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South Asian Dams at a Tipping Point? The Case of Tipaimukh Dam in Manipur, India

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ABSTRACT: While dam building has declined in most developed economies, it has seen an increase in emerging economies, particularly in East and South Asia. Even there, however, such dams are facing mounting opposition. This raises the prospect that dam building is nearing a global tipping point. In this study, we examine the case of the Tipaimukh Dam in Manipur, one of the states in India's peripheral northeast. We ask how such a major project was stopped despite support from powerful national- and regional-level actors. To analyse this case, we build on the Advocacy Coalition Framework and the analytical concepts of growth coalitions and discourse coalitions. The joint application of these concepts enables us to link global advocacy coalitions with local pro- and anti-growth coalitions through the storylines they advance, thereby formulating multiscale discourse coalitions. This allows us to follow the struggles between pro-dam and anti-dam coalitions, as well as trace the shifts in the composition and focus of coalitions over the 75 years since the Tipaimukh Dam was first proposed.

KEYWORDS: Water, emerging economies, discourse coalitions, storylines, Indigenous people, India

INTRODUCTION

Dams have been at the fulcrum of development in the 20th century. During its second half, about 45,000 large dams were built worldwide, three-quarters of which in developed countries (WCD, 2000). Dams are increasingly critiqued, however, due to the widespread negative externalities on fisheries, wildlife and riverine ecosystems (Graf, 2001), the displacement of populations, and the flooding of heritage sites and agricultural land (WCD, 2000; Huang et al., 2018).

At the same time as dam building was being wound down in developed countries, a new age of dam construction began in emerging economies. Today, the East and South Asian regions have the largest number of dams (Zarfl et al., 2015). Globally, China and India are the top dam builders as both countries increasingly exploit hydropower for economic development (Mulligan et al., 2020). In these emerging economies, dams have led to mass displacements (WCD, 2000), which has turned such sites into focal points for social conflicts (Baviskar, 1995; Wang et al., 2014).

The global shift in dam building from developed countries to emerging economies (Moran et al., 2018) can be viewed as a manifestation of the environmental Kuznets curve, which suggests an inverted-U-shaped relationship between economic growth and the state of the environment (Dinda, 2004). While dam building in developed countries has been largely blocked for environmental reasons, the issues facing dams in emerging economies are often social (that is, the displacement of local inhabitants; see

Sims, 2001), or cultural (that is, the effects on religious sites or on the livelihoods of local groups; see Del Bene et al., 2018). These issues have garnered increasing attention since the 1990s; they were prominent in major events such as the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and in the World Commission on Dams (WCD) Report which was published in 2000 (Goodland, 2010; Kirchherr, 2017). The WCD Report was largely rejected by Asian countries (Baghel and Nusser, 2010) but, even so, there is widespread opposition to large dams in Asia (Del Bene et al., 2018). This opposition to dams in developing countries can perhaps be viewed as the 'second closing of the frontier', that is, the closing of peripheral areas of these regions to projects that have substantial negative externalities. Such closures in developed countries have been attributed to the growing effectiveness of the opposition to development projects in peripheral areas (Feitelson, 1997). In developing regions as well, the successful closing of this frontier will depend on the effectiveness of the opposition to building such large dams in peripheral areas.

There are only a few cases in which dam-building projects have been suspended in emerging economies and developing countries. Most prominent among these are the scaling down of the proposed dams on the Nu/Salween River in China (Han et al., 2014), and the suspension of the Myitsone Dam construction project in Myanmar and the Kaeng Suea Ten Dam in Thailand (Kirchherr, 2018). Activists compelled influential donors (particularly the World Bank) to first reduce, and then later withdraw, project funding from the Narmada Dam in India and the Arum 3 Dam in Nepal; they also challenged the building of other dams such as the Pancheshwar Dam on the Mahakali River, which was advanced as part of the 1996 Mahakali Treaty between India and Nepal. With the increasing attention being given to the need to reduce greenhouse gases emissions, however, the World Bank has renewed the financing of dams (Del Bene et al., 2018).

Most of the studies analysing conflicts around dams in emerging economies focus on anti-dam movements (Kirchherr, 2018; Schapper et al., 2020); however, to fully understand how dams are stopped in peripheral areas in emerging economies, detailed analyses of all actors are needed. To this end, we analyse the shifting power relations regarding the suspension of the Tipaimukh Dam project. The proposed site of the dam was in Manipur, which is located in the country's marginalised northeastern region and is one of India's most peripheral states. Specifically, the research question we address is how such a policy change regarding a major dam occurred in the peripheral setting of Manipur?

At the theoretical level, policy change is increasingly explained through the application of coalition theories. Scholars have utilised the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) for analysing reversals of national policy around dams in several countries (Mertha and Lowry, 2006; Smith, 2009; Han et al., 2014). Other studies have focused on storylines and discourse coalitions to analyse conflicts over dams (Bingham, 2010; Atkins, 2019). In this paper, we explain the multiscale coalitions that are involved in dam controversies. We do so by building on the global ACF modernist and environmentalist dam coalitions (Heinmiller, 2013) and on local pro- and anti-dam growth coalitions; this is a concept which has thus far been applied mainly in the urban context (Wu et al., 2019). These global and local coalitions are bridged by the storylines they espouse, and in that way they form multiscale discourse coalitions; this concept allows us to comprehensively explain the interactions between various actors around dam projects and the narratives they adopt to support their stance on these projects.

In the next section, we very briefly review the shift in dam building; we then outline the ACF and the related concepts of growth coalitions and discourse coalitions. This is followed by a description of the Tipaimukh case, after which the research method is outlined. The analysis of the Tipaimukh Dam controversy is then presented, focusing on the pro- and anti-dam coalitions. Finally, we present a discussion in which the storylines that advanced and opposed the dam are explicated; we conclude by offering some general insights from the case study.

SHIFTS IN DAM BUILDING: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Dams have been closely associated with development (Biswas and Tortajada, 2001). From the mid-1800s to the 1970s and 1980s, developed countries increasingly regulated rivers to serve various purposes (Smith et al., 2014). Developed countries built numerous dams on most major rivers, which provided power generation, flood control, water supply, irrigation, and recreational opportunities (Bednarek, 2001).

Dams, however, have been increasingly criticised for their large-scale negative effects on riverine ecosystems (Nilsson et al., 2005). Recognition of these externalities has led to the advent of river restoration policies, one facet of which is the removal of dams (Foley et al., 2017). Since 1975, the construction of large dams has dwindled in developed countries, with the exception of Japan and Spain, where large dams continued to be built post-1975 (Biswas and Tortajada, 2001).

As dam building largely ceased in developed countries, a new era of dam building began in developing countries (Zarfl et al., 2015). Initially, they built large dams as part of the hydraulic mission in the process of nation building; these included projects such as the Aswan High Dam in Egypt, the Bhakra Dam in India, the Akosombo Dam in Ghana, and the Kariba Dam in Zambia (Bromber et al., 2014). Today, developing countries build dams mainly for energy security and economic growth (Matthews, 2012), supported by calls for reductions in greenhouse gases emissions. Many of these dams are being built in ecologically sensitive and ethnically diverse regions which are inhabited by Indigenous people (Huber and Joshi, 2015); ecological concerns and questions of social displacement are thus raised by such projects (Katus et al., 2016; Moran et al., 2018).

Among emerging economies, the largest numbers of dam-induced displacements have been in China and India. Since Independence in 1947, India had built 5,701 large dams (Mathew, 2017), displacing around 40 million people (Baviskar, 1995; Bisht, 2009). In both India and China, as well as in other emerging economies, there is widespread opposition to dams (Del Bene et al., 2018) on environmental, economic and social displacement grounds (Joy et al., 2018; Kirchherr, 2018; Schapper et al., 2020). Widespread opposition, for example, can be seen in the cases of the Hirakud, Narmada, Three Gorges, Ilisu, and Belo Monte Dams (Klein, 2015; Hommes et al., 2016; Wilmsen and Webber, 2017; Shah et al., 2019). Del Bene et al. (2018) analyse 220 dam-related conflicts, based on data retrieved from the Global Atlas of Environmental Justice (EJAtlas). They note that, despite opposition, most of the dams have been, or are being, built. A few dams have been rejected, or have at least been blocked even if not scrapped; these include, as noted above, the Nu River Dam in China and the Myitsone Dam in Myanmar (Kirchherr, 2018), as well as the dam proposed for the Kunthipuzha River in Kerala, which was opposed by the Silent Valley movement (although there is now a proposal to build the Pathrakadavu Dam just outside Silent Valley National Park).

MAIN ANALYTICAL CONCEPTS

To explain the shifts in attitudes towards dam construction, we build on the ACF and two interlinked analytical concepts: growth coalitions and discourse coalitions. From an advocacy coalition perspective, as advanced by Sabatier (1988), Heinmiller (2013) identifies two coalitions that hold different policy beliefs with regard to dams: a modernist coalition and an environmental coalition. Concurrent with this contestation, evident on a global scale (see, for example, Graf, 1999; Wilmsen and Webber, 2017; Moran et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2019), there is also a local-level struggle between pro-growth coalitions (who seek to enhance exchange values) and anti-growth coalitions (who want to maintain existing use values) (Logan and Molotch, 1987). Local and global coalitions are linked through storylines that cut across the different scales. These coalitions are then able to merge to form dam-related discourse coalitions, as termed by Hajer (1995).

