of the project. However, this right was not exercised. As one GTA official reiterated *'we have no right to stop the project when the Government of India and the Government of West Bengal have already signed an agreement.'*[78]

Although it cannot be verified, the interviewees reported that it is common knowledge that NHPC pays local politicians to keep silent on the projects. Such resources (bribes) are

---

[75] The Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxists (CPRM) political party was formed in 1996 by Communist Party of India (Marxist) dissidents in Darjeeling and Kalimpong who were dissatisfied with the peace settlement the Left-Front- the Communist Party of India (Marxist) government signed with the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF). Other key regional political parties in Darjeeling are All India Gorkha League (ABGL) and Gorkha Rashtriya Congress. All of political parties support the demand for Gorkhaland.

[76] Personal Interview, Male, 45 years, Teesta Bazar, April, 2017.

[77] Personal interview, Male, 55 years, Darjeeling, December 2017.

[78] Personal interview, Male, 60 years, Kalimpong, November, 2017.

important not only in their own right, but also instrumental in sustaining the party (which) to maintain legitimacy and muscle power.[79] To allege that all GJM politicians and GTA officials are just interested in bribes and other forms of gain can be a misleading generalization. The deeper issue highlighted through these interviews is the prevailing notion that it is an inconceivable proposition to oppose a 'central' government project.[80] Many also point this out to the limited and narrow perspective of the politicians leading Gorkhaland movement.[81] As one key informant highlighted this focus on the primacy of Gorkhaland:

> *It's because our leaders are backward, they have no exposure, and they don't know how to exercise their rights in the correct way. Election, politics have to be won in rumours, baseless things – Basically this got to do with our backwardness.* [82]

Moreover, conversations in Kalimpong and Darjeeling confirmed that the call for Gorkhaland defies all arguments and supersedes all other priorities. It is argued that only after the formation of a separate state, will environmental and other issues receive the attention they deserve (see also Wenner, 2015, Joshi, 2015). This explanation is echoed by the wider Darjeeling community as an explanation for the side-lining of not only environmental issues but also the communities' general concerns.[83]

While patronage ensures that the political leader stays in power, it ensures that the project developers can effectively run the projects without political objections. As one key informant described, *'the national government requires power, the state government gets revenue and the local leaders get commission.'* [84]

---

[79] Fieldwork, Darjeeling, March 2017.

[80] Conversations with different people across Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Siliguri indicated this. A perspective of an ordinary person from 29th Mile was that since it was a government project, it would have gone ahead with or without public approval. *We reside in government land. We don't have any legal claim to call it our property. The only legal claim is that we are Indian citizens, on the basis of which we are here, earning a livelihood.*

[81] Field work, Darjeeling, March 2017, Kalimpong and Siliguri, December 2017.

[82] Key informant interview, Kalimpong, December, 2017

[83] Fieldwork, Darjeeling, March 2017

[84] Personal interview, Male, 45 years, Teesta Bazar, April, 2017.

6.5.2. Legitimising consent: brokerage in unruly spaces

Many people around the locations of the hydropower projects perceived construction as a source of employment opportunities to locals in the form of labour work and petty contracts. Binay,[85] the broker and representative of Suruk, who was instrumental in facilitating the approval of the TLDP III project was allowed a voice due to his affiliations with the GNLF, as the GNLF councillors dominated the public consultation meeting. For communities like Suruk, the hydropower project, with its promises of bridges and roads, was a vehicle for meeting the aspirations of 'development'. While Binay acknowledged the practical benefits of the project, such as bridge, road and electricity connection, he also stated that there was no hope of the state or political administration trying to help develop their remote area. Accordingly, he used his political affiliation with GNLF, the then leading party to access the space for negotiation with NHPC. He stated that, for over two decades, he had repeatedly approached various state government officials and made petitions for the construction of a bridge to connect their isolated region with towns. Disillusioned by his realisation that the DGHC had neither the power nor the finances to develop his village, he realised that NHPC was the only hope. His experience of a lack of legitimacy in the DGHC settlement, achieved after bloody agitation, exemplified a sense of disappointment prevalent in the Darjeeling hills that continues to the present day in all spheres of life.

Kalijhora settlement, just above the Teesta Low Dam IV project (TLDP IV), with around 110 households, was an economically marginalised community where the majority of the people worked as labourers. Here, local contractors and influential community members formed a group to negotiate with NHPC. One of this group explained the reasons underlying their strategy for negotiation with the project developers. [86]

> *Because we were aware how people were misled and coerced during the public hearing of the TLDP III, we formed a committee before NHPC started work [in Kalijhora]. We called a token strike against NHPC and political interference [by GNLF leaders and councillors] and thwarted public hearings twice until NHPC agreed to our conditions.*

---

[85] Interview, 52-year-old male, *Suruk December, 2017.*

[86] Group conversation, 40- 45 year men, Kalijhora, September, 2017.

The people of Kalijhora who had been left out of the purview of DGHC, despite their sacrifices in the agitation, felt neglected and turned to the CPIM – who, according to them, were not as corrupt as the GNLF. *After the agitation, the situation changed for us, we became more deprived, and we were arbitrarily excluded from the purview of Darjeeling and merged with Champasari Gram Panchayat in Siliguri.*[87]

Despite differences within the community and opposition from NGOs, the contractor groups formed an association to push for the interests of the community and to negotiate with NHPC. This association demanded that the local of people should have various forms of unskilled and semi-skilled employment, including jobs as manual labourers, drivers and contractors. This included assurances that building contracts would go only to local contractors. While their main aim was to insulate themselves from political manipulation, they used their political leverage to garner support for the projects; nevertheless they maintained that it was an apolitical decision, driven by concerns over the economic precarity of Kalijhora. This was also because they were members of the CPIM, the ruling political party at the time, which galvanised community support for the project. As one respondent explained,

> *We had to support it because we came under political pressure, as we were with the CPIM party: if we opposed it, we were threatened by the leaders.* We *were from the ruling CPIM party then, and in a majority, and we supported the project.*[88]

Because they were representatives of Kalijhora, most community members felt their role as brokers was justified, as it strengthened their ability to negotiate. Temporary jobs and contracts for the local population presented valuable opportunities to address their socio-economic precarity as nothing was forthcoming from the state or the DGHC. It was the lack of the legitimacy of the political leadership in the hills that led Kalijhora to support the plains-based party after the establishment of the DGHC. However, in 2007, when GJM came to power and started an agitation for Gorkhaland, support for the cause induced most members of CPIM to join them.

The discussion above highlights the dynamic politicised space, contested practices, and limitations of governance and local politics that legitimise hydropower development in

---

[87] Group interview, 1 male- 50 years, female- 45 and female- 60 years old, Kalijhora, September, 2017.

[88] Group conversation, male- 35 years old, driver, female- 50 years old, ship-owner, Kalijjohra, September, 2017

Darjeeling. Next, I shall discuss the accounts of social concerns and benefits that emerge from the contrasting narratives of brokers and key informants. I show how political affiliations provide a medium for articulating agency for some, when political legitimacy is frequently contested and economic deprivation high.

6.6. Everyday governance through brokering and political affiliations

> *Kalijhora has become prosperous due to the dams.[89]*

The above statement is a common narrative of economic transformation among the general public in Darjeeling when referring to Kalijhora. However, some people, mostly older people in the in the directly and indirectly affected villages, reported that they did not see the effects of the hydropower projects in a positive light.

> *People started becoming concerned only with money (after the project).[90]*

> *This project has given birth to too many netas (political leaders) - The somewhat educated people became leaders and took advantage of the situation.[91]*

A common vehicle for economic upliftment has been through contractual work during the construction phase of the projects. According to Sailesh, a contractor:

> *I was a contractor before but a petty one like most people are. After NHPC came, I learned the skills and became a registered contractor and got employed full time in NHPC. In our village, there is no farming land, people are not educated and the best profession available was becoming a driver. We all had kuccha (mud) houses; now we have earned money and made good houses and are able to send our children to good schools. Otherwise we were all labour class people. Our economic status has improved and we are glad we supported the project. Our coming generations will be better off and more conscious as they have been able to get good education unlike us. [92]*

Some, like Sailesh in Kalijhora were able to progress in life as they accumulated credentials through proper documents as registered contractors. Indeed, even Kalijhora residents recount

---

[89] Field work, Darjeeling, March 2017.

[90] Interview, male, retired school teacher, 65 years old, Kalijhora, September, 2017

[91] Interview, male, government employee, 55 years old, Kalijhora, September, 2017

[92] Interview, male, 45 years, Kalijhora, September, 2017.

how the TLDP IV project has been a blessing for the village. The local forest department official also suggests that the forests were saved by the project because beforehand, people were subsisting by stealing and selling forest produce.

In the locations and settlements along the TDLP III, however, such short-term benefits have conferred fewer advantages. Here, political patronage has resulted in a proliferation of contractors, an increase in party politics, and inadequacies in the infrastructure caused by the poor quality construction carried out by unqualified contractors.

> *We wanted better protection for the village (from the dams), but that's not there because contractors don't think long term…they are more interested in making quick money.*

> *Party politics have increased after the project came. People sorted out issues within themselves in the past. After the dam project, people have seen money. For the tiniest work you have to get hold of party. This is also a tactic of NHPC- they want a letter from the party for everything.*

However, many reported that for the unemployed, the project was the only way to get ahead in life.

> *Employment should not be through a (political) party. But all jobs are available only through contractors not through the NHPC as it should be. In this, the councillor always takes a cut. So that's why we need the party – because without it we can't hope to get anything.[93]*

For example, in the case of the TLDP III project, inhabitants of the roadside villages of 29 Mile, 27 Mile, Geilkhola, and Teesta Bazar lost their daily livelihoods as quarry labourers after the project completed construction. People did not receive any compensation for their losses, despite presenting many petitions to the local GTA *sabhasads*.

Sanjay, a river rafting guide from Teesta bazar, and previously a GJM party worker, leveraged the contention around this issue of non-compensation. He joined the TMC party and led demands for compensation of the labourers.

> *I had to take a side and (the) TMC was the ruling party so my involvement with the party happened. GJM did not help local people get compensation for their losses. I*

---

[93] Group conversation, men 25- 35 years, 29th Mile, April 2017.

formed a group and organised a demonstration at the NHPC office. I did a lot of rallying with quarry labourers; then the NHPC started to seek provisions for compensation. My aim was to give the compensation before the festival so that people would be happy. I wanted to gain some publicity.[94]

Nevertheless, while the projects allowed small-time leaders like Sanjay to secure leadership positions and appropriate resources and publicity, they also helped villagers to access compensation. He also (supposedly) charged a fixed commission per person, to be paid from the compensation amount, demonstrating how informal brokers simultaneously attempted to challenge the system (here, NHPC) on behalf of local labourer interests but also consolidated their power, finances, and public image by these practices. The quarry labourers from 29th Mile and Geilkhola, without recourse to any other platforms that represented their needs, were more than happy to pay the commission. According to them:

TMC worked for us. So most of the labourers joined the TMC party to claim compensation and it was also safe to side with the ruling party. At the time word got around that people from the GJM party wouldn't get even this amount. So, all of us in the GJMM shifted to the TMC party.[95]

The TMC party raised the issue that labourers should get compensation. The amount we received was not much, just Rs. 48000. But that was still something rather than nothing. Nobody had raised a voice for labourers' compensation. We trusted TMC because our own sabhasad (councillor) did not help us.[96]

The striking feature of this vignette is not that these practices of changing political affiliations and demanding compensation through whatever means possible are unusual but that they are commonplace across Darjeeling. In Riyang, another location close to TLDP III, another local GJMM leader confided that if he had not got into the (GJM) party, he would not have been able to help his fellow villagers or progress in life[97]. He recounts that before he joined the party, he asked the NHPC many times for a job for this son but was chased away. After this, he joined the GJMM and became a leader in his village. His new position as a local political leader, helped his son get a job in the NHPC office and he and other villagers also secured contractual

[94] Interview, male, 45 years. May, 2017

[95] Conversation with quarry labourers, women- 30 to 50 years old, 29th Mile, April 2017

[96] Conversation with quarry labourers, women- 50 and 30 years old, Geilkhola, April 2017

[97] Personal interview, male, 50 years, Riyang, April 2017.

work through party recommendations. As one contractor from 29th Mile pointed out, '*Some (people) are politically motivated; some are economically motivated. We have to find a way because there is no one to represent us*' [98]

Overall, the narratives presented above highlight how political affiliation, combined with informal brokering, was a way to achieve aspirations and get ahead in life, consolidate local support for upcoming leaders, and overcome individual socio-economic precarity in the contested political setting of Darjeeling. These practices of everyday politics and governance offer only short-term redress through contract-based jobs or monetary compensation for vulnerable groups. However, in the absence of state-led support for strengthening livelihoods and addressing local precarity, informal brokering does provide temporary stability for disempowered groups.

