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Viewpoint – The Story of a Troubled Relationship

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ABSTRACT: This is the story of my changing relationship with the Indian Ministry of Water Resources and the Central Water Commission. When, in 1985, as a civil servant of the Government of India, I became Secretary, Water Resources, I brought to the assignment fairly conventional views on big dam projects as symbols of development and demonstrations of the application of science and technology to interventions in nature for human purposes. That widely prevalent view began to change as the environmental impacts of big dam projects, and the displacement of people by such projects, became clearer, and my thinking also underwent a change towards the end of my civil service days and later after my retirement. This subjected my old cordial relationship with the Ministry and the official engineering community to considerable strain. Over a period of time, that broken relationship was partially mended, but some embers of the old uneasiness still remain and can ignite easily. The Establishment's disapproval of me got intertwined with their strong defensiveness on dams, their anger against popular movements against big projects, in particular the Narmada project, and their bitter and implacable hostility to the World Commission on Dams. Thus, this personal story goes beyond the personal, and is the reflection of changing attitudes towards engineering interventions in nature and ecological and other concerns, and towards ideas of development.

KEYWORDS: Dams, development, environmental impacts, displacement of people, changing climate of opinion, World Commission on Dams

INTRODUCTION

This is the story of the vicissitudes of my relationship with the Indian Ministry of Water Resources and the Central Water Commission, a body of engineers forming the technical arm of the Ministry. I am writing this because I believe this personal story goes beyond the personal, and is the reflection of changing attitudes towards engineering interventions in nature and ecological and other concerns.

An account of that changing relationship in capsule form would be the following: when I was Secretary, Water Resources, in the Government of India, in the 1980s, I enjoyed a very good relationship with my colleagues and subordinates; that goodwill continued for a while after my retirement, but changed to strong disapproval as I began questioning and criticising big-dam projects; the disapproval reached a peak in the years 1998-2005; then slowly, over a period of time, anger against me mellowed, and the broken relationship was partially mended – but only partially; some embers of the old uneasiness still remain and can ignite easily. The Establishment's disapproval of me

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got intertwined with their strong defensiveness on dams, their anger against popular movements against big projects, in particular the Narmada project, and their bitter and implacable hostility to the World Commission on Dams. That is the story I propose to narrate in this paper.

With colonial rule, western engineering had come to India, and building dams on rivers for irrigation or power-generation became a familiar and much commended undertaking; dams became symbols of modernity and 'development' (though that word gained currency later). Some British engineers who built dams came to be venerated as public benefactors, with shrines being built in their honour. Dams and reservoirs also became places for tourists to visit, partly as engineering marvels and partly as picnic spots because of the large artificial lakes. Schools took children to dams on educational or recreational excursions. I myself recall that in 1957 or 58, as a young and junior official in the Government of India, I drove with my family to Bhakra Nangal, then not yet fully completed, on a holiday. The general admiration for dams and their builders found a striking expression in Nehru's famous and oft-quoted description of such projects as the temples of modern India. (That was in 1948; ten years later he made some cautionary observations about gigantism, which are not often cited.)

That benign view of dams and reservoirs had not significantly changed in India when, in the mid-1980s, I became Secretary, Water Resources in the Government of India. Prior to that appointment I had held various positions in different Ministries, but they were mostly Ministries concerned with diverse industries; I had not had occasion to give much thought to the subject of big dams. By default, I brought to my new assignment unexamined ideas tending to reflect the prevailing climate of opinion in India. I did realise at a fairly early stage in the new job that the Ministry's orientation needed to be changed from an excessive preoccupation with large projects to a concern with issues of resource policy. I was the initiator and principal draftsman of India's first National Water Policy, which was adopted in 1987, but that did not imply any serious reservations about big-dam projects. My job required me to push various large water resource development projects through the prescribed procedures towards approval, and I had no hesitation in doing so. I may add that a few modest bureaucratic successes brought me a measure of popularity within the Ministry.

The Ministry was largely focused on what it called 'major irrigation'. It did have divisions dealing with water management, 'minor' irrigation, and so on, but it was essentially a big-dam ministry. The newly emerging concerns about environmental impacts and the displacement of large numbers of people had not yet made any significant change in the centrality of dams in developmental thinking.

However, questions about environmental impacts and about the displacement of people were certainly in the air in the 1980s, and engineers too had begun to take note of them. The second half of the 1980s saw a large number of seminars and conferences on the environmental impacts of big dams, and while many were held by environmentalists, some were organised by the engineers themselves. Both the Ministry of Environment and Forests and the Ministry of Water Resources (Central Water Commission) issued guidelines on the subject. The earlier unquestioning belief in the goodness of big dam projects had become less absolute and more nuanced through an awareness of possible adverse impacts. In other words, a degree of enlightenment had begun to emerge. Unfortunately, this development suffered a setback in the 1990s, and there was a retreat from enlightenment, as we shall see.