From an ACF perspective, dams can be viewed as a policy subsystem in which different coalitions, distinguished by their beliefs, struggle for dominance (Sabatier, 1988). In essence, an advocacy coalition is a coalition of actors who share policy beliefs (Weible and Nohrstedt, 2012). These beliefs can be categorised hierarchically as deep core beliefs (normative assumptions), policy core beliefs (policy issues), and secondary beliefs (rules and budgetary applications). Deep core and policy core beliefs are very difficult to change, while secondary beliefs are more easily modified (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). Policy changes are thus largely an outcome of external perturbations or impositions from a higher echelon, though Pierce et al. (2020) in a meta-study of policy changes utilising the ACF identify also policy learning and negotiations as pathways for change.

As mentioned above, Heinmiller (2013) identifies the modernist coalition and the environmental coalition as the two major advocacy coalitions on dams. Modernist coalitions advance dam projects, arguing that dams are conducive to economic development, nation building, flood control (Graf, 1999) and, more recently, clean energy that can reduce greenhouse gases emissions (Moran et al., 2018). They argue for hydropower as supporting economic growth through the provision of clean, reliable and affordable energy (Cole et al., 2014), which is the only real alternative to fossil fuels (Fletcher, 2010).

With the rise of global environmental advocacies, the perception of dams has changed (Klein, 2015; Hommes et al., 2016; Wilmsen and Webber, 2017; Shah et al., 2019). In essence, the environmental coalition emphasises the negative externalities of dams on riverine ecosystems (Sims, 2001). The World Commission on Dams Policy Framework has helped strengthen anti-dam lobbies, as environmental coalitions use it as a tool to raise their concerns on global platforms (Sneddon and Fox, 2008). The scope of these coalitions has widened as dams raise human rights concerns stemming from the displacement of Indigenous people and the consequent effects on their livelihoods and culture (Baviskar, 1995; Khagram, 2004); the local issue of social displacement has thus been turned into a global concern (Sims, 2001). In the past 25 years, anti-dam coalitions have arisen in Turkey, Brazil, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Nepal and Malaysia (Rothman and Oliver, 1999; Evren, 2014; Yasuda, 2015; Hommes et al., 2016; Kirchherr, 2018; Tur et al., 2018). The adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has also strengthened ongoing anti-dam campaigns for Indigenous peoples' rights. Taking advantage of this, environmental coalitions have used legal mechanisms such as the principle of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) to oppose dams, though with varying degrees of success (Delina, 2020). Despite this opposition, developing countries, and especially emerging economies, are increasingly relying on hydro resources (Moran et al., 2018).

Concurrent with the global contestation of dams, there have been local struggles over dams between pro-growth and anti-growth coalitions. The Growth Coalition Theory (GCT) advanced by Logan and Molotch (1987) addressed city politics in the USA. Here we extend this theory to the context of dams in emerging economies in order to examine the local struggles taking place around specific dam sites.

GCT considers cities as growth machines wherein growth coalitions are comprised of actors who seek to gain from the city's economic growth and strive to enhance the exchange value of land. They are often opposed by anti-growth coalitions that seek to enhance use values – the utility obtained from using a resource – over exchange values (Logan and Molotch, 1987). In our context, growth coalitions strive to enhance exchange values as they seek to kick start or increase local development, thereby raising land values and attracting new, often external, businesses. They are opposed by actors who seek to protect the customary rights and livelihoods of Indigenous people, in the process forming anti-growth coalitions. Use values can explain the relationship between anti-growth coalitions and natural resources (water and land), as Indigenous communities in developing and emerging economies often associate natural resources with their cultural and spiritual beliefs and well-being (Mukul et al., 2012; Cox et al., 2014; Kandari et al., 2014). Such groups also often depend on natural resources for their livelihood. As the construction of dams adversely affects their livelihood patterns, they may launch a bottom-up struggle against the dams in order to protect their use values (Del Bene et al., 2018). Thus, while growth coalitions are formed largely by those who stand to gain from the revenues that may arise from the construction

of dams (industrialists, large-scale farmers, commercial landowners and, in some cases, local governments), the anti-growth coalitions focus mostly on maintaining the lifestyle of local (often Indigenous) peoples. In this sense, the anti-growth coalitions we expect to find in dam controversies in emerging economies are different from the anti-growth coalitions in developed countries, where such coalitions are often led by environmentally concerned, high-income, well-educated residents (Vogel and Swanson, 1989).

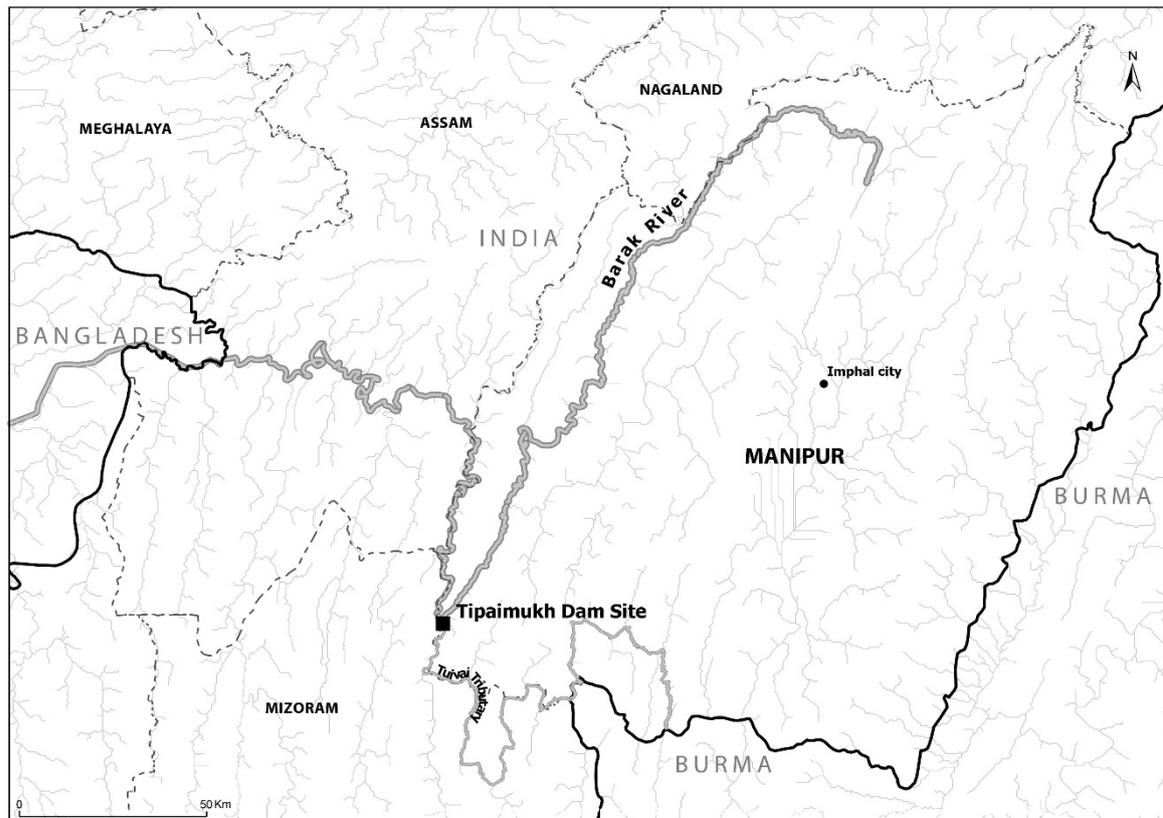
At the global level, the shift in dam building is viewed in the context of a long-standing struggle between modernist and environmental coalitions, while at the local level struggles ensue between pro- and anti-growth coalitions; however, the global and local scales are not independent of each other, but rather are bridged by storylines. These can be explained by Hajer's (1995: 44) Discourse Coalition Framework, in which discourse is defined as "a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorisations that are produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities". Hajer (ibid: 56) defines storylines as "the means through which different elements of physical and social realities are united into specific, closed problems and given meaning". They can create political change through the re-ordering of meaning (Thompson and Rayner, 1998). Storylines that lead to similar conclusions can form the base of discourse coalitions; these coalitions can then unite local and global actors in their struggle to promote or oppose dams.

In the discussion of advocacy and growth coalitions, four different storylines on dams can be identified: nation building, economic development, environmental concerns, and social issues. The nation-building storyline is identified by McCully (2001), based on examples from various regions including both colonialist countries, and colonised countries in the post-colonisation phase; this storyline considers dams to be a symbol of national identity and pride. The economic development storyline, identified by authors such as Klingensmith (2007), regards dams as a basis for economic growth, as is evident, for example, in the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) experience. This experience and its underlying rationale were later applied to various large-scale projects, such as the Belo Monte Dam in Brazil (Bingham, 2010). These are the storylines of modernist and growth coalitions of dams, that is, the coalitions that advance dam proposals and can thus be viewed as pro-dam discourse coalitions. The environmental storyline, on the other hand, is identified by authors such as Nilsson et al. (2005), Atkins (2018), and Tur et al. (2018). It is based on case studies from across the globe and focuses on the environmental externalities of dams. The social storyline, identified mainly around dam-building projects in emerging economies such as India (Baviskar, 1995) and Brazil (Atkins, 2017), stresses the social costs of dams, particularly displacement and adverse effects on local culture and livelihood. Together, the environmental and social storylines lead the global opposition to dams, and thus can be viewed as an anti-dam discourse coalition. This paper focuses on these storylines and the extent to which they indeed bridge the scales at which dams are discussed and fought over. To this end, we examine the multiscale formation and modifications of different coalitions and their associated storylines with regard to the Tipaimukh Dam in India, a case that may shed light on similar processes occurring elsewhere in South Asia.