6.7. Discussion and conclusion: everyday governance at the state margins

In our area, politics has become (a) part and parcel of our livelihood.[99]

(Political) party is the biggest employer in Darjeeling.[100]

This paper demonstrated that since the local political administration's legitimate power to bypass state and central government policy was limited, informal means were used to wield power. For local political actors, the hydropower projects then became a medium to extract resources (financial and political) from the hydropower developers; in return NHPC could implement their projects without impediment. Political parties also leveraged these reciprocal relationships for consolidating their power and overall these practices of everyday governance allowed villagers to receive short-term gains without acknowledging or addressing structural drivers of marginalisation and precarity.

In Darjeeling, as is the case elsewhere along Eastern Himalayan borderland (McDuie-Ra, 2008, Baruah, 2005), anxieties over autonomy, identity and belonging are deeply entrenched in the geographical, historical and political aspects of colonial and postcolonial governance. In order

---

[98] Interview, male, 47 years, 29th Mile, May, 2017.

[99] Key informant, Darjeeling town, December, 2017

[100] Key informant, Kalimpong town, December 2017

to establish territorial control over the Darjeeling Hills, the West Bengal state has used different strategies of coercion and pandering to different local interests, which to have created a politicised space where the rule of violence, patronage politics and party affiliations have become the norm. The sustained undermining of the autonomy and constitution of the semi-autonomous DGHC and GTA have resulted in a crisis of legitimacy and turned local governance actors and structures into agents of patronage. Party politics have thus become a vehicle for providing short-term local benefits and a medium for addressing grievances for the majority of Darjeeling's population. In the case of hydropower projects, such myopic and reactive political dynamics have weakened collective agency and contributed to a failure to address more deep-seated drivers of domination and disempowerment (De Wit and Berner, 2009).

The findings of this paper raise a broader concern of the implications of political agency by demonstrating how political affiliations and networks enable temporary stability. In contexts like Darjeeling, where accountability and democratic systems are often inadequate or absent, and political instability conceals everyday needs and challenges, ordinary people depend heavily upon political parties and informal brokers to seek redress. In the case of Kalijhora, for example, the jobs and contracts negotiated by brokers on behalf of the local population presented opportunities for ameliorating their precarious situation. In 29th Mile, informal brokers became the medium for accessing compensation for the disempowered quarry labourers to obtain redress, albeit temporarily. This study also presents brokers' motivations that are typically not only driven by material gain but also mediated by their individual political subjectivities of defying or accepting local political realities. However, while brokers offer short-term redress, they also perpetuate exploitative structures of inequality, as they work through an increasingly institutionalised culture of party politics. Such power dynamics reveal the challenges to collective action as well as environment governance, in politically contested and socio-economically precarious places such as Darjeeling.

By providing detailed, grounded research on the practices of informal networks that underpin and shape local hydropower governance, this paper makes empirical and theoretical contributions to the discourse on hydropower decision-making processes in the EH and to the literature on the political geography of margins and informal governance in South Asia. It argues:

- Understanding local politics and practices of everyday governance offers crucial insights into their influence on environmental governance and a more comprehensive view of development outcomes, such as impediments and encouragements to collective action, from a bottom-up perspective.

- These practices and cultures of everyday governance should be understood with reference to the histories of local politics, as well as the broader regional political economy, and challenge the notion that geographically peripheral regions are passive recipients of development initiatives formulated by the state (Meehan and Plonski, 2017).

- By focusing on local practices of governance, this paper strengthens calls for a negotiated and dynamic view of margins that argues that centres and margins are mutually constitutive, and continually shaped by conflicts, processes of interaction, and the flows of power and resources between them (Cons and Sanyal, 2013).

This paper aimed to unpack the local politics involved in shaping the (re)production of power in hydropower governance in Darjeeling. In unpacking the local politics surrounding hydropower development, this paper explored the role of local governance bodies in decision-making, and the roles and practices of informal brokers in negotiating benefits from the projects. It described the historical trajectory of contested political regimes, and the emergence and persistence of party political affiliations that influence everyday local governance in Darjeeling. It demonstrated that in undermining successive demands for political autonomy, local political governance structures had devolved into institutions of political patronage, lacking legitimacy and frequently ruling through force. In such a context, party politics become a way for small-time leaders and brokers to exercise political agency and claim benefits from the projects. Political affiliations significantly influenced their positioning in negotiating with hydropower authorities and affecting community action and response. Such practices and affiliations, while serving to perpetuate unequal power relationships, however, also offered a degree of redress to disempowered groups like the labourers affected by the projects in 29th Mile and the poor in Kalijhora.

In conclusion, by foregrounding marginality at the state borders, this paper contributes to understanding power dynamics and local networks of governance in the political geographies of borders and margins (Cons and Sanyal, 2013, Goodhand et al., 2016, Meehan and Plonski, 2017).

Chapter 7: Conclusion: development and agency at the margins

The overall aim of this thesis was to present a nuanced examination of the power dynamics that shape local responses to hydropower projects in Darjeeling. In order to understanding of local responses to hydropower development, in detail and as part of a larger socio-political processes, this thesis formulated three research questions.

- How do socio-political context and development discourses legitimise top-down development practices in hydropower governance in Darjeeling?

- What are the impacts of and responses to hydropower projects and how is agency exerted in response to these projects?

- How do local governance structures reshape power relations in hydropower governance at the local level?

The thesis answered these questions through three empirical chapters broadly corresponding to each of the research questions. This final chapter discusses these empirical findings and highlights their contribution to theory and practice. The following section (Section 7.1) first summarises each of the chapters and then presents a synthesis of their findings. Sections 7.2 and 7.3 discuss key theoretical and empirical contributions respectively. The chapter concludes with a note on insights for policy and future research.

7.1. Summary of chapters and findings

Chapter 4 considers the development discourse and the historical socio-political context that legitimises top-down hydropower development in Darjeeling. Drawing on theories of frontiers and territoriality in political ecology, it forwards the notion of 'unruly space' to interpret the structural context of colonial and postcolonial governance practices and their effects on marginalised places. It emphasises the legacy of non-recognition of land rights and territorial control of the region on present-day precarious livelihoods, and a prevailing sense of socio-economic insecurity and uncertainty of belonging in the region.

Against this backdrop of Darjeeling as an unruly space, the chapter discusses how hydropower development has unfolded. It provides a critical account of practices of the NHPC (the

hydropower authorities), which with its state-facilitated mandate saw itself only as an implementing agency and less as an actor concerned with pre- and post-project concerns such as garnering local acceptance or enabling transparent and fair compensation. The chapter elaborates on the NHPC's exclusionary and arbitrary hydropower planning and implementation practices such as providing inadequate information about project impacts, and dismissing local people and livelihoods as illegal, while making claims of bringing development to a backward region. By examining these practices of coercion, this chapter demonstrates how controversial hydropower projects get legitimised and approved in an economically and politically marginalised context. It examines the connection between local socio-economic circumstances and hydropower governance practices, and locates local responses to hydropower projects as part of cumulative socio-political trajectories of marginalisation.

Through the narratives of the communities living alongside hydropower sites, Chapter 5 explored the reasons behind the lack of local resistance to the construction of hydropower projects. It provides narrative accounts of two hydropower communities who were vocal in their support for, and facilitated the approval of the projects. Using a precarity-led framing of agency, this chapter found that the supporters were largely driven by perceived opportunities for employment and development. This chapter demonstrated how these expectations were informed by their lived experiences of deep neglect, economic disempowerment, and political marginalisation, owing to their tenuous socio-legal status.

For the communities living in remote locations, the promise of roads signified better connectivity and 'development', driving local support. For others, the hope to secure employment, as labourers and petty contractors, in the hydropower project sites, drove support. The projects provided an opportunity to escape precarious conditions and persistent economic hardship, even if temporarily. This chapter provides an understanding into why, despite the temporary nature of direct benefits, and potential environmental risks, marginalised people often support environmentally harmful development projects. It demonstrated how local circumstances of material need, geographical isolation, economic and political marginalisation, coupled with NHPC's underhand practices of mobilising selective communities and promises of development interacted to shape supportive responses to hydropower development.

Chapter 6 focuses on the local politics surrounding hydropower development in Darjeeling through the roles and practices of informal brokers in mediating local support and negotiating benefits from the projects. This chapter described the historical trajectory of regional politics and the dominance of the demand for Gorkhaland, distinctly positioned as a resistance against the West Bengal administration. It showed how the West Bengal state used different strategies of coercion and pandering to different local interests in order to establish territorial control over the region. These strategies have led to a rule of local governance where patronage politics and party affiliations have become the norm. These practices and norms are particularly critical in unruly spaces, and the chapter shows how brokerage, as a practice of everyday governance, is used to exercise agency and claim benefits from hydropower projects. Drawing on theoretical devices of everyday state and governance, and the role of brokerage in 'delivering development', this chapter details how hydropower decision-making is a negotiated and often coerced process.

The three empirical chapters (Chapter 4, 5 and 6) unpack the drivers of local support for hydropower projects along the Teesta River in Darjeeling in the Eastern Himalayan region of India. At its broadest, this research found that local support for hydropower projects was largely driven by perceived opportunities for 'development' and 'employment' by communities living along the hydropower sites. These economically and politically marginalised communities who are highway residents and forest villagers without secure land tenure, saw hydropower as an opportunity to improve their socio-economic conditions, often through opportunities for short-term wage labour. However, their informal status offered very limited options for negotiation and made these communities reliant on middlemen and brokers who are political party workers. Through them, communities demanded the provision of various unskilled and semi-skilled jobs for manual labourers, drivers and contractors. Political parties leveraged these reciprocal relationships for consolidating their power and overall, these practices of everyday governance allowed villagers to receive short-term gains.

As discussed in Chapter 6, the local political economy, which confers semi-autonomy status to Darjeeling, sharply mediates delivery of development and everyday governance. This structure of governance, with no legislative but limited financial and executive powers, is the outcome of prolonged and complicated processes of violent and nonviolent political struggle for

separation from West Bengal. As the local political administration, which oversees the semi-autonomous arrangement does not possess much legitimate power, it uses informal means of patronage politics and brokering to wield power. For local political actors, the hydropower projects, then, became a medium to extract financial resources from the hydropower developers. However, the larger issue highlighted by local communities and brokers and wider community for non-resistance is the prevailing notion that it is an inconceivable proposition to oppose a 'central' government project.

Finally, the projects were set up and supported because of inadequate information of project impacts, promises of antecedent benefits accorded by the power developers to selected communities, leaders and political party workers. The corrupt local structures of political administration coupled with the informal status of the communities enabled project developers to sidestep critical aspects of social and environmental impact assessments or informed public consent. In this environment, where people displayed having limited political agency with which to negotiate, power developers and political/elite actors leveraged this to make decisions without being subject to scrutiny or being held accountable. They could effectively run the projects without political objections or impediments from resisting communities whilst being presented as vehicles of development in a 'backward' region. While the immediate responses are often predicated on localised factors and power relations, broader, historical politics and processes (e.g. Darjeeling's colonial history, ongoing demands for political autonomy) structure current politics, precarity, and underdevelopment of the region. Further, this political reality perpetuates the marginalised informal status of the communities and influences local perspectives and responses towards development, including hydropower projects. In doing so, the findings demonstrate how regional politics filter into practices of support and negotiation, at multiple scales, from hydropower affected communities, to local leaders, and hydropower project officials.

Eventually, the hydropower projects also lead to differentiated risks, impacts, and outcomes. In reality, many of the promises such as free electricity connection made were not kept by the project authorities. After the projects completed construction, the settlements along the highway and their catchment area remain in constant danger from flooding, erosion and other natural calamities. Some communities have lost their previous livelihoods when dam

construction resulted in submergence of riverbeds where they worked as labourers breaking stone boulders. For the isolated communities living in remote areas, there was some form of tertiary benefits from infrastructure development, such as the bridge and roads. For others, there were opportunities for marginal economic upliftment through contractual work during the construction phase of the projects which significantly reduced after the project construction ended. These communities believe the project was beneficial because it lifted them out of poverty and improved their economic condition even marginally and improved accessibility to towns and markets. Such responses demonstrate how people, despite recognising that their long-term conditions might not improve, have weighed their options and decided to support the projects as they perceived any possibility of development, even short term was worth taking.

Together, the three empirical chapters illustrate the intricacy of responses to hydropower projects by different groups and shed light on the localized and wider dynamics of supportive responses towards the hydropower projects. They present a narrative of nested power dynamics of state and institutional actors, local political actors including brokers, and the immediate and wider communities that accrue to support ecologically damaging hydropower projects. There are multiple factors shaping supportive responses; from communities wanting to meet personal aspirations of overcoming socio-economic precarity to local leaders and brokers consolidating political and economic power. These dynamics combine to inform not only responses but present high risks, further environmental degradation, and challenge sustainable and equitable development.