In 1987, I left the Ministry a few months ahead of my formal date of retirement from the civil service to take up another government assignment for three years (on 're-employment', as it is called in India), but my interest in water policy and related issues continued. In 1989, I wrote an article on Large Dams: the Right Perspective (*Economic and Political Weekly*, 30 September 1989) which was widely read and much appreciated by both the supporters and opponents of big-dam projects because it took a 'balanced' position on the controversy over dams. In a scale of 1 to 10 (from total support to big dams to total opposition), the article occupied the mid-point. Over the ensuing decade, as a result of much reading, thinking and discussion, my position moved from that central point to a further point closer to

10, say, 7 or 8 (but not to 10). The change would have been evident from another article of mine in *Economic and Political Weekly* nine years after the earlier one (Water Resource Planning; Changing Perspectives, EPW, 12 December 1998).

Those 'changing perspectives' were partly the results of two major movements against the adverse impacts of large projects, one led by Medha Patkar and her *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (Save the Narmada Movement) against the Sardar Sarovar Project in Gujarat on the Narmada River, and the other led by Sunderlal Bahuguna against the Tehri hydroelectric Project on two tributaries of the Ganga in the north. These movements were major milestones in the history of evolving attitudes to large projects in India. Medha Patkar and Bahuguna became well known nationally and internationally, the former to a greater extent than the latter. Both these movements were very powerful at one time, and the Narmada movement in particular was perhaps the biggest mass movement since the struggle for independence.

In both cases, the movements started as critiques of the environmental aspects of the projects as well as the displacement of people by the projects, but gradually they became critiques of the projects themselves and their in-built inequities and injustices. Both movements became generally known as 'anti-dam' or 'anti-project'. Both went to the Supreme Court, but ultimately they failed in that forum. The projects were not stopped or suspended for a comprehensive review; in that sense the movements were ultimately unsuccessful; the projects were delayed but they went ahead. However, the old simplistic and benign view of such projects as representing 'development' was no longer tenable; it had now to be modified by a fuller understanding of the harm that they could cause. In this sense, the movements had a transformative influence on the thinking in India, and to some extent in the world, about such projects.

Let me return to my personal involvement in those changes. In the prolonged confrontation, lasting several years, between Medha Patkar and the Governments, State and Central, over the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) on the Narmada, there were many crises, and one such in 1993 led to the establishment, by the Ministry of Water Resources, of what was described as the 'Five Member Group' (FMG). I was a member of the FMG. (I was no longer in government service.) The FMG was asked to go into environmental and displacement aspects of the project. It submitted one report to the Government of India in 1994, and then, as desired by the Supreme Court of India, a further report on some specified points to that Court in 1995. Similarly, I was a member of an Expert Committee set up by the Ministry of Power to go into the environmental and displacement/rehabilitation aspects of the Tehri Hydroelectric Project. The Committee submitted its report in 1997.

During their deliberations, extensive presentations were made to the FMG and the Expert Committee on the many serious environmental impacts and consequences that the two projects were likely to have, and the difficulties and inadequacies of the remedial, or mitigatory or compensatory measures proposed. Similarly, detailed presentations were made on the inevitable displacements of large numbers of people by the projects, the total or partial loss of homesteads, land and livelihoods by the affected people, the deficiencies and inadequacies of the measures of resettlement and rehabilitation that were envisaged in the relevant policies and packages, the inevitable inefficiencies, lapses and shortfalls in the actual implementation of even these, and the consequent infliction of severe hardships on the affected people. There were of course other presentations to the FMG/Expert Committee that tended to emphasise the benefits expected from the projects, and to question the projections of negative impacts.

Broadly speaking, the supporters of the projects argued that the positive outcomes of the projects would greatly outweigh the negative aspects, and that the latter could be remedied or mitigated or compensated for through various measures. The critics contended that the benefits claimed were overstated and uncertain, whereas the financial, economic, environmental and social costs were certain and likely to be more than projected; and that the overall balance of costs and benefits would be

unfavourable. The actual position in this regard could of course vary from project to project. In the particular cases of the Narmada (SSP) and Tehri projects, the presentations to the FMG/Expert Committee on the adverse impacts of the projects, environmental, social and human, were very persuasive and made a powerful impression on me. My membership of the FMG on the Narmada project and the Expert Committee on the Tehri Project substantially changed my thinking on such projects.

In the course of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the gulf between the government administrators, planners and technocrats on the one hand, and the non-official critics and opponents of such projects on the other, kept widening, and gradually became an unbridgeable divide. Even among the intelligentsia as a whole (professionals in various disciplines, media persons, social activists, the general public), a polarisation began to set in between the supporters and opponents of big dams. There were many factors contributing to that polarisation, including the huge investments involved, the strong vested interests that they created, and the emergence of what came to be known as the 'politician – bureaucrat – consultant – contractor nexus'. However, the motives driving the approval and execution of big projects were not necessarily or in all cases dishonourable. There was a genuine ideological divide between the supporters and opponents of big-dam projects. Civility between the two sides tended to become fragile. Either side tended to question the good faith of the other and to regard it as a 'lobby'.