THE TIPAIMUKH DAM PROJECT

The Tipaimukh Dam site is located at the confluence of the Barak River and the Tuivai tributary in Manipur (Figure 1). The Government of India is increasingly exploiting natural resources in the hilly regions of this conflict-ridden state, thereby aggravating the local struggles of various ethnic groups for the protection of natural resources (Joy et al., 2018). In this context, the Tipaimukh Dam is a highly controversial project which dates back to the colonial period.

Figure 1. Tipaimukh Dam site and the surrounding region.



Source: United States Geological Survey.

The Tipaimukh Dam was one of the Government of India's most ambitious projects in the northeastern region. This is an area with a hydro potential of about 58,971 megawatts (MW), which accounts for roughly 40 percent of the country's total hydro potential (NEEPCO, 2019); the region is thus considered to be the future powerhouse of the country (Menon and Kohli, 2005). To this end, many dam projects have been advanced in this region (Dukpa et al., 2018), of which the Tipaimukh Dam is one (Joy et al., 2018). It was planned as a multipurpose hydroelectric project with an installed capacity of 1500 MW and additional components for flood control (AFCL, 2004).

The Barak River is imbued with the diverse cultural heritage of local Indigenous communities (Arora and Kipgen, 2012). Once the Tipaimukh Dam was built, the Indigenous Zeliangrong and Hmar peoples would have been displaced and their livelihood patterns lost or severely altered. The Tipaimukh Dam would have permanently submerged an area of 276 square kilometres (km²); it was expected to have negative impacts over an area of 9126 km² in the state of Manipur alone and to negatively affect 2027 villages (Singh, 2018). The submerged area is home to many endangered species, forest reserves and wildlife sanctuaries (AFCL, 2004). The Tipaimukh Dam site is also located in an area that is highly prone to earthquakes (Ranjan, 2003), an issue that is often overlooked (Huber, 2019).

RESEARCH METHOD

The Tipaimukh Dam is a case where a large-scale dam was rejected in a peripheral area of an emerging economy. This case thus provides insights regarding a possible policy reversal on large-dam building, which so far has only rarely occurred in emerging economies. At the core of this study is the analysis of key actors within coalitions and the linkages between these coalitions and shifting power relations. In

order to analyse the Tipaimukh case using the ACF and the concepts of growth coalitions and discourse coalitions, we focus on several parameters in the evolution of the conflict: 1) the actors and the level at which they operate, 2) the shifts in the arenas in which the conflict is played out, and 3) the argumentation put forward by the different actors. This third parameter is used to identify the storylines and the discourse coalitions they unite.

The study is based on both primary and secondary sources. A 70-day field research was undertaken in Manipur by the first author; in the course of this research, 23 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted, along with personal communications with key actors. The interviewees included representatives of the Tipaimukh Dam project authority, engineers, administrators, politicians, local civil societies and anti-dam activists from Indigenous communities. A snowball technique was utilised whereby respondents recommended other potential interviewees. Most of the interviews were recorded, but in cases where this was not possible they were written down in field notes. Some interviews were translated from local languages into English by the first author. The respondents' views were identified only by numbers in order to protect their anonymity. In addition, secondary sources such as government documents, memorandums and newsletters of civil societies were collected from local government agencies, dam proponents, Indigenous civil societies and academics. The first author also attended a workshop of a pro-dam coalition on hydro potential in Manipur. The full list of interviewees is detailed in Appendix 1.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE TIPAIMUKH DAM CONTROVERSY

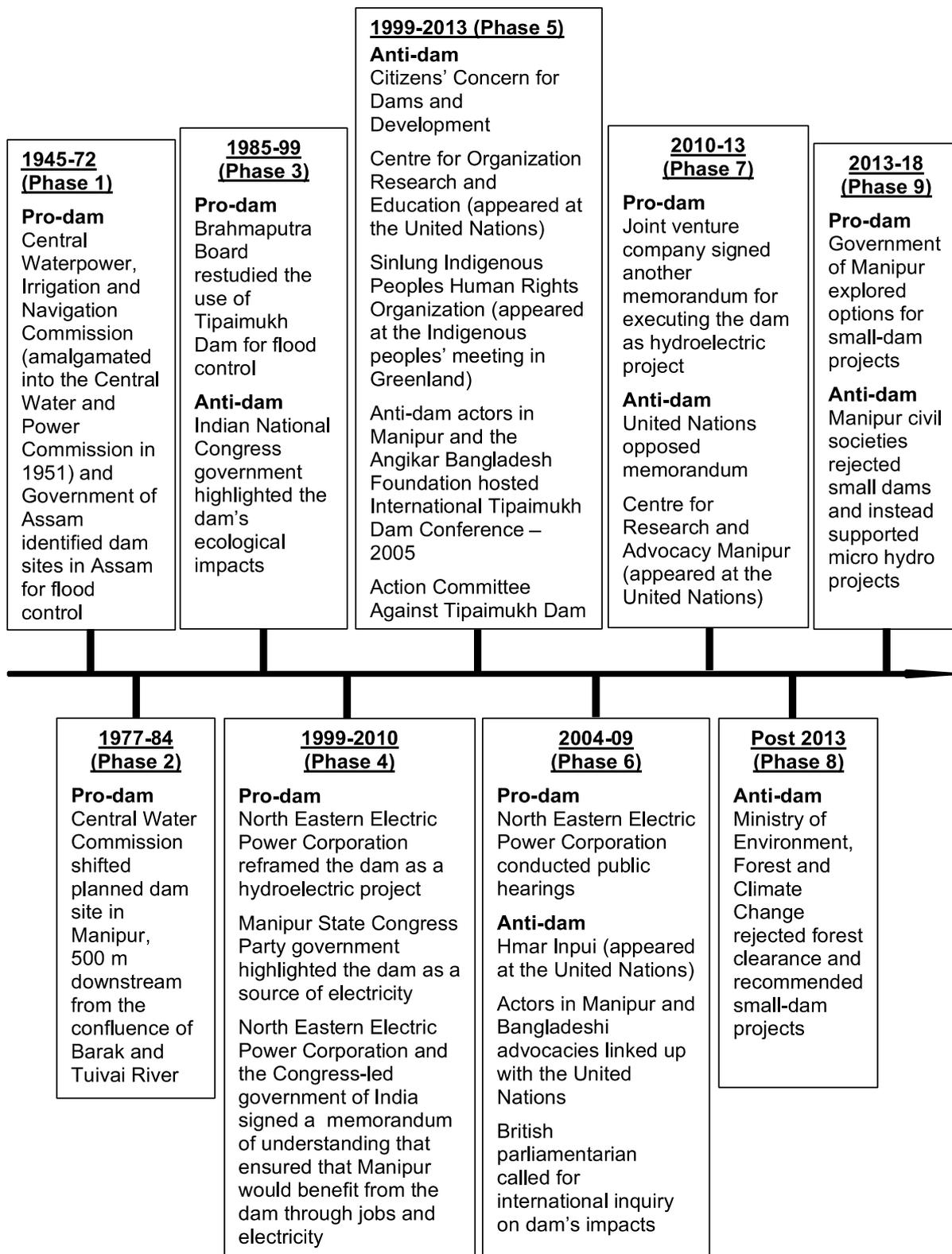
For over 70 years, the Tipaimukh Dam has been discussed by various actors in different forums. Figure 2 outlines the evolution of the conflicts over the Tipaimukh Dam, as well as the actors involved and the stance they took. First, the activities over time of the pro-dam actors are detailed; this is followed by a discussion of the emergence and perturbations of anti-dam coalitions and the conclusion of the struggle.

Pro-dam actors and coalitions

The first proposal to build a dam on the Barak River was advanced during the colonial era. In the first half of the 1900s, periodic flooding of the Barak River was having wide-ranging downstream effects, mainly in Assam. The Government of Assam therefore requested the Central Waterpower, Irrigation and Navigation Commission (CWINC), a national agency established in 1945 for planning multipurpose river projects, to take steps to reduce flooding. After India's Independence in 1947, the CWINC identified several possible storage schemes on the Barak River (Constituent Assembly of India, 1948; Parliamentary Debates, 1954a, 1954b, 1954c; Parliamentary Debates, 1955; CWC, 2018; Respondents 1 and 2, 2018). In 1951, the CWINC and the Central Electricity Commission were amalgamated into the Central Water and Power Commission (CWPC) under the Ministry of Irrigation and Power. The aim was to improve coordination between the irrigation and power sectors. The CWPC identified three possible dam sites in Assam, but these were rejected due to geological considerations or to their required submergence of fertile lands in Manipur (Phase 1 in Figure 2) (Lok Sabha Debates, 1962, 1966, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1973; CWC, 2018).