The broad argument is that absence of resistance does not equate to lack of agency or that the impacts and criticisms against hydropower is lessened; to be properly understood, people's responses must be seen embedded in the dynamics of the broader social and historical processes of marginalisation as well as local political structures of governance and patronage. The latter reshape everyday precarity and power relations which in turn affect environmental governance in general and hydropower outcomes in particular.

7.2. Theoretical contributions

In constructing the above arguments on governance, development and agency, this thesis drew on different theories and concepts to frame and situate the study within the ongoing debates on hydropower politics. Broadly, in providing perspectives on hydropower development in socio-ecologically precarious regions at the margins, it draws on and contributes to theoretical debates on political ecology, as well as postcolonial and political geography literatures on governance, development, agency and state in the Himalayan region. Below, I summarise the main theoretical arguments this thesis makes.

In Chapter 4, which draws on political ecology, the thesis used frontiers and territoriality literature to forward the notion of Darjeeling as an 'unruly space'. Here, unruly space is understood as a function of the local political and socio-economic context, produced by colonial and postcolonial territorialisation of people and resource extraction, leading to unequal and unjust outcomes. When taken together, these colonial histories of extraction and the postcolonial perpetuation of marginalisation are used to legitimise new state agendas. In the case of the Darjeeling Hills, I argue, that these new state agendas take on the form of hydropower development. Contributing to debates on the political ecology of hydropower projects (Gergan, 2016, Karlsson, 2011, Baruah, 2017, Joy et al., 2017, Huber, 2019), Chapter 4 demonstrates how the impacts and responses to development projects, and the resulting resource and livelihood transformations, require understanding of the historically embedded nature of relations between the region and the centre of power.

Chapter 5 engages with the concept of precarity (Munck, 2013, Millar, 2017) to examine the observed lack of resistance to hydropower projects in Darjeeling. By doing so, it contributes to understanding how and why there were no visible opposition to the projects. This precarity-led framing of agency accommodates the differentiated experiences of the legacies and processes of marginalisation, whilst also accounting for acts of resistance. Such an expanded view of agency can encapsulate resistance, compliance, and complicity, which often co-occur in marginalised communities, as shown in the case of Darjeeling. Contributing to literature on agency to top down processes of state led development (Huber and Joshi, 2015, Ete, 2017, Dukpa et al., 2019, McDuie-Ra, 2011), I highlight how, contrary to expectations of resistance, pre-existing and current vulnerability drove local support for hydropower projects.

Chapter 6 draws on literature on the political geography of margins and informal governance in South Asia to examine local political structures that mediate the margins. It unpacks the ways in which unruly spaces such as the marginalised territory of Darjeeling have created a stage for unruly governance.

While political ecology is a widely used framework in the context of hydropower projects and the analysis of other resource-based conflicts in the Eastern Himalayas, everyday governance is largely ignored, as most studies focus on the role of state in engendering vulnerabilities and marginalities (Baruah, 2003a, Baruah, 2003b, McDuie-Ra, 2008, Kipgen, 2017). By detailing the practices of informal networks and brokerage that underpin and shape local hydropower governance, Chapter 6 makes empirical and theoretical contributions to the current discourse on hydropower decision-making processes in the Eastern Himalayan borderland and to the literature on the political geography of margins (Cons and Sanyal, 2013, Goodhand, 2018) and the literature on informal governance and brokerage (Stovel and Shaw, 2012, Lindquist, 2015). It does this by demonstrating how power is imposed, negotiated and resisted at the states margins through local brokers. In doing so, it complements the political geography scholarship that argues for a view from the periphery challenging the view that that sees them as passive recipients of state-directed policies (Van Schendel, 2004). By foregrounding marginality at the state borders, these findings contribute to understanding power dynamics and local networks of everyday governance at the margins (Cons and Sanyal, 2013).

Overall, this thesis juxtaposes local precarity and marginalisation with micro perspectives of informal networks of everyday governance to complement the broader literature on environmental governance in postcolonial India. While political ecology debates on modernisation discourses and centre margin dynamics provides a broad context to examine the larger power dynamics through which local state structures of domination, exclusion and disempowerment are forged, the concept of 'precarity' facilitates articulation of agency in conditions of socio-economic marginality. In particular, using the lens of everyday governance, it offers a point of convergence for thinking about precarity as both a structural position in a system of socio-political relations and as a set of highly marginalised lived experiences. It complements political ecology's analysis of hydropower governance practices to illustrate how systematic exclusions are constituted and materialised at different levels.

7.3. Empirical contributions

The findings presented in this thesis further an empirical understanding of hydropower governance and people's agency in precarious and marginalised geographies. At a broader scale, the evidence furthers an understanding of how and why people support environmentally destructive development interventions, thereby expanding on previous studies on the political ecology of state-led development in India.

The findings of this thesis have shown the wide lapses in the processes of planning and governance of hydropower projects in Darjeeling. It has brought attention, not only to issues of technocratic, top-down approaches that numerous studies on hydropower development in the region and in India have highlighted (Vagholikar and Das, 2010, Menon et al., 2003, Huber, 2019, Huber and Joshi, 2015, Kohli, 2011) but also more controversial practices of manipulative practices of negotiations aimed at confusing and dividing communities to enable swift approval and smooth implementation of projects.

In the context of Darjeeling, small and medium dams have avoided scrutiny because the projects were officially categorised as 'low' dams, although technically they are substantially large at 132 MW and 160 MW, respectively. They also gain credence, by being promoted as benign "run-of-the-river" (R-o-R) projects for the development of the region (International Rivers, 2016a, Kohli, 2011, Vagholikar and Das, 2010). However, the empirical findings demonstrate how these medium dams also have significant socio-economic and environmental impacts, by rendering local livelihoods more precarious, eroding riverbanks and adding risk to an already vulnerable area. Critically, this thesis draws attention to and contributes to studies on medium sized and ''run off the river'' dams that are overlooked in the development discourse as they are seen to be having lower social and environmental externalities compared to mega hydropower projects.

By drawing attention to exclusionary hydropower governance practices and the controversial manipulative practices of hydropower, both overt and covert, this thesis makes empirical contributions to research on hydropower decision-making and everyday governance practices

in the Eastern Himalayan region. It examines local governance structures through the practices of informal brokers that underpin and shape local hydropower governance and project outcomes. This focus on informal networks and brokerage practices addresses a gap in the literature where relatively little attention has been paid to how local political structures and governance affect hydropower processes and outcomes at the grassroots level. While the issues of political patronage and role of corruption in mediating hydropower development are increasingly discussed in informal discourse, they have received cursory attention in academic debates on hydropower in the region (Huber and Joshi, 2015, Joshi et al., 2019, Alley, 2017). Speaking to this gap, this thesis demonstrates the manner in which top-down forms of technocratic hydropower governance are reinforced by local governance structures, which together affect hydropower outcomes and marginalisation processes. In doing so, it broadens knowledge about differentiated outcomes and responses of hydropower development at the interface of community dynamics, state interventions, and wider political processes.

Finally, in offering a less familiar account of local support and cooperation in the face of infrastructure projects as opposed to more commonly discussed narratives of protest and resistance to hydropower, this research also makes a key contribution to the growing body of scholarship with regard to agency and resistance to hydropower projects in the region (Huber and Joshi, 2015, McDuie-Ra, 2011, Karlsson, 2016, Arora, 2009, Ete, 2017, Arora and Kipgen, 2012).

In the context of Darjeeling, this thesis draws attention to the struggles of communities in the highway and forest settlements, whose voices and stories are removed from the rich academic engagements with identity politics, labour rights, and the adversities suffered by tea plantation workers in the region. The communities covered in this study hold a subaltern marginal position even within Darjeeling society, due to their informal status, and are overtly labelled as encroachers. Also, under researched is the issue of development politics in the region, as development is largely conflated with continuing concerns with identity and ethnicity and preoccupation with the Gorkhaland demand. This study thus shines a spotlight on the marginal within the marginalised and contributes to a growing interest in Darjeeling studies (e.g. Middleton, 2018).

This thesis argues for a recognition of different forms of marginality, evidenced through the case studies, and the need to support political mechanisms appropriate to different marginalised contexts and identities. In doing so, it not only contributes to research on margins in South Asia (Das and Poole, 2004b) but also furthers our understanding of the heterogeneous social and political landscape in the Himalayas (Karlsson, 2011, Chowdhury and Kipgen, 2013, Joy et al., 2017).

While grounded in the local context of Darjeeling, the themes discussed in this thesis are conversant with and contribute to developmental debates in the wider Himalayan context. These include, for example, the persistent use of 'underdeveloped' and 'economically backward' to denote the region and its mountain communities (Drew, 2014), the prevailing desire and demand for development by mountain communities (Lord, 2014, Rest, 2012), and ways in which the beliefs and aspirations of these communities are offered by governments as justification for large-scale, externally dictated programs of development, including hydropower (Drew, 2014).

7.4. Closing note: concerns for governance, insights for policy, and future research

The findings of this thesis have relevance for policy and practices hydropower development in locations at the margins. It points to crucial shortcomings in hydropower governance and its role in aggravating social inequalities and environmental vulnerabilities. The disregard for significant social risks and environmental impact assessments including the meaningful participation of communities most immediately affected by hydropower development, increases the risk of disasters, safety of lives, and availability of livelihoods. For example, from the case studies, this thesis has shown how the settlements close to the project sites remain in constant danger from flooding as a consequence of dam's construction. In some areas, protection walls are eroded as substandard quality work was undertaken due to it being contracted through corruptive local leaders. Environmental risk and degradation are heightened because these areas are prone to frequent landslides and earthquakes. Hence, hydropower implementation practices require greater scrutiny and mandatory rules for impact assessments.

As has been shown, Darjeeling, in comparison to other Eastern Himalayan contexts, is a rather unusual location for hydropower research, particularly because of the lack of 'indigeneity' claims and the absence of mega hydropower projects like those in other areas in the Eastern Himalayas. This thesis aims to contribute to dialogue on the fundamental debate about recognition of land and labour rights in Darjeeling (Besky, 2014, Besky, 2017, Chettri, 2013, Middleton, 2018, Sarkar, 2010) from the perspectives of the marginal and disadvantaged sections of Darjeeling society. In the absence of land or labour rights or any mechanisms or state-led support for claiming compensation or strengthening livelihoods, marginalised communities are exposed to exploitation and forced to rely on political actors to address precarity. In the absence of these rights, some defined mechanism has to be put in place to protect community rights and develop a more systemic agenda on land and labour rights in the region.

Studies in the eastern Himalayan region have largely focused primarily on the antagonistic relationship of with state and state led development (McDuie-Ra, 2008, Karlsson, 2013, Baruah, 2003b, Sharma, 2018). The discussion of development in the region would benefit from drawing on perspectives of the everyday state and everyday governance to provide more nuanced perspectives on the state-society interface and the practices and outcomes of development. A further exploration of specific forms of marginality from the perspective of lived experiences of other marginal and disadvantaged populations as well as those engaged in informal livelihood activities in other contexts in the region is a significant opportunity for future research to highlight other categories of exclusion that remains understudied due to the preoccupation with tribal identities and ethnic politics. Such an enquiry can provide different insights and interpretations and add validity to the claims on different form of identities and marginalities. This can contribute to a more nuanced portrayal of this socio-culturally and environmentally heterogeneous region.

Finally, this thesis could not give much focus on the increased environmental risk and safety associated with hydropower projects and other intersecting governance factors such as forest rights and land rights. Future research would add value by focusing on the interconnections of hydropower development with emerging risks, such as climate change, as well as the cumulative impacts of projects along a single river.

References

ADB (2007) *Hydropower development in India: A sector assessment*. Available at: http://hdl.handle.net/11540/6167.

Adger, W. N. (2006) 'Vulnerability', *Global environmental change,* 16(3), pp. 268-281.

Agrawal, A. (1995) 'Dismantling the divide between indigenous and scientific knowledge', *Development and change,* 26(3), pp. 413-439.

Agrawal, A. (2005) 'Environmentality: technologies of government and the making of subjects'.

Agrawal, A. and Gibson, C. C. (1999) 'Enchantment and disenchantment: the role of community in natural resource conservation', *World development,* 27(4), pp. 629-649.

Ahearn, L. M. (2001) 'Language and agency', *Annual review of anthropology,* 30(1), pp. 109-137.

Ahlers, R., Budds, J., Joshi, D. and Zwarteveen, M. (2015) 'Framing hydropower as green energy: assessing drivers, risks and tensions in the Eastern Himalayas', *Earth System Dynamics,* 6(1), pp. 195-204.

Aiyar, S. (2003) *In District-Level Deprivation in the New Millenium. India' Socio-Economic Faultline-a Review* New Delhi: Konark Publisher.

Ali, A. (2015) '38 Killed, 23 missing as landslides rock Darjeeling', *The Indian Express*. Available at: https://indianexpress.com/article/india/west-bengal/landslides-claim-18-lives-in-darjeeling/.

