



**School of Environment, Resources and Development
Regional and Rural Development Planning**

Special Lecture

On

**State-Formation and Democratization from Below': Movements against
Hydropower Projects in India, 1970-2004**

by: Dr. Arnab Roy Chowdhury

National University of Singapore

Abstract:

In this presentation, I compare the social history of movements against hydropower projects in two states of India, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, from 1970 to 2004. I argue that the subalterns (tribes, peasants, and farmers) played significant causal and constitutive roles in transforming the structure of the postcolonial Indian state into a more democratic one and, in that process, considerably changed their political discourses, practices, and strategies.

The two extended historical cases of movements against large dams in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh illustrate the emergence of different types of subaltern politics in postcolonial India and the achievement of two different kinds of successes.

Most large dams built in India are located in Maharashtra; consequently, it also has the longest history of resistance against large dams—in India and worldwide. Such movements are led by the groups Maharashtra Dharangrasta va Prakaalpgrasta Shetkari Parishad (MRDPSP; Maharashtra Dam-affected and Project-affected Farmers' Organisation) and Shramik Mukthi Dal (SMD; Toilers Liberation League). In the 1970s, these movements began to succeed in fulfilling their material demands, such as civic amenities and rehabilitation for the displaced and equal distribution of dam-impounded water. Their trajectory was strategically localised and oriented towards the politics of the sub-national state and, in 1976, the movements succeeded in negotiating with the state of Maharashtra to pass the first law for the rehabilitation of project-affected people. I claim that in interaction with the state, the 'provincials' (localisers), emerged here.

Whereas, Madhya Pradesh has the second-largest number of large dams in India, but here movements against dams emerged much later—in the 1980s. It was mainly the leadership of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save Narmada Movement) that mobilised the peasants and tribes here and generated support from many NGOs and a section of the Indian middle class. This movement failed to fulfil its material demands—largely, the Indian state ignored these demands—but it captured the 'global imagination', affected World Bank social and environmental policies, and were instrumental in the formation of the World Commission on Dams (WCD) in 1997. Therefore, their movement can be considered as an ideational success story. I claim that, in interaction with the state and the global civil society, the politics of the 'cosmopolitans' (globalisers) emerged here.

In this presentation, I highlight the similarities, differences, and achievements of these two kinds of politics of the marginalised, and demonstrate their democratic and transformative capabilities.

Date: Monday, 24 April 2017

Time: 14:00-16:00 hrs.

Venue: S101, SERD Meeting Room

All interested are welcome to the presentation

RRDP students are required to attend