In 1974, as part of wider national-level structural change, the CWPC was divided into the Central Water Commission (CWC) and the Central Electrical Authority. In 1984, the CWC identified a new site in Tipaimukh (Phase 2 in Figure 2) and handed over the project to the Brahmaputra Board for implementation (Phase 3 in Figure 2) (Respondent 2, 2018). The Board was an autonomous statutory body of the Ministry of Water Resources, and was in charge of flood control in the Barak and Brahmaputra valleys. The Board gave precedence to flood control in Assam (Respondent 2, 2018), but added a 1500 MW hydropower element to the proposed dam. This proposal was opposed by the Government of Manipur due to the priority given to downstream flood control, the perceived limited benefits to Manipur, and the possibility that the Imphal Valley in Manipur might be submerged (Respondent 1, 2018).

Figure 2. Evolution of the coalitions’ conflicts over the Tipaimukh Dam, and the main actors involved.



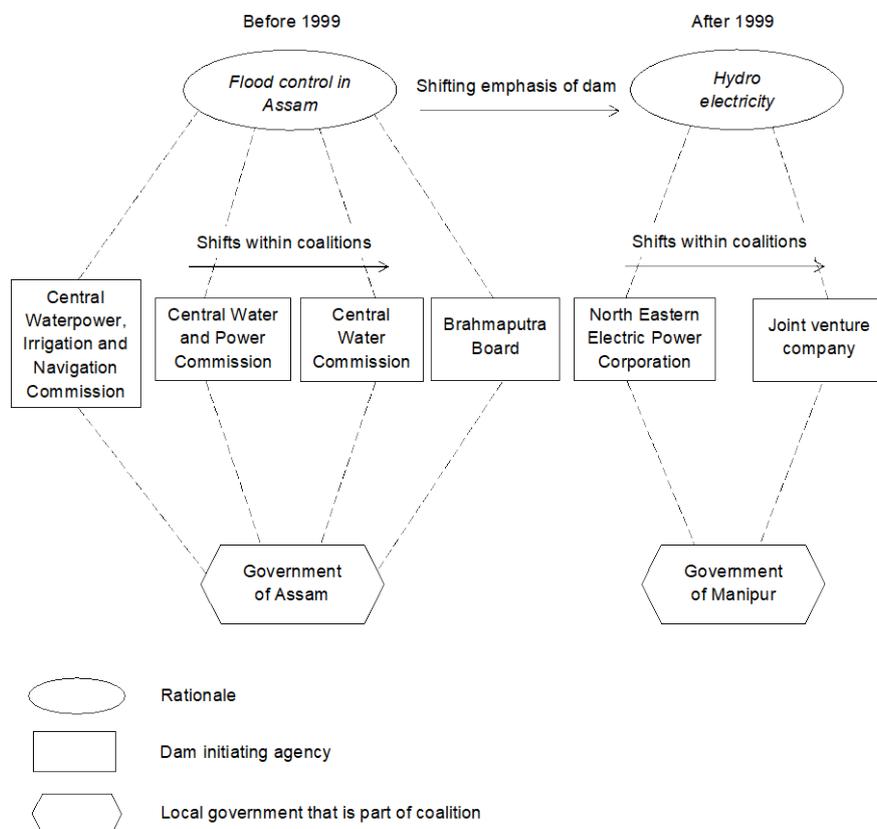
Source: Authors' compilation.

In 1995, the Indian National Congress (INC) Party formed a new coalition government in Manipur. Despite the political and ideological similarities between the Manipur INC party and the national-level INC party, and the support to build the dam from the INC-led Central Government, the INC-led Manipur government opposed the Tipaimukh Dam. The Government of Manipur urged the Central Government not to build the dam and thereafter passed a resolution against the dam; it did so on grounds of displacement of people, high seismic activity, and the submergence of unique flora and fauna (Phase 3 in Figure 2) (CCDD, 1999a).

In 1999 a new coalition government in Manipur rekindled interest in the Tipaimukh Dam as a hydropower project, putting forward a reworked plan which reduced the extent of submerged land and ensured that Manipur would obtain direct benefits. In tandem, the North Eastern Electric Power Corporation (NEEPCO), a regional power generation company, was given responsibility for the Tipaimukh hydroelectric project. It stated that Manipur would get electric power free of charge as well as employment benefits from the project (Ministry of Power, 1999, 2000; Respondents 1 and 2, 2018). The shift in the framing of the Tipaimukh Dam and the composition of the new Manipur government led the state to change its position and support the dam (Phase 4 in Figure 2). This change in the Government of Manipur’s stance led to the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the government and NEEPCO in 2003; in the MOU, NEEPCO agreed to provide 12% of the total 1500 MW produced by the Tipaimukh Dam to Manipur free of charge, to provide jobs to the people affected by the dam, and to develop the Barak Waterfall as a tourist resort.

The shifts in composition of the pro-dam coalitions are shown in Figure 3. The top part of the figure notes the driving rationale, the central part details the agencies that advanced the dams, and the bottom part displays the state-level governments that were part of these coalitions.

Figure 3. Shifts in pro-dam coalition structures.

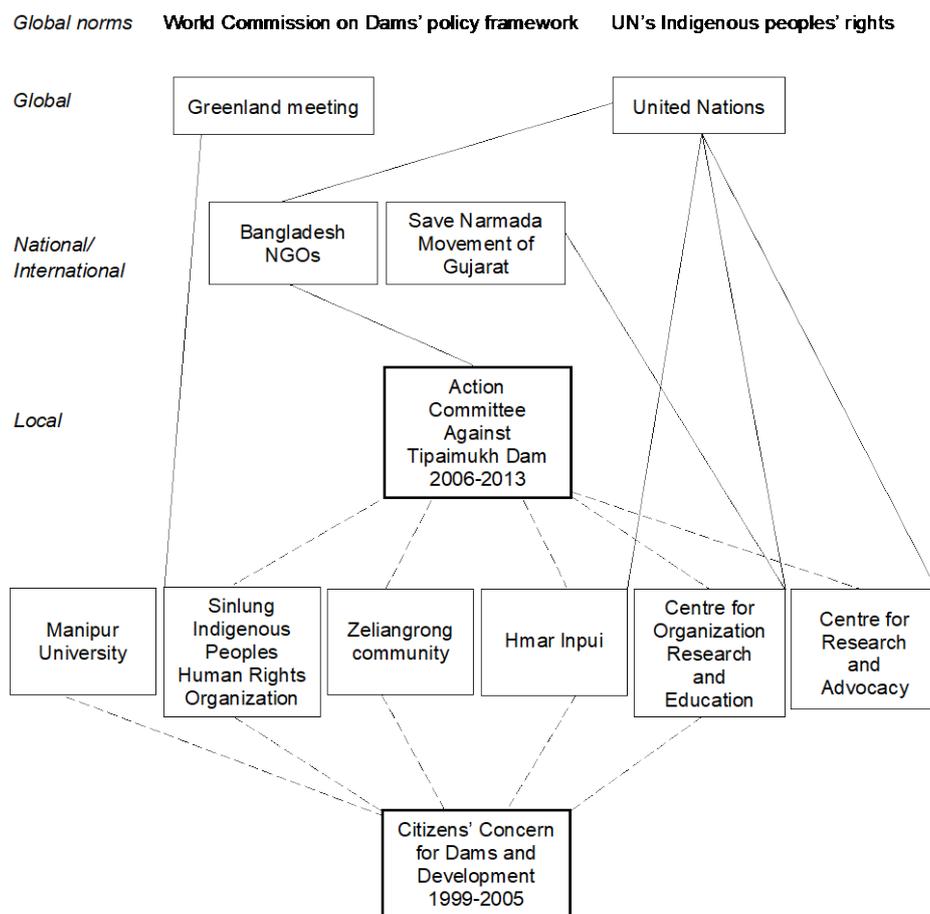


Source: Authors’ compilation.

Escalating conflicts over Tipaimukh Dam: The emergence of anti-dam coalitions

Since the early 1990s, the national government’s intention to build the Tipaimukh Dam had been raising concerns among locals in Manipur, mainly academics, environmental activists, community leaders and Indigenous people (Respondent 3, 2018). As a result, in 1999 an anti-dam organisation called the Citizens’ Concern for Dams and Development (CCDD) was formed (Phase 5 in Figure 2). This coalition comprised over 40 civil society organisations, including the Manipur-based Centre for Organization Research and Education (CORE), academics affiliated with Manipur University, Indigenous groups of the Hmar Inpui and the Zeliangrong communities, and the Sinlung Indigenous Peoples Human Rights Organisation (SIPHRO) (Respondent 4, 2018). The coalition asserted the local right to natural resources, development and cultural heritage, and sought to empower Indigenous people in the decision-making process (CCDD, 1999b). The coalition conducted an assessment of the environmental and social impacts of the Tipaimukh Dam, utilising the expertise of academics from Manipur University (CCDD, 1999a; Respondent 3, 2018). Its oppositional stance then widened to include its environmental implications, as well as the seismicity of the proposed dam site (Respondents 5, 6 and 7, 2018). From its inception, the coalition launched a variety of forms of protest, demanding that the Government of Manipur oppose the dam (CCDD, 1999c). In Figure 4, we depict the anti-dam actors within the CCDD and within the Action Committee against Tipaimukh Project (ACTIP), a coalition which was formed after the dissipation of the CCDD. The figure also shows their scale of operations; that is, each actor is connected by dashed lines to the coalitions of which it was part (the CCDD and/or ACTIP) and by solid lines to supralocal venues or actors.

Figure 4. Anti-dam coalitions.



Source: Authors’ compilation.