Ali, A. I. and Das, I. (2003) 'Tribal situation in north east India', *Studies of Tribes and Tribals,* 1(2), pp. 141-148.

Alley, K. D. (2017) 'Modes of governance in India's hydropower development', *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Water,* 4(2), pp. e1198.

Alley, K. D., Hile, R. and Mitra, C. (2014) 'Visualizing hydropower across the Himalayas: mapping in a time of regulatory decline', *HIMALAYA, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies,* 34(2), pp. 9.

Anand, N. (2011) 'Pressure: The politechnics of water supply in Mumbai', *Cultural Anthropology,* 26(4), pp. 542-564.

Anderson, B. (2007) 'Battles in time: the relation between global and labour mobilities', *New Migration Dynamics*, pp. 5-24.

Arora, V. (2008) 'Gandhigiri in Sikkim', *Economic and political weekly,* 43(38), pp. 27-28.

Arora, V. (2009) ''They are All Set to Dam (n) Our Future': Contested Development through Hydel Power in Democratic Sikkim', *Sociological bulletin,* 58(1), pp. 94-114.

Arora, V. and Kipgen, N. (2012) ''We can live without power, but we can't live without our land': Indigenous Hmar Oppose the Tipaimukh Dam in Manipur', *Sociological Bulletin,* 61(1), pp. 109-128.

Bagchi, R. (2012) *Gorkhaland: crisis of statehood.* Sage Publications India.

Baghel, R. (2014) 'Misplaced knowledge: Large dams as an Anatopism in South Asia', *Large Dams in Asia*: Springer, pp. 15-31.

Baghel, R. and Nüsser, M. (2010) 'Discussing large dams in Asia after the World Commission on Dams: Is a political ecology approach the way forward?', *Water alternatives,* 3(2).

Bakker, K. (1999) 'The politics of hydropower: developing the Mekong', *Political Geography,* 18(2), pp. 209-232.

Bakker, K. (2012) 'Water: Political, biopolitical, material', *Social Studies of Science,* 42(4), pp. 616-623.

Bandyopadhyay, J. (2009) 'Climate change and Hindu Kush-Himalayan waters-knowledge gaps and priorities in adaptation', *ICIMOD, Sustainable Mountain Development,* (56), pp. 17-20.

Bandyopadhyay, J., Mallik, B., Mandal, M. and Perveen, S. (2002) 'Dams and development: Report on a policy dialogue', *Economic and political weekly*, pp. 4108-4112.

Banerjee, A., Ghosh, S., Springate-Baginski, O. and One, N. F. (2010) 'The creation of West Bengal's forest underclass an historical institutional analysis of forest rights deprivations', *IPPG Discussion Papers,* 51, pp. 1-26.

Banki, S. (2013) 'Precarity of place: A complement to the growing precariat literature', *Global Discourse,* 3(3-4), pp. 450-463.

Barney, K. (2009) 'Laos and the making of a 'relational'resource frontier', *Geographical Journal,* 175(2), pp. 146-159.

Barros, N., Cole, J. J., Tranvik, L. J., Prairie, Y. T., Bastviken, D., Huszar, V. L. M., Del Giorgio, P. and Roland, F. (2011) 'Carbon emission from hydroelectric reservoirs linked to reservoir age and latitude', *Nature Geoscience,* 4(9), pp. 593-596.

Baruah, S. (1999) *India against itself: Assam and the politics of nationality.* University of Pennsylvania Press.

Baruah, S. (2003a) 'Citizens and denizens: Ethnicity, homelands, and the crisis of displacement in Northeast India', *Journal of Refugee Studies,* 16(1), pp. 44-66.

Baruah, S. (2003b) 'Nationalizing space: Cosmetic federalism and the politics of development in Northeast India', *Development and Change,* 34(5), pp. 915-939.

Baruah, S. (2005) 'Durable disorder', *Understanding the Politics of*.

Baruah, S. (2007) *Postfrontier blues: Toward a new policy framework for Northeast India.* East-West Center Washington.

Baruah, S. (2008) 'Territoriality, indigeneity and rights in the north-east India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, pp. 15-19.

Baruah, S. (2013) 'Politics of territoriality: Indigeneity, itinerancy and rights in North-East India', *Territorial changes and territorial restructurings in the Himalayas*, pp. 69-83.

Baruah, S. (2017) 'Whose river is it, anyway?: The political economy of hydropower in the Eastern Himalayas 1', *Water Conflicts in Northeast India*: Routledge India, pp. 116-144.

Baud, M. and Van Schendel, W. (1997) 'Toward a comparative history of borderlands', *Journal of World History*, pp. 211-242.

Baviskar, A. (1995) 'In the Belly of the River', *Tribal Conflicts over Development in the Narmada Valley*.

Baviskar, A. (1997) 'Tribal politics and discourses of environmentalism', *Contributions to Indian Sociology,* 31(2), pp. 195-223.

Baviskar, A. (2003) 'Tribal politics and discourses of Indian environmentalism', *Nature in the Global South*: Duke University Press, pp. 289-318.

Baviskar, A. (2007) *Waterscapes: the cultural politics of a natural resource.* Permanent Black Delhi.

Baviskar, A. 'Between reason and resistance'.

Bebbington, A. (2012) 'Extractive industries, socio-environmental conflicts and political economic transformations in Andean America', *Social conflict, economic development and extractive industry: Evidence from South America*, pp. 3-26.

Bengal, G. o. W., Kolkata, K. (2010) *West Bengal State Action Plan on Climate Change*.

Bennike, R. (2017) 'Frontier commodification: Governing land, labour and leisure in Darjeeling, India', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies,* 40(2), pp. 256-271.

Berenschot, W. (2010) 'Everyday mediation: The politics of public service delivery in Gujarat, India', *Development and Change,* 41(5), pp. 883-905.

Berenschot, W. (2011) 'On the Usefulness of Goonda s in Indian Politics:'Moneypower'and 'Musclepower'in a Gujarati Locality', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies,* 34(2), pp. 255-275.

Berenschot, W. and Van Klinken, G. (2018) 'Informality and citizenship: the everyday state in Indonesia', *Citizenship studies,* 22(2), pp. 95-111.

Besky, S. (2014) *The Darjeeling distinction: Labor and justice on fair-trade tea plantations in India.* Univ of California Press.

Besky, S. (2017) 'The land in Gorkhaland: On the edges of belonging in Darjeeling, India', *Environmental Humanities,* 9(1), pp. 18-39.

Béteille, A. (1998) 'The idea of indigenous people', *Current anthropology,* 39(2), pp. 187-192.

Bhattacharya, N. (2013) 'Leisure, economy and colonial urbanism: Darjeeling, 1835–1930', *Urban history,* 40(3), pp. 442-461.

Bhaumik, S. (2004) 'Ethnicity, ideology and religion: Separatist movements in India's Northeast', *Religious radicalism and security in South Asia*, pp. 219-44.

Bhaumik, S. (2009) *Troubled Periphery: The Crisis of India's North East.* SAGE Publications India.

Bhushal, R. 2016. Many Hydroelectric Plants in Himalayas Are At Risk From Glacial Lakes. Environmental Research Web.

Bierschenk, T., Chauveau, J.-P., De Sardan, J.-P. O. and Kossi, A. (2002) 'Local Development Brokers in Africa The rise of a new social category'.

Biswas, A. K. and Tortajada, C. (2001) 'Development and large dams: A global perspective', *International Journal of Water Resources Development,* 17(1), pp. 9-21.

Blaikie, P. (1989) 'Explanation and policy in land degradation and rehabilitation for developing countries', *Land Degradation & Development,* 1(1), pp. 23-37.

Blaikie, P. and Brookfield, H. (1987) 'Defining and debating the problem', *Land degradation and society/Piers Blaikie and Harold Brookfield with contributions by Bryant Allen...[et al.].*

Blaikie, P., Cameron, J. and Seddon, D. (2002) 'Understanding 20 years of change in West-Central Nepal: Continuity and change in lives and ideas', *World development,* 30(7), pp. 1255-1270.

Blaikie, P., Cannon, T., Davis, I. and Wisner, B. (2005) *At risk: natural hazards, people's vulnerability and disasters.* Routledge.

Blaikie, P. M. and Muldavin, J. S. (2004) 'Upstream, downstream, China, India: the politics of environment in the Himalayan region', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers,* 94(3), pp. 520-548.

Blundo, G. and Le Meur, P.-Y. (2009) *The governance of daily life in Africa: ethnographic explorations of public and collective services.* Brill.

Boelens, R., Hoogesteger, J., Swyngedouw, E., Vos, J. and Wester, P. 2016. Hydrosocial territories: a political ecology perspective. Taylor & Francis.

Bomjan, D. (2008) *Darjeeling-Dooars: People and Place Under Benga's Neo-colonial Rule.* Bikash Jana Sahitya Kendra.

Bose, I. (2010) 'How did the Indian forest rights Act, 2006, emerge', *IPPG Discussion Papers,* 39(1), pp. 30.

Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice.* Cambridge university press.

Bourdieu, P. (1998) *Acts of resistance.* New Press New York.

Briscoe, J. and Malik, R. (2006) *India's water economy: Bracing for a turbulent future.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Bryant, R. L. (1998) 'Power, knowledge and political ecology in the third world: a review', *Progress in physical geography,* 22(1), pp. 79-94.

Bryant, R. L. and Bailey, S. (1997) *Third world political ecology.* Psychology Press.

Bryman, A. (2012) 'Social research methods: OUP Oxford'.

Budds, J. (2009) 'Contested H2O: Science, policy and politics in water resources management in Chile', *Geoforum,* 40(3), pp. 418-430.

Budds, J. (2013) 'Water, power, and the production of neoliberalism in Chile, 1973–2005', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* 31(2), pp. 301-318.

Budds, J. and Sultana, F. (2013) 'Exploring political ecologies of water and development', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* 31(2), pp. 275-279.

Business Standard (2013) *No rethink on hydel power policies.* Available at: https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/no-rethink-on-hydel-power-policies-113080201288_1.html (Accessed: 12.10.19.

Cernea, M. M. (1988) *Involuntary resettlement in development projects: Policy guidelines in World Bank-financed projects.* World Bank Publications.

Chambers, R. (1989) 'Editorial introduction: vulnerability, coping and policy'.

Chatterjee, P. (2001) *A time for tea: Women, labor, and post/colonial politics on an Indian plantation.* Duke University Press.

Chavez, C. (2008) 'Conceptualizing from the inside: Advantages, complications, and demands on insider positionality', *The Qualitative Report,* 13(3), pp. 474-494.

Chettri, M. (2013) 'Choosing the Gorkha: at the crossroads of class and ethnicity in the Darjeeling hills', *Asian Ethnicity,* 14(3), pp. 293-308.

Chettri, M. (2017) 'Ethnic environmentalism in the eastern Himalaya', *Economic and Political Weekly,* 52(46).

Chhetri, N. (2017) 'Restructuring the past, reimagining the future: ethnic renewal process and claims for recognition as scheduled tribes in Darjeeling', *Asian Ethnicity,* 18(4), pp. 470-487.

Chowdhury, A. R. and Kipgen, N. (2013) 'Deluge amidst conflict: Hydropower development and displacement in the North-east region of India', *Progress in Development Studies,* 13(3), pp. 195-208.

Cole, M. A., Elliott, R. J. and Strobl, E. (2014) 'Climate change, hydro-dependency, and the African dam boom', *World Development,* 60, pp. 84-98.

Connelly, F. M. and Clandinin, D. J. (1990) 'Stories of experience and narrative inquiry', *Educational researcher,* 19(5), pp. 2-14.

Cons, J. and Sanyal, R. (2013) 'Geographies at the margins: borders in South Asia–an introduction', *Political Geography,* 35, pp. 5-13.

Corbridge, S., Williams, G., Srivastava, M. and Véron, R. (2005) *Seeing the state: Governance and governmentality in India.* Cambridge University Press.

D'Souza, R. (2008) 'Framing India's Hydraulic Crises: The Politics of the Modern Large Dam', *Monthly Review,* 60(3), pp. 112.

Dandekar, P. 2017. Damaged rivers, collapsing fisheries: impacts of dams on riverine fisheries in India, SANDRP—South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People.

Darjeeling Chronicle (2016) 'Thirteen Structures Along Teesta Demolished to Avert Mishaps Claims District Admin'.

Darjeeling Chronicle (2018) *Mamata, Development Boards, Darjeeling-Dooars and the Gorkhas: Apprehensions and Implications*. Available at: https://thedarjeelingchronicle.com/development-board-implications/.

Das, N. K. (1989) *Ethnic identity, ethnicity and social stratification in north-east India.* Inter-India Publications.

Das, V. and Poole, D. (2004a) 'Anthropology in the margins of the state'.

Das, V. and Poole, D. (2004b) 'State and its margins: comparative ethnographies', *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*, pp. 3-33.

Das, V., Poole, D., Das, V. and Poole, D. (2004) 'Anthropology in the Margins of the State', *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review,* 30(1), pp. 140-144.