The logic underlying the MOU between the Manipur government and NEEPCO was rejected by the CCDD as a flagrant violation of Indigenous peoples' rights (CCDD, 2003). Both the Hmar and Zeliangrong Indigenous communities argued that the dam would destroy their livelihoods and cultural identity (Respondents 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14, 2018), as the confluence of the Barak and Tuivai Rivers is the holiest place of these tribes (Respondents 10 and 11, 2018). They further stated that, "[t]he submergence of the Ahu [Barak] waterfalls [through the construction of the Tipaimukh Dam], the biggest and most beautiful natural gift of God in Manipur, will destroy the important aspect of the heritage (...), the innumerable myths and legends woven around the Ahu waterfalls (...), which are an inalienable part of the memories (...)" (Naga Women's Union, 2001: 4). The MOU thus led local communities to intensify their anti-Tipaimukh campaign against NEEPCO in order to protect their cultural identity on the Barak River.

Opposition, however, was not limited to Manipur. The Centre for Organization Research and Education (CORE) was active at the national level. This was a civil society body working for Indigenous peoples' rights, which comprised of well-educated individuals with wide-ranging connections. CORE linked the anti-Tipaimukh campaign to the Save Narmada Movement in Gujarat, enabling mutual support between the two movements. The Save Narmada Movement initially emerged to protest against the Narmada Dam's detrimental effects on Indigenous peoples' rights. Its success motivated other local anti-dam struggles across the country, including that surrounding the Tipaimukh Dam. Through engaging in joint protests and advocacy that were coordinated by the leaders of the movements, the Save Narmada Movement supported CORE's campaign to protect Indigenous peoples' rights (Nayak, 2015; Respondents 4 and 12, 2018). As CORE has special consultative relations with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations, they raised the Tipaimukh Dam case at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (Phase 5 in Figure 2) and exchanged information with the WCD's members. At the global level, the Sinlung Indigenous Peoples Human Rights Organisation (SIPHRO) – a human rights organisation of the Hmar – presented the Tipaimukh Dam case at an Indigenous peoples' meeting in Greenland. The CCDD and CORE, along with the Angikar Bangladesh Foundation, jointly organised an International Tipaimukh Dam Conference in Dhaka in 2005 (Phase 5 in Figure 2); this led to the adoption of the Dhaka declaration on Tipaimukh, resolving to advance a peoples' action plan for stopping the Tipaimukh project (Respondent 4 and 15, 2018), which unanimously demanded that the Government of India and the international community call for an immediate moratorium on the Tipaimukh Dam (and on other similar projects in India's northeastern region) and that the Government of Bangladesh make every effort to initiate a dialogue with the Government of India to satisfactorily address the people's concerns (E-Pao, 2006).

In 2006 another large coalition, the Action Committee against Tipaimukh Project (ACTIP), was formed in Manipur (Phase 5 in Figure 2); it sought to revive the anti-Tipaimukh Dam campaign after the CCDD ceased to be active in 2005. The CCDD dissipated due to internal and external conflicts among its members (Respondent 4, 2018). Conflicts arose between members of the Meetei community and the Hmar and Zeliangrong communities regarding representation of Indigenous communities; at the same time, some members outside the CCDD coalition attempted to advance nationalist Manipur agendas within the scope of the CCDD, while other members of the CCDD rejected this attempt. As a result of these conflicts, most of the leading organisations, including CORE, left CCDD and decided to form ACTIP (Respondent 4, 2018; CORE, 2004).

ACTIP was established by the leaders of local anti-dam organisations including CORE, SIPHRO, Hmar Inpui, the Zeliangrong community, and the Centre for Research and Advocacy Manipur (CRAM). It organised mass rallies and submitted an objection letter to the Prime Minister of India (ACTIP, 2007; Respondent 16, 2018). At the grassroots level, ACTIP mobilised Indigenous people and informed them about the negative impacts of Tipaimukh Dam on their land and environment. These efforts to raise awareness led to a shifting of sides by local people who had originally supported the dam. These people, particularly those living near the Barak River, had been led to expect economic benefits from the dam,

though its proponents were not active in advancing these local benefits. As awareness of the dam's negative externalities increased, local people gradually joined the anti-dam coalitions (Respondents 4, 16 and 17, 2018). One of the ACTIP's main activists stated that,

[e]arlier, the local communities supported the dam project as they think of getting benefits from the dam [as assured by NEEPCO]. In order to resist the dam project, we visited and met local communities organizing various awareness programs at the grassroots levels. Then, the local communities gradually came to know about its adverse impacts and thus started opposing the dam (Respondent 17, 2018).

Regardless of local opposition, between 2004 and 2008 NEEPCO conducted five mandatory public hearings (Phase 6 in Figure 2). Such hearings are required in order to obtain environmental clearance from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC). Public hearings are the only medium through which local communities can directly interact with project proponents and raise their grievances (Mohan and Pabreja, 2016); however, this process is at the heart many dam controversies because projects are routinely approved without including concerns raised in public hearings (Dutta et al., 2011). In the case of the Tipaimukh Dam as well, NEEPCO representatives were not transparent regarding the inclusion of local communities' concerns in the dam's planning. Conflicts with local civil society organisations therefore escalated, the latter demanding to be included in the planning process. At the public hearings, ACTIP, together with civil society organisations, local people and village authorities, strongly objected to the dam, and their strong opposition led to the cancellation of one of the hearings (Respondent 18, 2018). Despite this opposition, in 2008 NEEPCO obtained the environmental clearance, thereby increasing public frustration (Pushparani, 2013).

After the environmental clearance for the dam was obtained, the Prime Minister of India publicly announced that now only the forest clearance was required to begin the construction of the dam; he went on to state that the Tipaimukh Dam would be built soon (Samom, 2011). The Congress-led Central Government, however, was at the same time trying to maintain a bilateral relationship with Bangladesh over the Tipaimukh Dam. As a downstream riparian, Bangladesh was concerned that the Tipaimukh Dam would severely affect the agriculture, vegetation, and flora and fauna in its territory (Huda, 2017). At the Non-Aligned Movement Summit in 2009, the Prime Minister of India assured his Bangladesh counterpart that India would not proceed with its plan to construct the dam without studying its impacts on Bangladesh (*The Daily Star*, 2009).

Local anti-dam organisations, in the meantime, intensified their campaign by raising their concerns in global arenas. The Hmar Inpui, a coalition of Hmar-based civil society bodies, raised the issue of the Tipaimukh Dam at the United Nations, while other anti-dam lobbies widened the scale of opposition across Manipur and Bangladesh. Some members of ACTIP worked closely with Bangladeshi activists (Respondent 19, 2018). This led to the Islami Andolan Bangladesh political party submitting a memorandum to the United Nations Secretary General urging that the Tipaimukh Dam project be stopped; it also motivated the Bangladeshi National Tipaimukh Dam Resistance Committee to organise a mass rally against the dam in Bangladesh. A visiting British parliamentarian called for an international enquiry into the potential ecological impacts of the Tipaimukh Dam on Bangladesh, stating that India's decision to construct the dam would be "a criminal offence" (Islam, 2013); this assisted in drawing further global attention to the anti-Tipaimukh campaign (Phase 6 in Figure 2) (Islam and Islam, 2016).

Due to the growing opposition to the dam at different levels, after the first MOU for the project was signed in 2003, NEEPCO was unable to advance the Tipaimukh Dam project further. As a result, the Government of Manipur sought to replace NEEPCO and requested the Ministry of Power to establish a joint venture company that would take over the project (Respondent 2, 2018; Projects Monitor, 2013). In response, in 2010, the Ministry of Power established a public sector company co-owned by the Government of Manipur, the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC), and the Sutlej Jal Vidyut Nigam Limited (SJVNL), a public sector enterprise owned by the Indian Ministry of Power. Concurrently, NHPC and the Government of Manipur formed another joint venture company – Loktak Downstream

Hydroelectric Corporation Limited – for advancing the 66 MW Loktak project in Manipur. Across the country, such public power companies have been established to develop hydro resources; they are currently playing a leading role in achieving the national target of an installed hydropower capacity of 70,000 MW by 2030 (Energetica, 2020). Most of the dam projects they have advanced, however, are controversial. Recently, the Chief Vigilance Officer of the public sector unit accused NEEPCO and the Union Minister of State of corruption on a dam project in Arunachal Pradesh (*The Wire*, 2016). This rent-seeking behaviour was referred to by Mishra (2019) as "hydro-criminality", that is, criminalisation of politics, rampant accumulation and corruption around dams. The lack of transparency of such ventures and other cases of alleged corruption escalated the tensions with civil society organisations, increasing their opposition to publicly owned dam projects such as the Teesta Dam in Sikkim and the Ithai Barrage in Manipur (Kaneti, 2020; Yumnam, 2020).

Upon establishment of the joint venture company, responsibility for advancing the Tipaimukh Dam project was shared between the NHPC (with 69% equity), the SJVN (26%) and the Government of Manipur (5%). The three stakeholders signed an MOU in 2010 (Phase 7 in Figure 2), according to which the NHPC was appointed implementing agency (Respondent 2, 2018). This led to a public outcry that reached the global arena. The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expressed its concern about the signing of the MOU in light of the widespread public opposition and condemnation of the dam by all Indigenous communities in Manipur (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2011); concurrently, the Centre for Research and Advocacy Manipur, a human rights civil society organisation, again raised the Tipaimukh Dam case at the United Nations (Phase 7 in Figure 2) (Respondent 20, 2018). Even so, the joint venture company moved forward on its plan to build the Tipaimukh Dam.