Datta, P. (1991) 'The Gorkhaland Agitation in West Bengal', *The Indian Journal of Political Science,* 52(2), pp. 225-241.

De Angelis, M. (2004) 'Separating the doing and the deed: Capital and the continuous character of enclosures', *Historical Materialism,* 12(2), pp. 57-87.

De Wit, J. and Berner, E. (2009) 'Progressive patronage? Municipalities, NGOs, CBOs and the limits to slum dwellers' empowerment', *Development and Change,* 40(5), pp. 927-947.

Del Bene, D., Scheidel, A. and Temper, L. (2018) 'More dams, more violence? A global analysis on resistances and repression around conflictive dams through co-produced knowledge', *Sustainability science,* 13(3), pp. 617-633.

Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (2011) *The Sage handbook of qualitative research.* Sage.

DeWalt, K. and DeWalt, B. (2002) 'Doing participant observation: Becoming an observer', *Participant observation: A guide for fieldworkers*, pp. 67-82.

Dharmadhikary, S. (2008) *Mountains of concrete: Dam building in the Himalayas*.

Dickson-Swift, V., James, E. L., Kippen, S. and Liamputtong, P. (2007) 'Doing sensitive research: what challenges do qualitative researchers face?', *Qualitative research,* 7(3), pp. 327-353.

Dörre, K., Kraemer, K. and Speidel, F. (2006) 'The increasing precariousness of the employment society: driving force for a new right wing populism?', *International Journal of Action Research,* 2(1), pp. 98-128.

Doshi, S. and Ranganathan, M. (2019) 'Towards a critical geography of corruption and power in late capitalism', *Progress in Human Geography,* 43(3), pp. 436-457.

Drew, G. (2014) 'Developing the Himalaya: Development as if livelihoods mattered'.

Duarah, C. K. (2017) 'Pasighat reaffirms opposition to big dam', *Assam Times*, Jan 10, 2017. Available at: https://www.assamtimes.org/node/18252 (Accessed: 09.10.2019).

Dubey, S., Sreedhar, R. and Lahiri, S. (2005) 'For Whom the Teesta Flows? A Fact Finding Report on the Teesta Low Dam Project III'.

Duflo, E. and Pande, R. (2007) 'Dams', *The Quarterly Journal of Economics,* 122(2), pp. 601-646.

Dukpa, R. D., Joshi, D. and Boelens, R. (2018) 'Hydropower development and the meaning of place. Multi-ethnic hydropower struggles in Sikkim, India', *Geoforum,* 89, pp. 60-72.

Dukpa, R. D., Joshi, D. and Boelens, R. (2019) 'Contesting Hydropower dams in the Eastern Himalaya: The Cultural Politics of Identity, Territory and Self-Governance Institutions in Sikkim, India', *Water,* 11(3), pp. 412.

Dwivedi, R. (1999) 'Displacement, risks and resistance: Local perceptions and actions in the Sardar Sarovar', *Development and Change,* 30(1), pp. 43-78.

Dye, B. J. (2018) *The politics of dam resurgence: high modernist statebuilding and the emerging powers in Africa.* University of Oxford.

Economic Times (2014) *Lok Sabha polls: BJP promises to consider Gorkhaland issue*. Available at: https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/lok-sabha-polls-bjp-promises-to-consider-gorkhaland-issue/articleshow/33460880.cms?from=mdr (Accessed: 01.08.2019.

Economic Times (2017) *TMC wins 4 civic bodies, GJM captures 3 in the hills*

Read more at:

. Available at: https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/tmc-wins-4-civic-bodies-gjm-captures-3-in-the-hills/articleshow/58714361.cms.

Elden, S. (2010) 'Land, terrain, territory', *Progress in human geography,* 34(6), pp. 799-817.

Elden, S. (2013) *The birth of territory.* University of Chicago Press.

England, K. V. (1994) 'Getting personal: Reflexivity, positionality, and feminist research', *The professional geographer,* 46(1), pp. 80-89.

Escobar, A. (1995) 'Encountering development: the making and unmaking of the third world. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press'.

Escobar, A. (1998) 'Whose knowledge, whose nature? Biodiversity, conservation, and the political ecology of social movements', *Journal of political ecology,* 5(1), pp. 53-82.

Ete, M. (2017) 'Hydro-dollar dreams: Emergent local politics of large dams and small communities', *Geographies of Difference*: Routledge India, pp. 109-127.

Ettlinger, N. (2007) 'Precarity Unbound', *Alternatives,* 32(3), pp. 319-340.

Fletcher, R. (2010) 'When environmental issues collide: climate change and the shifting political ecology of hydroelectric power', *Peace and Conflict Review,* 5(1), pp. 14-30.

Fold, N. and Hirsch, P. (2009) 'Re-thinking frontiers in Southeast Asia', *The Geographical Journal*, pp. 95-97.

Forsyth, T. (2004) *Critical political ecology: the politics of environmental science.* Routledge.

Fox, C. A. and Sneddon, C. S. (2019) 'Political borders, epistemological boundaries, and contested knowledges: Constructing dams and narratives in the Mekong river basin', *Water,* 11(3), pp. 413.

Fuller, C. J. and Benei, V. (2009) *The everyday state and society in modern India.* Social Science Press.

Fuller, C. J. and Harriss, J. (2001) 'For an anthropology of the modern Indian state'.

Ganguly, R. (2005) 'Poverty, malgovernance and ethnopolitical mobilization: Gorkha nationalism and the Gorkhaland agitation in India', *Nationalism and ethnic politics,* 11(4), pp. 467-502.

Gazette, T. K. ((2012) 'The Gorkhaland Territorial Administration Act, 2011. '. Available at: http://darjeeling.gov.in/notification/GTA_ACT.pdf.

Geiger, D. (2009) *Turner in the tropics: the frontier concept revisited.* Verlag nicht ermittelbar.

Gellner, D. N. (2013) *Borderland lives in northern South Asia.* Duke University Press.

Gergan, M. D. (2014) 'Precarity and possibility: On being young and Indigenous in Sikkim, India', *HIMALAYA, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies,* 34(2), pp. 10.

Gergan, M. D. (2016) *Precarity and Possibility at the Margins: Hazards, Infrastructure, and Indigenous Politics in Sikkim, India.*, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. .

Ghosh, A. (2009) 'Gorkhaland redux', *Economic and Political Weekly*, pp. 10-13.

Giddens, A. 1984. The constitution ofsociety. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Goodhand, J. (2018) 'The Centrality of Margins: The Political Economy of Conflict and Development in Borderlands', *Working Paper*.

Goodhand, J., Klem, B. and Walton, O. (2016) 'Mediating the margins: the role of brokers and the Eastern Provincial Council in Sri Lanka's post-war transition', *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal,* 1(6), pp. 817-836.

GoS, Department, E.a.P. (2016) *Status/Progress of Hydroelectric Projects, Gangtok*: Government of Sikkim.

Government of India, Ministry of Power (2008) *New Hydropower Policy.* New Delhi, India.

Government of West Bengal, Kolkata, K. (2010) *West Bengal State Action Plan on Climate Change*.

Griffith, A. I. (1998) 'Insider/outsider: Epistemological privilege and mothering work', *Human Studies,* 21(4), pp. 361-376.

Grumbine, R. E. and Pandit, M. K. (2013) 'Threats from India's Himalaya dams', *Science,* 339(6115), pp. 36-37.

Gupta, A. (1995) 'Blurred boundaries: the discourse of corruption, the culture of politics, and the imagined state', *American ethnologist,* 22(2), pp. 375-402.

Guy, S. (2011) 'The precariat', *The new dangerous class. London and NY: Bloomsbury Academic*.

Guyot-Réchard, B. (2013) 'Nation-building or state-making? India's North-East Frontier and the ambiguities of Nehruvian developmentalism, 1950–1959', *Contemporary South Asia,* 21(1), pp. 22-37.

Harris, T. (2013) 'Trading places: new economic geographies across Himalayan borderlands', *Political Geography,* 35, pp. 60-68.

Huber, A. (2019) 'Hydropower in the Himalayan Hazardscape: Strategic Ignorance and the Production of Unequal Risk', *Water,* 11(3), pp. 414.

Huber, A., Gorostiza, S., Kotsila, P., Beltrán, M. J. and Armiero, M. (2017) 'Beyond "socially constructed" disasters: Re-politicizing the debate on large dams through a political ecology of risk', *Capitalism Nature Socialism,* 28(3), pp. 48-68.

Huber, A. and Joshi, D. (2015) 'Hydropower, anti-politics, and the opening of new political spaces in the Eastern Himalayas', *World Development,* 76, pp. 13-25.

Hutt, M. (1998) 'Going to Mugalan: Nepali literary representations of migration to India and Bhutan', *South Asia Research,* 18(2), pp. 195-214.

Hutt, M. (2003) *Unbecoming citizens: Culture, nationhood, and the flight of refugees from Bhutan.* Oxford University Press New Delhi.

Hvalkof, S. (2008) 'Colonization and conflict on the Amazon frontier: dimensions of interethnic relations in the Peruvian Montana', *Frontier Encounters*: IWIGIA-International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, pp. 217-286.

IEA (2017) *Tracking Clean Energy Progress 2017.*, Paris: OECD/IEA: International Energy Agency. Available at:

www.iea.org/publications/freepublications/publication/TrackingCleanEnergyProgress2017.pdf (Accessed: 10.09.2018).

Indian Express (2011) *All fingers are crossed as they sign Darjeeling autonomy pact*. Available at: http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/all-fingers-are-crossed-as-they-sign-darjeeling-autonomy-pact/819304 (Accessed: 01.09.2019.

International Rivers (2015) *Mapithel Dam: An Inside Look*. Available at: https://www.internationalrivers.org/blogs/328-22 (Accessed: 10.10.19.

International Rivers (2016a) *Run-of-River Hydro: Green Energy or Greenwash?* Available at: https://www.internationalrivers.org/blogs/352-6 (Accessed: 12.10.19.

International Rivers (2016b) *Zero Rejection of Hydropower in India*. Available at: https://www.internationalrivers.org/blogs/328-27 (Accessed: 10.10.2019.

Isin, E. F. (2012) *Citizens without frontiers.* Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

Ives, J. (2004) *Himalayan perceptions: Environmental change and the well-being of mountain peoples.* Routledge.

Joshi, D. (2015) 'Like water for justice', *Geoforum,* 61, pp. 111-121.

Joshi, D. and Huber, A. (2013) 'Hydropower in Sikkum: Coercion and Emergent Socio-environmental Justice', *Water Conflicts in Northeast India. A Compendium of Case Studies*, pp. 102-110.

Joshi, D., Platteeuw, J., Singh, J. and Teoh, J. (2019) 'Watered down? Civil society organizations and hydropower development in the Darjeeling and Sikkim regions, Eastern Himalaya: A comparative study', *Climate Policy,* 19(sup1), pp. S63-S77.

Joy, K., Das, P. J., Chakraborty, G., Mahanta, C., Paranjape, S. and Vispute, S. (2017) *Water Conflicts in Northeast India.* Taylor & Francis.

Kaika, M. (2006) 'Dams as symbols of modernization: The urbanization of nature between geographical imagination and materiality', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers,* 96(2), pp. 276-301.

Karlsson, B. G. (2011) *Unruly hills: a political ecology of India's northeast.* Berghahn Books.

Karlsson, B. G. (2013) 'Evading the state: ethnicity in Northeast India through the lens of James Scott', *Asian ethnology,* 72(2), pp. 321-331.

Karlsson, B. G. (2016) 'Into the Grid: Hydropower and Subaltern Politics in Northeast India'.

Khagram, S. (2004) *Dams and development: Transnational struggles for water and power.* Cornell University Press.

Khawas, V. (2006) *Socio-Economic Conditions of Tea Garden Labourers in Darjeeling Hills.* Council for Social Development.

Khawas, V. (2009) 'The project of Gorkhaland', *Social Change,* 39(3), pp. 435-439.

Khawas, V. 'Status of tea garden labourers in eastern Himalaya: a case of Darjeeling tea industry'. *Mountain Forum*, 1-19.

Kipgen, N. (2017) 'The enclosures of colonization: Indigeneity, development, and the case of Mapithel dam in Northeast India', *Asian Ethnicity,* 18(4), pp. 505-521.

Kipgen, N. and Roy Chowdhury, A. (2016) ''Contested State-craft'on the Frontiers of the Indian Nation:'Hills–Valley Divide'and the Genealogy of Kuki Ethnic Nationalism in Manipur', *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism,* 16(2), pp. 283-303.

Kohli, K. (2011) 'Inducing vulnerabilities in a fragile landscape', *Economic and Political Weekly*, pp. 19-22.

Korf, B., Hagmann, T. and Doevenspeck, M. (2013) 'Geographies of violence and sovereignty: The African frontier revisited', *Violence on the Margins*: Springer, pp. 29-54.

Kothari, S. (1996) 'Whose nation? The displaced as victims of development', *Economic and Political Weekly*, pp. 1476-1485.

Lacina, B. (2009) 'The problem of political stability in Northeast India: Local ethnic autocracy and the rule of law', *Asian Survey,* 49(6), pp. 998-1020.

Le Billon, P. (2017) 'Resource Curse? Governmentality, Oil and Power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria', *The Geopolitics of Resource Wars*: Routledge, pp. 56-86.

Le Meur, P. Y. and Lund, C. (2001) 'Everyday governance of land in Africa', *Bulletin de l'APAD,* (22).

Leach, M. and Mearns, R. (1996) 'Environmental change and policy', *The Lie of the Land: Challenging Received Wisdom on the African Environment; Imperial College: London, UK*, pp. 440-475.

Li, T. M. (2010) 'To make live or let die? Rural dispossession and the protection of surplus populations', *Antipode,* 41, pp. 66-93.

Li, T. M. (2014) *Land's end: capitalist relations on an indigenous frontier.* Duke University Press.

Lindquist, J. (2015) 'Brokers and brokerage, anthropology of'.

Linton, J. and Budds, J. (2014) 'The hydrosocial cycle: Defining and mobilizing a relational-dialectical approach to water', *Geoforum,* 57, pp. 170-180.

Little, K. (2008) 'Lepcha narratives of their threatened sacred landscapes', *Transforming Cultures eJournal,* 3(1).

Lord, A. (2014) 'Making a 'hydropower nation': subjectivity, mobility, and work in the Nepalese hydroscape', *HIMALAYA, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies,* 34(2), pp. 13.

Lorey, I. (2015) *State of insecurity: Government of the precarious.* Verso Books.

Lund, C. and Rachman, N. F. (2016) 'Occupied! property, citizenship and peasant movements in Rural Java', *Development and Change,* 47(6), pp. 1316-1337.

Majumdar, A. (2016) 'The Colonial State and Resource Frontiers: Tracing the Politics of Appropriating Rubber in the Northeastern Frontier of British India, 1810–84', *Indian Historical Review,* 43(1), pp. 25-41.

Martinez-Alier, J. (2003) *The Environmentalism of the poor: a study of ecological conflicts and valuation.* Edward Elgar Publishing.

Martinez-Alier, J., Kallis, G., Veuthey, S., Walter, M. and Temper, L. (2010) 'Social metabolism, ecological distribution conflicts, and valuation languages', *Ecological Economics,* 70(2), pp. 153-158.

Massey, D. (1999) 'Space-time,'science'and the relationship between physical geography and human geography', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers,* 24(3), pp. 261-276.

Mathur, H. M. (1998) 'The impoverishment risk model and its use as a planning tool', *Development projects and impoverishment risks: resettling project-affected people in India.*, pp. 67-78.

Mathur, N. (2016) *Paper tiger.* Cambridge University Press.

Matthews, N. (2012) 'Water Grabbing in the Mekong Basin-An Analysis of the Winners and Losers of Thailand's Hydropower Development in Lao PDR', *Water Alternatives,* 5(2).

McCully, P. (1996) *Silenced rivers: The ecology and politics of large dams.* Zed Books.

McDowell, C. (1996) *Understanding impoverishment: The consequences of development-induced displacement.* Berghahn books.

McDuie-Ra, D. (2008) 'Between national security and ethno-nationalism: The regional politics of development in Northeast India', *Journal of South Asian Development,* 3(2), pp. 185-210.

McDuie-Ra, D. (2009) 'Fifty-year disturbance: the Armed Forces Special Powers Act and exceptionalism in a South Asian periphery', *Contemporary South Asia,* 17(3), pp. 255-270.

McDuie-Ra, D. (2011) 'The dilemmas of pro-development actors: viewing state–ethnic minority relations and intra-ethnic dynamics through contentious development projects', *Asian Ethnicity,* 12(1), pp. 77-100.

McNay, L. (2004) 'Agency and experience: Gender as a lived relation', *The Sociological Review,* 52(2_suppl), pp. 175-190.

Meehan, P. and Plonski, S. (2017) 'Brokering the margins: A review of concepts and methods'.

Mehta, L. (2007) 'Whose scarcity? Whose property? The case of water in western India', *Land use policy,* 24(4), pp. 654-663.

Menga, F. (2015) 'Building a nation through a dam: the case of Rogun in Tajikistan', *Nationalities Papers,* 43(3), pp. 479-494.

Menga, F. and Swyngedouw, E. (2018) *Water, Technology and the Nation-state.* Routledge.

Menon, M. 2019. Infrastructure development in the Northeast: Hydropower, natural resources, legal and institutional frameworks and compliance. Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung.

Menon, M. and Kohli, K. (2005) 'Large dams for hydropower in north east India', *A dossier, New Delhi: Kalpavriksh and South Asia Network of Dams Rivers and People*.

Menon, M., Vagholikar, N., Kohli, K. and Fernandes, A. (2003) 'Large Dams in the Northeast-A Bright Future?', *Ecologist Asia,* 11, pp. 3-8.

Merriam, S. B. (1998) *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education. Revised and Expanded from" Case Study Research in Education.".* ERIC.

Middleton, T. (2013) 'Anxious belongings: anxiety and the politics of belonging in subnationalist Darjeeling', *American Anthropologist,* 115(4), pp. 608-621.

Middleton, T. (2015) *The Demands of Recognition: State Anthropology and Ethnopolitics in Darjeeling.* Stanford University Press.

Middleton, T. (2018) 'Unwritten Histories: Difference, Capital, and the Darjeeling Exception', *Darjeeling Reconsidered*: Oxford University Press, pp. 27-53.

Middleton, T. and Shneiderman, S. (2018) 'Darjeeling Reconsidered: Histories, Politics', *Environments*, pp. 87-101.

Migdal, J. S. (2001) *State in society: Studying how states and societies transform and constitute one another.* Cambridge University Press.

Millar, K. M. (2017) 'Toward a critical politics of precarity', *Sociology Compass,* 11(6), pp. e12483.

Miller, J. and Glassner, B. (1997) 'The 'inside'and the 'outside': Finding realities in interviews', *Qualitative research*, pp. 99-112.

MoDONER, Region, M.o.D.o.N. (2008) *Northeastern Region Vision 2020.* New Delhi.

Mohanty, B. (2005) 'Displacement and rehabilitation of tribals', *Economic and political Weekly*, pp. 1318-1320.

Molle, F. (2007) 'Scales and power in river basin management: the Chao Phraya River in Thailand 1', *Geographical Journal,* 173(4), pp. 358-373.

Molle, F., Mollinga, P. P. and Wester, P. (2009) 'Hydraulic bureaucracies and the hydraulic mission: Flows of water, flows of power', *Water alternatives,* 2(3), pp. 328-349.

Mollinga, P. P. (2014) 'Canal irrigation and the hydrosocial cycle: The morphogenesis of contested water control in the Tungabhadra Left Bank Canal, South India', *Geoforum,* 57, pp. 192-204.

Moore, D., Dore, J. and Gyawali, D. (2010) 'The World Commission on Dams+ 10: Revisiting the Large Dam Controversy', *Water Alternatives,* 3(2).

Mukerjee, M. (2015) 'The Impending Dam Disaster in the Himalayan Mountains', *Scientific American*. Available at: https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-impending-dam-disaster-in-the-himalayas/ (Accessed 15.10.19).

Munck, R. (2013) 'The Precariat: a view from the South', *Third World Quarterly,* 34(5), pp. 747-762.

Mungpoo News (2016) *Darjeeling district administration demolished 13 houses - shops structures at 29th Mile Teesta*. Available at: https://www.mungpoo.org/2016/07/darjeeling-district-administration-demilished-houses-shops-29-mile-teesta.html (Accessed: 19.09.2018.

Mustafa, D. (2007) 'Social construction of hydropolitics: The geographical scales of water and security in the Indus Basin', *Geographical Review,* 97(4), pp. 484-501.

Nag, S. (2013) *Contesting marginality: Ethnicity, insurgency and subnationalism in North-East India.*

Nayak, A. K. (2013) 'Development, displacement and justice in India: Study of Hirakud Dam', *Social change,* 43(3), pp. 397-419.

Neilson, B. and Rossiter, N. (2008) 'Precarity as a political concept, or, Fordism as exception', *Theory, Culture & Society,* 25(7-8), pp. 51-72.

Nüsser, M. (2003) 'Political ecology of large dams: a critical review', *Petermanns Geographische Mitteilungen,* 147(1), pp. 20-27.

Oliver-Smith, A. (2009) *Development & dispossession: the crisis of forced displacement and resettlement.* School for Advanced Research Press.

Oliver-Smith, A. (2010) *Defying displacement: Grassroots resistance and the critique of development.* University of Texas Press.

Paasi, A. (2003) 'Region and place: regional identity in question', *Progress in human geography,* 27(4), pp. 475-485.

Palmer, M. A., Reidy Liermann, C. A., Nilsson, C., Flörke, M., Alcamo, J., Lake, P. S. and Bond, N. (2008) 'Climate change and the world's river basins: anticipating management options', *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment,* 6(2), pp. 81-89.

Pandit, M. K. and Grumbine, R. E. (2012) 'Potential effects of ongoing and proposed hydropower development on terrestrial biological diversity in the Indian Himalaya', *Conservation Biology,* 26(6), pp. 1061-1071.

Paret, M. and Gleeson, S. (2016) 'Precarity and agency through a migration lens', *Citizenship Studies,* 20(3-4), pp. 277-294.

Pathy, J. (1999) 'Tribe, region and nation in the context of the Indian State', *Sociological bulletin,* 48(1-2), pp. 97-111.

Pattnaik, B. K. (2013) 'Tribal resistance movements and the politics of development-induced displacement in contemporary Orissa', *Social Change,* 43(1), pp. 53-78.

Peet, R. and Hartwick, E. 2009. Theories of development: contentions, arguments. alternatives New York.

Peet, R., Robbins, P. and Watts, M. (2011) *Global political ecology.* London; New York: Routledge.

Peet, R. and Watts, M. (2004) *Liberation ecologies: environment, development and social movements.* Routledge.

Peluso, N. L. and Lund, C. (2011) 'New frontiers of land control: Introduction', *Journal of Peasant Studies,* 38(4), pp. 667-681.

Peluso, N. L. and Watts, M. (2001) *Violent environments.* Cornell University Press.

Petley, D. (2013) 'Landslides and Large Dams: There May be Trouble Ahead'. Available at: http://blogs.agu.org/landslideblog/2013/05/26/landslides-and-large-dams-there-may-be-trouble-ahead/.

Pigg, S. L. (1992) 'Investing social categories through place: Social representations and development in Nepal', *Comparative studies in society and history,* 34(3), pp. 491-513.

Piliavsky, A. (2014) *Patronage as politics in South Asia.* Cambridge University Press.

Pittock, J. (2010) 'Viewpoint-Better management of hydropower in an era of climate change', *Water Alternatives,* 3(2), pp. 444-452.

Poddar, P. and Prasad, A. (2009) *Gorkhas Imagined: Indra Bahadur Rai in Translation.* Mukti Prakashan.

Prasai, S. and Surie, M. D. (2013) 'Political economy analysis of the Teesta River Basin', *The Asia Foundation, New Delhi,* 37.

Punch, K. (2005) 'Introduction to social research: Qualitative and quantitative approaches (D. Bayrak, B. Aslan, & Z. Akyüz, Trans.)', *Ankara: Seçkin Publications*.

Rajendran, K., Rajendran, C., Thulasiraman, N., Andrews, R. and Sherpa, N. (2011) 'The 18 September 2011, North Sikkim earthquake', *Current Science*, pp. 1475-1479.

Rao, V. V. K. (2012) *Hydropower in the Northeast: Potential and harnessing analysis - A critique*: World Bank Available at: https://www.indiawaterportal.org/articles/hydropower-northeast-potential-and-harnessing-analysis-critique.

Rasmussen, M. B. and Lund, C. (2018) 'Reconfiguring Frontier Spaces: The territorialization of resource control', *World Development,* 101, pp. 388-399.

Rest, M. (2012) 'Generating power: debates on development around the Nepalese Arun-3 hydropower project', *Contemporary South Asia,* 20(1), pp. 105-117.

Riessman, C. K. (1993) *Narrative analysis.* Sage.

Rigg, J., Oven, K. J., Basyal, G. K. and Lamichhane, R. (2016) 'Between a rock and a hard place: Vulnerability and precarity in rural Nepal', *Geoforum,* 76, pp. 63-74.

Rivers, I. (2016) *Police Kill Two Anti-Dam Protesters in North India*. Available at: https://www.internationalrivers.org/blogs/433/police-kill-two-anti-dam-protesters-in-north-india (Accessed: 22.09.19.

Robbins, P. (2004) *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction (Critical Introductions to Geography).* Wiley-Blackwell.