Rejection of forest clearance

By 2011, after several decades of struggles between pro- and anti-dam actors (Phases 1 to 7 in Figure 2), the only formal obstacle left for the Tipaimukh Dam was forest clearance under the *1980 Forest (Conservation) Act*. On behalf of the implementing agency (the joint venture company), the Government of Manipur submitted a proposal for forest clearance to the MoEFCC, which constituted the Forest Advisory Committee for assessing forest clearance (Respondent 21, 2018). The committee, which is largely comprised of experts (Respondent 4, 2018), rejected this request in 2013 due to the scale of the resulting effects, that is, the clearing of approximately 22,800 hectares of forest lands. This rejection marks the transition from Phase 7 in Figure 2 to Phase 8. The vast forest clearance required was more than 100 times the average forestland loss for hydropower projects for which the MoEFCC had granted clearance elsewhere. It was felt that this was disproportionate to the dam's power generation capacity and that it could not be compensated for through afforestation (Mehta, 2013; Respondent 2, 2018). Such compensatory afforestation is stipulated as a prerequisite for approving forest clearance (MoEFCC, 2019), and thus the inability to compensate for the loss of forests was seen by the MoEFCC as a major impediment. Instead of granting the forest clearance, it recommended building four small dams whose combined capacity would be equal to the capacity planned for the original Tipaimukh project (E-Pao, 2013). In 2013 the Government of Manipur began to explore possible options for multiple small dam projects (Phase 9 in Figure 2) (Respondents 2, 22 and 23, 2018).

In 2014, a new national government led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came into power and, since then, the Central Government has not publicly disclosed any information concerning the Tipaimukh Dam. In 2015, a member of parliament from Manipur inquired about the status of the Tipaimukh Dam; in his reply, India's Minister of Power stated only that the forest clearance had been declined (Lok Sabha, 2015), without making clear whether the dam was suspended or in limbo. The Modi-led government, however, has been exploring possible options for small dam projects on the Barak River in Manipur (CRAM, 2018). Even though local anti-dam actors welcomed the rejection of forest clearance for the Tipaimukh Dam project, they also did not support small dam projects on the Barak River; instead, they

favoured micro hydro installations that could fulfil communities' energy needs. As most of them considered the Tipaimukh Dam project to have been suspended, however, at least at the time of writing they had not launched a campaign against the building of small dams (Respondent 4, 10, 15, 19 and 20, 2018).

DISCUSSION: SHIFTING STORYLINES

In the Tipaimukh Dam case, pro- and anti-dam coalitions formed and shifted in composition and focus. There were fluctuations over time in the scale at which the coalitions operated and in the storylines they advanced. The storylines allowed actors to bridge differences in scale and to focus on forming discourse coalitions both supporting and opposing the Tipaimukh Dam. Table 1 summarises the storylines, the actors advancing them, and their stance regarding the desirability of the dam, in the order in which they were introduced.

Table 1. The story lines espoused by the various Tipaimukh Dam project actors.

Actors	Storyline	Time	Position
Indian National Congress	Nation building	1947	Pro-dam
Government of Assam; Central Waterpower, Irrigation and Navigation Commission; Central Water Commission; Brahmaputra Board	Flood control	1945-1999	Pro-dam
Government of Manipur	Economic loss Ecological impacts	Until 1999	Anti-dam
Government of Manipur; North Eastern Electric Power Corporation	Economic development (hydroelectricity)	1999-2010	Pro-dam
Citizens' Concern for Dams and Development: Manipur University; Sinlung Indigenous Peoples Human Rights Organisation (SIPHRO); Zeliangrong community; Hmar Inpui; Centre for Organization Research and Education (CORE)	Social (Indigenous peoples' rights) Environmental (seismic risk)	1999-2005	Anti-dam
Bangladeshi advocacies	Environmental (downstream ecological impacts)	2005-2013	Anti-dam
Action Committee Against Tipaimukh Dam: SIPHRO; Zeliangrong community; Hmar Inpui; CORE; Centre for Research and Advocacy Manipur (CRAM)	Social (Indigenous peoples' rights)	2006-2013	Anti-dam
Joint venture company: National Hydroelectric Power Corporation; Sutlej Jal Vidyut Nigam Limited; Government of Manipur	Economic development (hydroelectricity)	2010-2013	Pro-dam
CRAM	Social (Indigenous peoples' rights)	2010-2013	Anti-dam
Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change	Environmental (forestlands)	2013	Anti-dam

Source: Authors' compilation.

Storylines of pro-dam advocacy coalitions

In the postcolonial era, nation building emerged as a dominant storyline among technocratic elites in the discourse around dams. Following independence in 1947, India increasingly sought to exploit hydro resources for economic development (Biswas, 2012). To this end, a pro-dam advocacy coalition led by Nehru advanced many dam projects for flood control, hydroelectricity and irrigation. This coalition considered dams to be a means for economic growth, patriotic pride, and the consolidation of national identity (McCully, 2001), as reflected in Nehru's "dams as the secular temples of modern India" statement. Nehru's clear pro-science, pro-dam stance is further reflected in his famous statement at the inauguration of the Bhakra-Nangal Dam in Himachal Pradesh, which, as Morrison (2010) comments, embraces modernity unequivocally:

What a stupendous, magnificent work – a work which only that nation can take up which has faith and boldness! (...). It has become the symbol of a nation's will to march with strength, determination, and courage (...). As I walked round the [dam] site, I thought that these days the biggest temple and mosque and gurdwara is the place where man works for the good of mankind. Which place can be greater than this, this Bhakra-Nangal, where thousands and lakhs of men have worked, have shed their blood and sweat and laid down their lives as well? Where can be a greater and holier place than this, which we can regard as higher? (as quoted in McCully, 2001: 2).

The nation-building storyline advanced by Nehru considered dams to be development in and of themselves (Kothari, 1996; Baviskar, 2019). Such dams, for which millions of people were uprooted, became an icon of nation building and modernity.

The Indian nation-building storyline is linked with the global diffusion of the TVA-based development model which was adopted by many developing countries in the postcolonial era. Inspired by this model, in 1948 the Nehru-led coalition advanced the Damodar Valley Corporation to handle flood control in eastern India. This coalition, advancing the nation-building storyline with the objective of developing the Indian economy, developed many dam projects. This national storyline was thus embedded in global storylines which were at the time advancing the hydraulic mission as part of nation building, often upholding the TVA as a paragon of how water resources should be developed (Klingensmith, 2007).

A flood-control storyline was at the same time being advanced in many parts of postcolonial India; it was manifested in projects such as the Hirakud, the Bhakra-Nangal, and the Tehri Dams. This storyline became prominent in India's remote northeast, including in Assam, the first proposed site of the Tipaimukh Dam. The Government of Assam requested the Central Government to undertake flood-control measures on the state's Barak River. A member of parliament from Assam appealed to the Central Government, arguing that,

[i]t is an annual feature with us to be visited by floods, sometimes even twice or thrice a year. Crops over a large area get damaged, resulting in untold hardships to people (...). A storage scheme on this river would absorb floods (...). So, Sir, unless flood is controlled and the area is developed economically, the lot of the people inhabiting that area will be miserable (as quoted in Parliamentary Debates, 1954a, 4258, 1954b, 4260-4261).

To advance the project, the Assam government turned to the national government. The dam on the Barak River was thus initially proposed for flood-control purposes by a regional-national coalition. Even though the composition of the pro-dam coalition and the agencies advancing the dam shifted during this era (from CWINC, to CWPC, to CWC, and then to the Brahmaputra Board) and the specific site of the dam was also moved, the flood-control storyline remained dominant until 1999.

The Manipur government opposed the flood-control storyline, as the benefits did not accrue to the state; a national-regional pro-dam advocacy coalition was thus stymied by a local anti-growth veto player. This deadlock was broken when NEEPCO, a regional power company, strategically reframed the dam as a hydroelectric project, which led the Government of Manipur to change its stance to one of support; in

this way, the responsibility for constructing the dam shifted to the regional power company (Respondent 1 and 2, 2018; Ministry of Power, 2000). The shift in the Government of Manipur's stance was expressed in its 1999 statement to the Manipur Legislative Assembly:

The government has decided to allow NEEPCO to go ahead with the investigation of the Tipaimukh Dam project (...). Now, therefore, the Manipur Legislative Assembly hereby resolves to rescind its earlier resolution in relation to the objection of implementing the Tipaimukh Dam project and authorised NEEPCO to go ahead with further survey and investigation of the project (Manipur Legislative Assembly, 1999: 1).

Senior officials of NEEPCO further assured that,

[t]he hydroelectricity generation from the Tipaimukh Dam would enhance the local economy of Manipur (...). Besides having cheap, clean, and renewable power, the Tipaimukh Dam project would lead to the overall socio-economic development of the entire area. The construction of the project would also open up new avenues for gainful employment to a large section of the population (...) (Respondent 1, 2018; Excerpt from Tipaimukh Dam Conference, 1999: 2).

The shift in the position of the Government of Manipur, triggered by the economic development storyline advanced by NEEPCO, has therefore led to the formation of a local pro-dam pro-growth coalition in Manipur. The regional power company has also managed to gain the support of local communities by highlighting the economic benefits they will get from the dam, thereby further expanding the pro-dam coalition in Manipur. The emergence of this local-regional pro-growth coalition was therefore enabled by the discourse coalition that advanced hydroelectricity as a means for local economic development. While the scale at which the pro-dam coalition operated fluctuated between the national and regional (shifting from the regional power company to the joint venture company), at times with support from local pro-growth coalitions, the pro-dam hydroelectricity storyline has largely remained the same since 1999.