Robbins, P. (2008) 'The state in political ecology: A postcard to political geography from the field', *The SAGE handbook of political geography*, pp. 205-218.

Robbins, P. (2011) *Political ecology: A critical introduction.* John Wiley & Sons.

Robson, C. (2002) 'Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers., 2nd edn.(Blackwell Publishing: Oxford, UK.)'.

Rose, G. (1997) 'Situating knowledges: positionality, reflexivities and other tactics', *Progress in human geography,* 21(3), pp. 305-320.

Roy, A. (1999) 'The greater common good'.

Rumbach, A. and Németh, J. (2018) 'Disaster risk creation in the Darjeeling Himalayas: Moving toward justice', *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space,* 1(3), pp. 340-362.

Sahni, A. (2002) 'Survey of conflicts & resolution in India's Northeast', *FAULTLINES-NEW DELHI-,* 12, pp. 39-112.

Saikia, S. (2014) '9/11 of India: a critical review on Armed Forces Special Power Act (Afspa), and Human Right Violation in North East India', *Journal of Social Welfare and Human Rights,* 2(1), pp. 265-279.

Samanta, A. K. (1996) *Gorkhaland: A study in ethnic separatism.* Khama Publishers.

Samanta, A. K. (2000) *Gorkhaland movement: a study in ethnic separatism.* APH Publishing.

Sarin, M., Singh, N. M., Sundar, N. and Bhogal, R. K. (2003) *Devolution as a threat to democratic decision-making in forestry?: Findings from three states in India.* Citeseer.

Sarkar, S. (2010) 'The land question and ethnicity in the Darjeeling Hills', *Journal of Rural Social Sciences,* 25(2).

Sarkar, S. (2012) 'Autonomy, self-rule and community in Darjeeling Hills: a review of Gorkhaland territorial administration (GTA)', *Available at SSRN 2038225.*

Sarkar, S. (2014) 'Tribal Detour in Darjeeling Hills', *Economic & Political Weekly,* 49(32), pp. 25.

Saxena, N. C. (1997) *The saga of participatory forest management in India.* CIFOR.

Scott, C. A., Zhang, F., Mukherji, A., Immerzeel, W., Mustafa, D. and Bharati, L. (2019) 'Water in the Hindu Kush Himalaya', *The Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment*: Springer, pp. 257-299.

Scott, J. C. (1998) *Seeing like a state: How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed.* Yale University Press.

Scott, J. C. (2006) 'High modernist social engineering: the case of the Tennessee Valley Authority', *Experiencing the state*, pp. 3-52.

Scott, J. C. (2010) *The art of not being governed: An anarchist history of upland Southeast Asia.* Nus Press.

Scudder, T. T. (2012) *The future of large dams: Dealing with social, environmental, institutional and political costs.* Routledge.

Sen, A. (1981) 'Ingredients of famine analysis: availability and entitlements', *The quarterly journal of economics,* 96(3), pp. 433-464.

Shah, E., Vos, J., Veldwisch, G. J., Boelens, R. and Duarte-Abadía, B. (2019) 'Environmental justice movements in globalising networks: a critical discussion on social resistance against large dams', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, pp. 1-25.

Sharma, A. and Gupta, A. (2009) *The anthropology of the state: a reader.* John Wiley & Sons.

Sharma, C. K. (2018) 'Dam,'Development'and Popular Resistance in Northeast India', *Sociological Bulletin,* 67(3), pp. 317-333.

Sharma, E., Chettri, N., Tse-Ring, K., Shrestha, A., Jing, F., Mool, P. and Eriksson, M. (2009) 'Climate change impacts and vulnerability in the Eastern Himalayas'.

Shimray, U. (2004) 'Socio-political unrest in the region called North-East India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, pp. 4637-4643.

Silverman, D. (2013) *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook.* SAGE publications limited.

Sivaramakrishnan, K. (1995) 'Situating the subaltern: History and anthropology in the subaltern studies project', *Journal of Historical Sociology,* 8(4), pp. 395-429.

Sivaramakrishnan, K. (1998) 'Comanaged forests in West Bengal: Historical perspectives on community and control', *Journal of Sustainable Forestry,* 7(3-4), pp. 23-51.

Sivaramakrishnan, K. and Agrawal, A. (2003) *Regional modernities: The cultural politics of development in India.* Stanford University Press.

Somayaji, S. 2008. Interrogating development: State, displacement and popular resistance in north east India (SAGE Studies on India's North East). JSTOR.

Somayaji, S. and Talwar, S. (2011) *Development–induced displacement, rehabilitation and resettlement in India: current issues and challenges.* Taylor & Francis.

Standing, G. (2012) 'The precariat: from denizens to citizens?', *Polity,* 44(4), pp. 588-608.

Stoler, L. A. (2013) 'Introduction: The Rot Remains', *Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruin and Ruination*, pp. 67-83.

Stott, P. A. and Sullivan, S. (2000) 'Political ecology: science, myth and power'.

Stovel, K. and Shaw, L. (2012) 'Brokerage', *Annual Review of Sociology,* 38, pp. 139-158.

Subba, T. B. (1992) *Ethnicity, state and development: A case study of Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling.*

Subrahmanyam, D. (2013) 'Status of electric power generation in India with special emphasis on hydropower expansion', *Int J Renew Energ Environ Eng,* 1, pp. 31-33.

Sultana, F. (2013) 'Water, technology, and development: transformations of development technonatures in changing waterscapes', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* 31(2), pp. 337-353.

Sunam, R. K. and McCarthy, J. F. (2016) 'Reconsidering the links between poverty, international labour migration, and agrarian change: critical insights from Nepal', *The Journal of Peasant Studies,* 43(1), pp. 39-63.

Suykens, B. (2013) 'State-Making and the Suspension of Law in India's Northeast: The Place of Exception in the Assam-Nagaland Border Dispute', *Violence on the Margins*: Springer, pp. 167-189.

Swyngedouw, E. (2003) 'Modernity and the Production of the Spanish Waterscape, 1890-1930', *Political ecology: An integrative approach to geography and environment-development studies*, pp. 94-112.

Swyngedouw, E. (2004) 'Scaled geographies: Nature, place, and the politics of scale', *Scale and geographic inquiry: Nature, society, and method*, pp. 129-153.

Swyngedouw, E. (2009) 'The political economy and political ecology of the hydro-social cycle', *Journal of contemporary water research & education,* 142(1), pp. 56-60.

Swyngedouw, E., Kaika, M. and Castro, E. (2002) 'Urban water: a political-ecology perspective', *Built Environment (1978-)*, pp. 124-137.

Tambe, S., Arrawatia, M., Bhutia, N. and Swaroop, B. (2011) 'Rapid, cost-effective and high resolution assessment of climate-related vulnerability of rural communities of Sikkim Himalaya, India', *Current Science*, pp. 165-173.

Tambe, S., Kharel, G., Arrawatia, M., Kulkarni, H., Mahamuni, K. and Ganeriwala, A. K. (2012) 'Reviving dying springs: climate change adaptation experiments from the Sikkim Himalaya', *Mountain Research and Development,* 32(1), pp. 62-73.

Tanka, B. S. 1992. Ethnicity, State and Development, A Case Study of Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling. Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi.

Truelove, Y. (2011) '(Re-) Conceptualizing water inequality in Delhi, India through a feminist political ecology framework', *Geoforum,* 42(2), pp. 143-152.

Tsing, A. L. (2003) 'Natural resources and capitalist frontiers', *Economic and Political Weekly*, pp. 5100-5106.

UNDP (2004) *"West Bengal Human Development Report." United Nations Development Project.* Available at: http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/national/asiathepacific/india/name,3275,en.html.

Vagholikar, N. and Das, P. J. (2010) 'Damming northeast India: juggernaut of hydropower projects theatens social and environmental security of region'.

Van Schendel, W. (2004) *The Bengal Borderland.* Anthem Press.

Vandenhelsken, M., Barkataki-Ruscheweyh, M. and Karlsson, B. G. (2017) *Geographies of Difference: Explorations in Northeast Indian Studies.* Taylor & Francis.

Vandenhelsken, M. and Karlsson, B. G. 2016. Fluid attachments in Northeast India: introduction. Taylor & Francis.

Vandergeest, P. and Peluso, N. L. (1995) 'Territorialization and state power in Thailand', *Theory and society*, pp. 385-426.

Waite, L. (2009) 'A place and space for a critical geography of precarity?', *Geography Compass,* 3(1), pp. 412-433.

Wangchuk, P. (2007) 'Lepchas and their Hydel protest', *Bulletin of tibetology,* 43(12), pp. 33-57.

Warner, C. (2014) 'Flighty Subjects: Sovereignty, Shifting Cultivators, and the State in Darjeeling, 1830-1856', *HIMALAYA, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies,* 34(1), pp. 8.

Watts, M. (2004) 'Resource curse? Governmentality, oil and power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria', *Geopolitics,* 9(1), pp. 50-80.

Watts, M. and Peet, R. (2004) 'Liberating political ecology', *Liberation ecologies: Environment, development, social movements,* 2, pp. 3-43.

Watts, M. J. (2017) 'Frontiers: authority, precarity and insurgency at the edge of the state', *L'Espace Politique. Revue en ligne de géographie politique et de géopolitique,* (32).

Watts, M. J. and Bohle, H. G. (1993) 'The space of vulnerability: the causal structure of hunger and famine', *Progress in human geography,* 17(1), pp. 43-67.

WCD (2000) *Dams and development: A new framework for decision-making: The report of the world commission on dams.* Earthscan.

Wenner, M. (2013) 'Challenging the state by reproducing its principles: the demand for" Gorkhaland" between regional autonomy and the national belonging', *Asian ethnology,* 72(2), pp. 199.

Wenner, M. (2015) 'Legitimization through patronage? Strategies for political control beyond ethno-regional claims in Darjeeling, India', *Geoforum,* 66, pp. 234-243.

Williams, P., Vira, B. and Chopra, D. (2011) 'Marginality, agency and power: experiencing the state in contemporary India', *Pacific affairs,* 84(1), pp. 7-23.

Witsoe, J. (2012) 'Everyday corruption and the political mediation of the Indian state: An ethnographic exploration of brokers in Bihar', *Economic and Political Weekly*, pp. 47-54.

World Bank (2007) *Water and the Environment Nexus for Development and Growth in Northeast India*. Available at: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTSAREGTOPWATRES/FeatureStories/20981161/2006-06-30NEEnvStudyStrategyReport.pdf.

Xaxa, V. (1985) 'Colonial capitalism and underdevelopment in North Bengal', *Economic and Political Weekly*, pp. 1659-1665.

Yin, R. K. (2014) 'Getting started: How to know whether and when to use the case study as a research method', *Case study research: Design and methods,* 5, pp. 2-25.

Zou, D. V. and Kumar, M. S. (2011) 'Mapping a colonial borderland: objectifying the geo-body of India's northeast', *The Journal of Asian Studies,* 70(1), pp. 141-170.