The shift in pro-dam discourses can also be seen as a shift from a statist to a neoliberal stance. In the post-independence era, Nehru established a centralised state with a statist ideology (Das, 2001), but by the end of the 20th century, this regime had been supplanted by a neoliberal state (Naseemullah, 2017). This has had implications for dam initiatives; as such initiatives were, in the process, shifted from state agencies to various companies. In the Tipaimukh case, the project was moved from government agencies to the regional power sector and then to a public company. Table 2 summarises the interrelations between structural changes in the composition of both pro- and anti-dam coalitions, the storylines, and the scale at which the storylines were espoused.

With the advent of the neoliberal turn and India's rapid economic development, the Central Government has become increasingly preoccupied with addressing the economically detrimental effects of energy deficits (Banerjee, 2014). To advance energy security, the Central Government has initiated large hydropower projects across the country, regardless of shifting political ideology and leadership. The scope of hydropower has been widening since 2014 when the Modi-led BJP regained power. In order to address India's energy security problem, and in line with its current objective of achieving 40 percent of its energy supply from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030, the Modi-led government has sought to advance hydropower projects as renewable and sustainable energy sources. The objective of energy security and economic development has been combined with a clean energy campaign, resulting in a programme to advance hydroelectricity and encourage private actors to exploit hydro resources as a vital component of a neoliberal development strategy (Baviskar, 2019; Verma, 2020).

One of the most important achievements of the Modi-led government was the completion of the controversial Narmada Dam in 2017 despite the withdrawal of World Bank funding. The World Bank has, however, recently shown a renewed interest in financing hydropower projects in India. It has not only funded dam projects but has facilitated many hydro policies by providing technical and financial assistance. Apart from this, the Asian Development Bank has influenced energy policies in India by ensuring that South Asian countries can benefit from a single interconnected energy market that gives

India a chance to replace fossil fuels with hydropower, much of it imported from Bhutan and Nepal. This funding has led public power companies – who hold more than 90 percent of the country's hydropower capacity – to form joint ventures with state agencies in order to advance dam projects, as occurred in Manipur (ADB, 2018; Kumar, 2018; World Bank, 2019).

Table 2. Discourse coalitions around the Tipaimukh Dam, by actors and storylines.

Level	Pro-dam				Anti-dam		
	Nation building	Flood control	Hydro-electricity	Economic development	Economic loss	Indigenous rights and livelihood	Environmental
Global/ Intern'l						World Commission on Dams; United Nations	World Commission on Dams; Bangladesh NGOs (effects on rivers)
National	Nehru	Central Waterpower, Irrigation and Navigation Commission, Central Water Commission and Brahmaputra Board	Joint venture company				Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (effects on forests)
Regional/state		Assam	North Eastern Electric Power Corporation	Manipur government (after 1999)	Manipur government (before 1999)	Citizens' Concern for Dams and Development; Action Committee Against Tipaimukh Project	Citizens' Concern for Dams and Development; Action Committee Against Tipaimukh Project
Local						Local NGOs	Academics (seismic risk)

Source: Authors' compilation.

Storylines of anti-dam advocacy coalitions

While the composition of the leading anti-dam coalitions, CCDD and ACTIP, varied over time, most of the anti-growth actors remained active throughout the struggle. Both CCDD and ACTIP operated mainly through networking, campaigning and advocacy. They educated locals about the impacts of the dam, thereby widening grassroots opposition. Leaders who were part of the educated elite were able to link the anti-Tipaimukh lobbies to national, Bangladeshi and global anti-dam advocacies, thereby amplifying their voice. These activists were central to some of the most important anti-dam efforts, for example by linking the anti-Tipaimukh struggles with the Save Narmada Movement, with campaigns against the Tipaimukh dam in Bangladesh, and with the appeal for Indigenous peoples' rights made at the United Nations (Respondent 4 and 11, 2018). The connection between local coalitions and global anti-dam advocacy coalitions was made through their shared storylines.

From the early 1990s, Indigenous peoples' rights emerged as the main anti-dam storyline; this was highlighted in the words of a Zeliangrong activist from CCDD who said that, "[t]he construction of Tipaimukh Dam is a gross violation of human rights, right to life and livelihood of Indigenous communities

(...). It is a contempt of basic human values (...). We have the right to reject the kind of development projects that we do not need or want" (as quoted in Submission of Memorandum to Prime Minister, 2001: 4). Similarly, one of the Hmar Inpui's main activists said that,

[t]he confluence of Barak River and Tuivai tributary is the holiest place of many tribes in Manipur. There is a close cultural connection among tribes over this confluence (...). We have many cultural attachments and memories (...). The construction of Tipaimukh Dam will lead to the loss of Hmar cultural identity on the Barak River (Respondent 11, 2018).

For the Indigenous people, the Barak River is not only their cultural symbol but also a source of livelihood that has sustained them for centuries. As mentioned by another Hmar activist,

Since time immemorial, the Barak River has truly been the lifeline for the Hmars and their kindred tribes of Manipur (...). The Barak serves the areas inhabited by the Hmar and is a gift that was given to the Hmars. On both sides of the River, crops and various kinds of fruits are cultivated and the economic life of the Barak valley is entirely dependent on the Barak River (Sawngate, 2011: 33).

The social and livelihood storyline advocated by local anti-growth actors was therefore based on the protection of Indigenous cultural identity and livelihood sources on the Barak River.

The social storyline allowed anti-growth actors to link up with national- and global-level advocates for Indigenous peoples' rights. Specifically, it allowed connections to the Save Narmada Movement in Gujarat, the Indigenous peoples' meeting in Greenland and the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), which provides a global platform to highlight the rights of Indigenous communities (United Nations, 2019). It therefore constituted an important element of the upscaling of anti-dam struggles to these levels. As a leading educated activist from CORE indicated,

At the national level, we were closely working with the Save Narmada Movement. This national anti-dam campaign supports our protest and we also support their protest. We synchronise and strengthen the anti-dam campaign through solidarity (...). At the global level we are part of the study process of WCD [World Commission on Dams] and provided information to the WCD Report. In the late 1990s, we were familiar with the WCD members like Medha Patkar [founder of the Save Narmada Movement]. We communicated with them and exchanged information regarding the dam (...). And also, we raised the issue of Tipaimukh Dam at the United Nations forum on Indigenous peoples' rights (Respondent 4, 2018).

Supporting the global advocacy, a well-known human rights activist from CRAM stated that,

I raised the voice of Tipaimukh Dam at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (...). The targeting of peoples' land and resources both by the state and corporate bodies for pursuance of mega dams [including Tipaimukh Dam] will worsen human rights and the survival challenges of Indigenous peoples (...). The proposed move to construct the Tipaimukh Dam without peoples' consent is an effort to undermine Indigenous peoples' self-determined development over their land (Respondent 16, 2018; E-Pao, 2016: 1).

On this same global platform, an academic from Hmar Inpui "[said m]ore about the governmental process of Tipaimukh Dam, further stating that there was no proper consultation, transparency and accountability of the dam project towards the Indigenous peoples" (Respondent 11, 2018). Thus, by using the WCD's policy framework as a discursive tool – which argued for the empowerment of bottom-up struggles for Indigenous rights (WCD, 2000) – local anti-Tipaimukh coalitions were able to be heard at the global level. The WCD's framework suggested that, "[n]o dam should be built without the demonstrable acceptance of affected people, and without the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous and tribal peoples" (Imhof et al., 2002: 10).

Following the upscaling of the anti-dam campaign to the global level, the United Nations' Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination urged India's Central Government not to construct the Tipaimukh Dam as its construction and planning process violated the principle of free, fair and prior informed consent, which had not been given by the local Indigenous people (Youth Voices, 2012). The

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights also demanded an explanation from the Central Government for deploying military troops near the Tipaimukh Dam site, a move which was argued by anti-growth actors to be supporting the building the dam; the Central Government consequently withdrew its troops (Respondent 11, 2018). The social storyline was thus effective in linking up the local anti-dam opposition with those working on similar issues at the national and global levels; this eventually led the United Nations to pressure the Central Government to not construct the dam.

A second storyline advanced by the anti-dam coalition is the environmental storyline. This storyline was initially put forward by local academics who were highlighting the seismic risks of the Tipaimukh Dam. One of the academics from Manipur University argued that,

[t]he project area is located within the seismic zone characterized by earthquakes of magnitude 7 or more on the Richter scale. Therefore, a potential danger, in the form of an impending earthquake that may cause damages to the proposed Tipaimukh Dam, cannot be ruled out in the long run (Respondent 3, 2018).

This and other academics raised concerns similar to those of several national-level seismologists who measured micro-earthquake trembling effects near the Tipaimukh Dam site (Verma and Kumar, 1994), thereby linking to a national – local academic storyline regarding the seismic risk.

The ecological storyline was originally advanced at the Manipur-Bangladesh 2005 Tipaimukh conference, and later gained greater prominence. It initially focused on the impacts of the Tipaimukh Dam downstream, in Bangladesh. The conference's slogan was "Let the Barak River run free! Development in harmony with nature" (International Tipaimukh Dam Conference, 2005: 1). Supporting this storyline, one of the Bangladeshi activists commented that, "[t]he Tipaimukh Dam would be a disaster for Bangladesh's river system (...). It is going to be more disastrous than the Farakka Barrage that has already destroyed the Padma river and ecology in the country's south-western region" (as quoted in Islam and Islam, 2016: 5).