Appendices

Appendix 1 List of interviews

	Date	Place	Initials	Gender	Age	Livelihood
1	03.04.17	29 Mile	BC	F	35	Fast food stall
2	05.04.17	29 Mile	MS	F	62	Shop owner/ community leader
3	05.04.17	29 Mile	DP	M	65	labourer
4	11.04.17	29 Mile	CT	M	45	Shop owner
5	11.04.17	29 Mile	GP	M	70	Labourer
6	12.04.17	29 Mile	MT	M	45	Quarry contractor
7	15.04.17	29 Mile	RC	M	50	Shop owner
8	16.04.17	29 Mile	PBJ	F	70	Shop owner
9	23.04.17	Riyang	NL	M	50	GJM leader
10	04.05.17	Deorali	BBR	M	75	Labourer
11	06.05.17	Dong	RL	M	35	Contractor
12	16.04.17	29 Mile	SR	M	60	Quarry contractor
13	16.04.17	29 Mile	SP	M	45	Restaurant owner
14	20.04.17	29 Mile	HD	M	60	Tyre fixing shop
15	20.04.17	29 Mile	ML	M	55	Restaurant owner
16	22.04.17	29 Mile	GR	M	35	GJM party representative
17	22.04.17	29 Mile	BS	M	40	Shop owner
18	27.04.17	29 Mile	IBR	M	55	Government employee
19	27.04.17	29 Mile	PN	F	50	Labourer
20	28.04.17	29 Mile	KI	F	65	Labourer
21	29.04.17	29 Mile	AG	F	60	Labourer
22	01.05.17	Teesta Bazar	RB	M	40	River rafters president
23	01.05.17	Teesta Bazar	PP	M	50	Quarry contractor
24	03.05.17	Deorali	AR	M	50	Petty contractor
25	03.05.17	29 Mile	MD	M	50	Fast food stall
26	04.05.17	Deorali	BBL	M	70	Labourer
27	05.05.17	Deorali	SR	M	70	Retired army soldier
28	07.07.17	29 Mile	SS	F	40	Shopkeeper
29	09.05.17	Geilkhola	LG	M	40	Contractor
30	10.05.17	Geilkhoa	PB	F	70	Restaurant owner
31	10.05.17	Geilkhola	NR	F	70	Labourer
32	11.06.17	Deorali	PT	M	45	Community worker
33	11.06.17	Deorali	KR	M	47	Petty contractor

34	11.06.17	Deorali	MM	F	50	Labourer
35	11.06.17	Deorali	MR	F	50	Labourer
36	13.06.17	Deorali	RL	F	30	Labourer
37	13.06.17	Deorali	PR	M	30	Police constable
38	14.06.17	Deorali	SR	M	60	Former guard DGHC
39	20.07.17	29 Mile	MT	M	40	Shop owner
40	22.07.17	29 Mile	GR	M	70	Labourer
41	13.08.19	Teesta Bazar	MT	M	45	Driver, petty contractor and TMC party worker- highway president
42	03.09.17	Kalijhora	SB	M	50	Contractor
43	04.09.17	Kalijhora	SG	M	45	Contractor
44	05.09.17	Kalijhora	PM	M	35	Labourer
45	05.09.17	Kalijhora	NG	M	35	Petty contractor, teacher
46	07.09.17	Kalijhora	BP	F	50	sons working as contractors
47	10.09.17	Kalijhora	ST	M	35	NHPC vehicle driver
48	10.09.17	Kalijhora	PT	M	65	Former NHPC contractor
49	10.09.17	Kalijhora	NP	F	60	Labourer
50	12.09.17	Kalijhora	BT	F	30	Labourer
51	12.09.17	Kalijhora	RG	M	45	Petty contactor
52	13.09.17	Kalijhora	DT	F	60	Restaurant owner
53	17.09.17	Kalijhora	NT	F	60	Labourers (all family)
54	17.09.17	Kalijhora	BL	M	60	Contractor
55	18.09.17	Kalijhora	AG	M	40	Shop owner
56	18.09.17	Kalijhora	AG	M	45	School headmaster in Sevoke,
57	20.09.17	Kalijhora	RP	M	50	PWD and NHPC contractor
58	21.09.17	Kalijhora	BS	M	70	Former school headmaster
59	21.09.17	Kalijhora	BS	M	80	Retired PWD guard
60	21.09.17	Kalijhora	GC	M	45	NHPC contractor
61	22.09.17	Kalijhora	PL	F	60	Homemaker, husband truck driver
62	23.09.17	Kalijhora	AC	M	60	No job, son working in Dubai
63	23.09.17	Kalijhora	AP	M	45	PWD accountant
64	24.09.17	Kalijhora	BB	M	40	Cook at NHPC hostel
65	24.09.17	Kalijhora	JS	M	50	Contractor
66	24.09.17	Kalijhora	HC	M	55	PWD guard
67	01.11.17	Sevoke	TP	M	70	Former army officer
68	20.12.17	Najok	RR	M	30	Contractor
69	21.12.17	Najok	MR	F	40	Quarry worker
70	22.12.17	Najok	BL	M	50	Head teacher
71	23.12.17	Suruk	BB	M	60	Former GNLF leader/activist/ teacher
72	24.12.20	Dong	BR	M	30	Petty contractor

	Date	Place	Type of discussion	Group characteristics
1	25.03.17	29 Mile (Raigaon)	Group conversation (2 families)	Quarry labourers
2	30.03.17	Teesta Bazar	Group conversation (3 men; 40-45 years old)	Members of River Rafters Association,
3	01.04.17	29 Mile	Group conversation (2 men; 40-45 years old)	Shop owners
4	07.04.17	Deorali	Group conversation (2 men; 30 & 45 years old)	Wage labourers
5	19.04.17	Riyang	Group conversation (2 women; 30-34 years old)	Quarry labourers
6	01.05.17	Teesta Bazar	Group conversation (1 family; man, woman and daughter)	Former quarry labourers
7	09.05.17	Geilkhola	Group conversation (3 women; 50, 30 and 25)	Former quarry labourers
8	02.09.17	Kalijhora	Group meeting (4 men; 45 to 50 years old)	Contractors
9	07.09.17	Kalijhora	Group conversation (3 women; 35, 40, 50 years old)	Small business
10	09.09.17	Kalijhora	Group conversation (5 men; 30-55 years old)	Different livelihoods
11	20.12.17	Najok	Group conversation (2 men; 35-40 years old	Petty contractors
12	01.11.17	Sevoke	Group conversation (3 men; 50-65 years old)	Group conversation
13	21.12.17	Najok	Group conversation (3 elderly men; 70-75 years old)	Farmers
14	23.12.17	Suruk	Group conversation (2 men; 35 and 50 years old)	Petty contractors
15	24.12.17	Dong	Group conversation (2 men; 40 and 45 years old)	Teacher and contractor
16	24.12.17	Sep Khola	Group conversation (2 men 50 and 55 years)	Farmers
17	04.01.18	Karmatt	Meeting (5 men and 4 women)	Farmers
18	07.01.18	Panbu	Group meeting (3 women and 4 men)	Farmers
19	10.01.18	Kapur Busty/ Teesta Bazar	Group conversation (3 women and 2 men)	Rafting workers

Appendix 3: List of key informants and stakeholder interviews

	Date	Place	Designation, Organisation
1	08.02.17	Delhi	Coordinator, South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP)
2	27.02.17	Siliguri	Forest rights activist, North Eastern Society for the Preservation of Nature (NESPON)
3	18.03.17	Kalimpong	Member, Himalayan Forest Villagers Organisation (HVFO)
4	10.03.17	Darjeeling	Former reporter, Statesman, Siliguri
5	20.03.17	Siliguri	Professor in Economics, North Bengal University (NBU)
6	30.06.17	Darjeeling	District Forest Officer, Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA)
7	02.07.17	Darjeeling	State Government official, Forest Department
8	05.07.17	Darjeeling	Social worker and former GTA councillor
9	16.07.17	Gangtok	Local journalist, Darjeeling Times
10	18.07.17	Gangtok	PhD researcher on dams in Sikkim, Wageningen University
11	25.07.17	Legship	Former chief engineer, National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC)
12	28.07.17	Gangtok	President of Affected Citizens of Teesta, Sikkim
13	30.07.17	Gangtok	Assistant Professor in Geography, Sikkim University
14	31.07.17	Siliguri	Researcher dams in Darjeeling, North Bengal university (NBU)
15	10.12.17	Rambhi	Reporter with local news channel, ABN TV
16	12.08.17	Teesta Bazar	Dam activist, writer and teacher, politician Jana Andolan Party (JAP)
17	12.08.17	Teesta Bazar	Political Party (GJM) president of Teesta Gram panchayat
18	13.08.17	Teesta Bazar	Political party TMC representative
19	14.08.17	Teesta Bazar	CPRM Party president, Kalimpong district
20	16.08.17	Takdah	President of Himalayan Forest Villagers Organisation,
21	14.10.17	Mungpoo	Chief Engineer, TDLP III, NHPC
22	14.10.17	Mungpoo	Senior Engineer, TDLP III, NHPC
23	14.10.17	Mungpoo	Junior Engineer, TDLPIII, NHPC
24	15.10.17	Mungpoo	Director, Cinchona plantation
25	15.10.17	Mungpoo	Staff, Cinchona plantation
26	16.10.17	Mungoooo	Teacher, Higher secondary school.
27	16.10.17	Mungpoo	Former Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), Lok Sabha, politician Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) party
28	18.10.17	Kalijhora	Ranger, Forest department
29	19.10.17	Kalijhora	Senior Engineer, TDLP IV, NHPC

30	19.10.17	Kalijhora	Human resource manager, TDLP IV, NHPC
31	25.10.17	Kalimpong	Former Public Relations Officer, NHPC, Sikkim
32	25.10.17	Kalimpong	PWD Junior Engineer, Kalimpong
33	26.10.17	Kalimpong	President of NGO Centre for Mountain Dynamic (CMD), Politician Jana Andolan Party (JAP)
34	26.10.17	Kalimpong	Block development officer, Kalimpong
35	26.10.17	Kalimpong	Additional Deputy Magistrate, Kalimpong
36	27.10.17	Kalimpong	School Principal and GTA councillor/ poltician
37	30.10.17	Kalimpong	Former District Land reforms officer, Darjeeling
38	30.10.17	Kalimpong	GTA Engineer , Kalimpong Engineering Department (KED)
39	30.10.17	Kalimpong	Block Revenue officer
40	30.10.17	Kalimpong	Senior Land Revenue officer
41	02.11.17	Siliguri	Founder, Society for Promoting Participative Ecosystem Management (SOPPECOM), Pune
42	02.11.17	Siliguri	Anti-dam activist, Manipur
43	02.11.17	Siliguri	Anti-dam activist, Assam
44	04.11.17	Darjeeling	Former DGHC councillor
45	23.12.17	Suruk	Teacher, former GNLF leader
46	02.01.18	Kurseong	Government Official, Soil Department, Kurseon subdivision
47	02.01.18	Kurseong	Forest guard, Kurseong subdivsion
48	09.01.18	email	Geologist, Indian Institute of Technology Bombay.
49	07.02.18	phone	Engineer, Border Roads Organisation
50	11.02.18	Kalimpong	Founder, Save the Hills (STH)
51	15.02.18	Rambhi	Dam activist, Founder, Varnamala parivar (NGO)
52	16.02.18	Siliguri	Land Reforms official, Darjeeling
53	19.02.18	Darjeeling	Historian/ Academic, Governmnet College, Darjeeling.
54	20.02.18	Darjeeling	Former Principal Conservator of Forests, West Bengal
55	21.02.18	Darjeeling	Documentary filmmaker on Teesta dams
56	22.02.18	Darjeeling	Founder, NGO, DLR Prerna

Appendix 4 Question guides used for data collection

4A Question guide for key informant interviews and individual case studies within the community.

- How do you earn your living?

- What are your major problems to earn a living at present? How are you facing those problems? How was it in the past? Can you talk about your family, their lives and livelihoods?

- What do you think about the changes in the village after the dam construction? How was it before? How do you think the dam construction has impacted your life or livelihoods? Has it brought you any benefit- for example- contractual work, roads and schools etc.?

- Who benefitted the most/ less from the dam construction? What new opportunities have come up due to the project? Have economic disparities increased after the dam intervention?

- Can you guess any difficulties that you may face in the future? example landslides etc? What could be the consequences in your life if there is landslide and you lose your house? How would you do to protect yourself against such disasters? What are you doing now to be able to cope with possible risks tomorrow?

- What changes would you like in the village? Why? What would you not want to change? What do you do to improve your life and the life of your children?

- What is your biggest fear? What do you do to anticipate those possible difficulties? What could you do?

- How do you feel about not have rights to land? What do you think about forest villages? What are the benefits, policies and schemes? How helpful are these benefits? Do they provide a sense of security to your life and your dependants?

- Were you involved in quarry? Did it provide a significant source of income for your family? How has the dam impacted this livelihood? Have these issues been discussed with you when the project was being planned? Did you protest against the project? What did you do? What was the outcome? Did you receive compensation? Do you think you got a fair deal?

4B Semi- structured interview guide for external stakeholders

- What are your views on the hydropower projects along the Teesta River and the two projects in Darjeeling in particular?
- What is the level of their involvement of local administration in these projects and who are the other stakeholders in the project?
- Has your organisation/agency played a role in this particular project? What role? What have been the outcomes?
- What is the process of policy making, feasibility studies and clearance for these projects? What is the level of community involvement in these studies? Are local scientists and civil society consulted for these projects? Are there documents that I can refer to?
- How do you think the project has affected the local population? Employment, infrastructure, services etc.?
- How have these benefits been measured/ monitored?
- What do you think are the development challenges and priorities of Darjeeling?
- How do you think, the project has benefitted the development of the region?
- Do you think the terms and conditions are fair?

- What do they think of hydropower intervention in their village? Did this intervention policy occur with consultations with local people? If no, why? If yes comment on the process- the terms and conditions? Who are the actors involved and what are their strategies and objectives?

- What are the benefits and changes that the intervention has brought about in the study area and the community? Has the change been brought about by this development been mostly positive or negative? How has it impacted the environment, livelihoods and ways of life of the local community? How is it going to benefit/ harm in the long run?

- Have communities experienced loss of land/ life/ livelihoods because of the hydropower intervention? How have they coped with the situation? Has compensation made to affected households? Are there safeguards in place which ensure that local livelihoods are considered?

- Did people resist the projects? What was the outcome?

- What are the broad and specific positive impacts? Who are beneficiaries of the project within the communities? How have they benefitted? Why and how did they have access to these opportunities to benefit from the project?

- What are the issues of contestation between different social groups and actors?

- Who are the most vulnerable groups and people in the study area? What makes them vulnerable? Who benefits from their vulnerability?