This Bangladesh-originated storyline seemingly resonated with the MoEFCC, though in a modified India-centred form that was understandable for a national-level Indian agency. As the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests concluded, "No compensatory measure would help in mitigating the adverse impact caused by loss of such forestland tracts on the habitat, flora, fauna, biodiversity, micro-climate and environment (...)." He added that, "[s]uch a diversion proposal involving a huge stretch of critically important forest and wildlife habitat where compensatory measures may not be proved effective, may not be advisable" (E-Pao, 2013). His stance reveals the contradictions among government agencies regarding the dam: agencies whose goals included energy security were supportive of the dam, while it was opposed by other agencies whose main goals were environmental. This is particularly notable for the MoEFCC, a ministry which is the focal agency for international environmental affairs and whose staff is directly exposed to international environmental discourses.

The MoEFCC's position can perhaps be further explained by the composition of the ministry's personnel, who came largely from environmental elites. Among the MoEFCC's most senior staff were two ecologists (one of whom a professor in academia), a zoologist, a wildlife biologist, a hydrologist and an environmentalist; all were deeply aware of the environmental value of forests and thus were strongly drawn to the ecological storyline. Moreover, as the MoEFCC prides itself on reducing the rate of forest loss and sees the compensatory afforestation mechanism as one of its major successes in this field, the approval of the forest clearance for the dam would have countered its institutional ethos.

CONCLUSION

The question of whether the era of dam building will end in South Asia, as it has elsewhere, is contingent on the outcome of the kind of site-specific struggles over dams that are described here. As the proposed Tipaimukh Dam is located in Manipur – one of the most peripheral states in India – this rejection of the project, together with evidence regarding the increasing opposition to dams in other emerging

economies (see, for example, Kirchherr, 2018; Schapper et al., 2020), is perhaps indicative of a second, wider, closing of the frontier for dams. If a large dam can be stopped in such a peripheral setting, it is distinctly possible that similar outcomes will occur in less peripheral settings.

The second closing of the frontier was premised by Feitelson (1997) to be the outcome of local-national coalitions that oppose environmentally problematic projects in the periphery. In the Tipaimukh Dam case, we see how global-national advocacy coalitions are grounded in local pro- versus anti-growth coalition struggles, thereby forming such cross-scalar opposition. The composition of the coalitions and their storylines, however, shift over time. While initial proposals focused on flood control, later proposals emphasised hydroelectricity and local economic development. This shift came about, in part, to address local opposition arising from the uneven distribution of costs (in Manipur) and benefits (flood control in Assam); however, by espousing Indigenous rights storylines and, later, environmental storylines, local anti-growth coalitions managed to link up with global-level anti-dam and Indigenous rights advocacies. Ultimately, however, it was an environmental storyline – originally a minor storyline among anti-dam activists – feeding into the ethos of a national-level veto player (the MoEFCC) which connected local to national opposition, leading finally to rejection of the dam at the national level. This storyline resonated both epistemically and institutionally with the personnel of the agency that was in charge of issuing forest clearance permits. Though much of the opposition to dams in emerging economies is due to their social ramifications (mainly displacement), in the case of the Tipaimukh Dam, the effect of the ecological storyline resembles that which led to the end of the dam-building era in developed countries. This case may thus also be indicative of an emerging discourse coalition connecting anti-dam storylines in developed and developing countries.

Local anti-growth struggles heralded a change in dam governance in India. In that sense, this study's results may in part be explained by other processes which were unfolding at the same time as the Tipaimukh Dam issue, including similar struggles that were occurring in less-peripheral areas of India. These included the Silent Valley movement, which succeeded in stopping a dam project in the southern state of Kerala through an anti-growth campaign that emerged as an environmental protest against dam projects which undermine ecological balance. In 1984, Silent Valley was declared a National Park, indicating a shift in dam policy (Sethi, 1993; Baviskar, 1995). Importantly, at the global level, the World Bank was increasingly becoming aware of Indigenous peoples' rights, which was having a significant impact on project funding policies. In India, the Save Narmada Movement led to the withdrawal of World Bank funding from the Narmada Dam. For a period of time, the Bank suspended its financing of dam projects in India (Khagram, 2004; Patkar, 2015), leading the Central Government to formulate a rehabilitation policy for displaced persons and to introduce public hearings which involved local communities in decision-making processes related to dam construction. Anti-growth actors played an instrumental role in this shift, mobilising local communities to press for inclusive participation in such hearings (Dutta et al., 2011).

The advent of neoliberalism has also influenced dam governance in India. It has led to the rise of corporate capitalism and the privatising of water resources in the country, a process described – mainly in the context of its adverse effects on Indigenous groups – as 'water grabbing'. Neoliberalism is strongly opposed by anti-growth activists who support an alternative development model; as such, it has escalated tensions between governing bodies and anti-growth actors who argue that Indigenous rights are protected under the WCD (Sneddon and Fox, 2008; Mehta et al., 2012). Resistance to the effects of neoliberalism on water governance and Indigenous people has contributed to the formation of important networks such as the South Asia Network of Dams, Rivers and People in 1998 in India. Despite such resistance, however, most of the large hydropower projects in India have been successfully imposed on local people, even though these projects have led to many conflicts, particularly over land (Mishra and Nayak, 2020). Under Modi's government, the Narmada Dam – the second largest dam in the world – was completed, despite withdrawal of World Bank funding (Scroll, 2017), indicating the Modi government's clear pro-dam stance.

At the same time, India's neoliberal policy was not successful in advancing some of the most controversial large hydropower projects; this failure was due to increasing recognition of the rights of communities that are negatively impacted by dams. The lack of success has also been due to the anti-dam struggles of these communities which have resulted in the delay and suspension of dam projects and in political lobbying for dam removals; an example are the recent calls for dismantling of the Mullaperiyar Dam by the Government of Kerala. Such achievements illustrate the shifting power relations in water governance and indicate a potential turning point in dam policy in India. Most recently, the north eastern region of India has become a locus of anti-dam struggles that have led to delays in many dam projects. These delays are linked to a broader shift in anti-dam resistance in India, which has evolved from a discourse around Indigenous peoples' rights into a scientific discourse linked with river health (Baviskar, 2019). Delays are also linked to an increasing emphasis on the ecological impacts of dams, which led to the rejection of forest clearance for the Tipaimukh Dam and to rejection of the Dibang Dam; ecological concerns also led to calls by the Government of Manipur for the decommissioning of the Ithai Barrage on Loktak Lake. This marks an important shift in government policy, as India – unlike many developed economies – does not have a history of blocking or removing dams in response to ecological concerns (Mehta, 2013; Thakur, 2020). The picture is thus a mixed one, whereby some dams move forward while others do not, also under the Modi pro-hydro government. A full identification of pro- and anti-dam factors in India, however, requires a comparative study which is beyond the scope of this paper and thus awaits further research.

This study indicates that discourse coalitions enable local actors to rescale conflicts. Thus, if the second closing of the frontier to large dam projects is to materialise in emerging economies in general, and in South Asia in particular, a key mechanism of the process will be the rescaling from local disparate struggles to struggles that bridge local, national and global coalitions. In this way, local anti-growth coalitions that are striving to protect the use values of their local resources will be able to connect with national agencies or global anti-dam advocacy coalitions. If this rescaling of interconnections does indeed spread, we may be witnessing a tipping point in dam building in India. Further studies of the struggles and local discourses around dams in emerging economies is required, however, in order to assess whether this is in fact the case and to determine the extent to which a possible shift in India reflects shifts in other South Asian countries.

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APPENDIX 1: LIST OF RESPONDENTS

Respondent No.	Position	Type	Organisation
1	General Manager (retired)	Central Government	North Eastern Electric Power Corporation
2	Executive Director	Manipur government	Manipur State Power Corporation Limited
3	Superintending Engineer	Manipur government	Manipur State Power Corporation Limited
4	Politician	Manipur government	Bharatiya Janata Party (ruling)
5	Commissioner (civil servant)	Manipur government	Old Secretariat
6	Assistant Engineer	Manipur government	Manipur Pollution Control Board
7	Forest Ranger	Manipur government	Forest Department of Manipur
8	Convener	Civil society	Citizens' Concern for Dams and Development
9	Co-convener	Civil society	Citizens' Concern for Dams and Development
10	Co-convener	Civil society	Action Committee Against Tipaimukh Project
11	Activist	Civil society	Action Committee Against Tipaimukh Project
12	Activist	Civil society	Action Committee Against Tipaimukh Project
13	President	Civil society	Centre for Organization Research and Education
14	Chairperson	Civil society	Singlung Indigenous Peoples Human Rights Organisation
15	Joint Secretary	Civil society	Hmar Inpui
16	Secretary	Civil society	Centre for Research and Advocacy Manipur
7	Hmar activist	Local people	Hmar community
18	Hmar writer	Local people	Hmar community

19	Hmar professor	Local people	Hmar community
20	Hmar woman activist	Local people	Hmar community
21	Zeliangrong activist	Local people	Zeliangrong community
22	Professor	Academia	Manipur University
23	Assistant Professor	Academia	Manipur University

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