The sharpest polarisation was over the Narmada (Sardar Sarovar) Project (SSP) in Gujarat State. Successive Governments in Gujarat vigorously advocated the cause of this project (both out of genuine conviction and for political reasons) and created a strong body of opinion in the State in its favour. The project rapidly acquired an iconic status. There was near-unanimity on the project in the State. A large number of people were persuaded by the official view that the project represented 'the life-line of Gujarat' and the dominant view tended to render such dissent as might have existed within the State virtually inaudible. To the ardent supporters of the project the movement against it led by Medha Patkar represented a negative force to be fought hard. Medha Patkar became their Enemy Number One. Those intellectuals who found some merit in her arguments and supported her demand for a review of the project also became enemies to be fought against. They were held to be anti-dam, anti-SSP, anti-national, and anti-development; and their motivations were apt to be questioned. However hard one tried to maintain a sane and balanced position, it was difficult in that polarised ambience to escape classification as 'pro-dam' or 'anti-dam'. That polarisation spread from the State of Gujarat to the Centre, largely through the professional solidarity of the community of engineers common to the States and the Centre. It gradually affected the whole country, or at any rate the engineering community as well as those who thought of 'development' in terms of big projects.

I found myself labelled as 'anti-dam' and 'supporter of Medha'. My relationships with former friends and colleagues came under a strain. I was no longer welcome in my old Ministry. I used to visit the Ministry occasionally to meet people and get myself briefed on developments of interest, but this became increasingly difficult. Senior officials did not want to meet me. The Water Establishment's disapproval of me was even greater than its disapproval of Medha Patkar. After all, she was the Enemy, but I had been part of the Water Establishment a few years earlier. In the eyes of the Establishment I was one of them. It was as a former Secretary Water Resources that I was nominated to various government committees and commissions, and there was dismay in official circles when my thinking changed and I began speaking a different language. The dismay changed to anger. I was regarded as a renegade who had deserted the ranks and joined the enemy camp. People in the Ministry and in the Central Water Commission (particularly engineers) who had earlier been well disposed towards me became cold. Some former colleagues who continued to maintain friendly relations with me had to contend with the disapproval of their engineering brotherhood.

Things became worse with the establishment of the World Commission on Dams (WCD) in 1998. From the beginning the Government of India was hostile to the WCD; and the report of the WCD, launched at London in the year 2000, was comprehensively rejected by India. For instance, the

Government of India's reply to the WCD (letter No. 2/WCD/2001/DT (PR) Vol.-III, dated 1-2-2001 addressed to the Secretary General of the WCD) said:

Government of India has adopted a National Water Policy and guidelines on the various facets of water resources development. These guidelines have been framed keeping in view the socio-economic ethos of the country. The guidelines for development now suggested by WCD in their Final report are wholly incompatible with our development imperatives. Having made impressive strides since independence in developing our water resources, India proposes to continue with its programme of dam construction to create another 200 Billion m³ of storage in the next 25 years or so to ensure continued self-sufficiency in food grain production and to meet the energy and drinking water needs of a growing population. In view of the above, the recommendations and guidelines of the WCD are not acceptable to us.

In the detailed comments of the Ministry of Water Resources on the recommendations in Part II of the WCD Report, as posted on their website (they are no longer there), there were some revealing observations. Consider the following:

- *On equity*: "[h]owever, emphasis on equity in a wrong manner is dangerous... too much emphasis on equity can only perpetuate poverty...".
- *On the consideration of alternatives and options*: "[o]nly developed countries, which have the time and money to explore all possible alternatives to dams can afford, if they wish, may wish (*sic*) to opt for such exercises on 'Options Assessment' as brought out in WCD Report".
- *On the principle of consultation and participation*: "[i]f for every single project decision, informed participation and acceptance by all groups is to be carried out, the decision making would become a long drawn, protracted process". (...) "'Free, prior and informed consent' as suggested by the Commission is likely to render all major project proposals of significance subject to purely local perspective and evaluation, negating the regional and national planning of economic development"; (...) "[t]ribals and even non-tribals affected by the project would understandably view the dam proposal from their own perspective...".

The explanation for that extremely negative response to the WCD's report was twofold. First, against the background of the prolonged and bitter battle over the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) and the increasing polarisation of attitudes on the large dam controversy, the Indian Water Resources Establishment tended to react with dismay to the very idea of the setting up of a World Commission on Dams, which seemed to them a sinister 'anti-dam' move. In particular, a reference to the 'decommissioning of dams' that figured among the many subjects for study by the Commission set alarm bells ringing: the suspicion was that this was an attempt to scuttle SSP.

Secondly, the Establishment's suspicions and hostility were particularly aroused by the membership of the Commission, which included Medha Patkar (whom they regarded as their arch enemy) and L.C. Jain (whom they considered to be her friend and sympathiser). They were therefore antagonistic to the WCD from the start.

That background conditioned Gol's attitude to WCD all along. When the WCD began its work and wanted to hold a hearing in India early in 1998, Gol was initially not averse to this, but subsequently advised WCD that the proposed hearing would be inopportune. WCD then held its first hearing in Colombo.

Sometime later, when the WCD commissioned a country study of India's experience in relation to large dams by a team of five persons, the Gol's hostility to WCD was reflected in their attitude to that team. The fact that I was a member of the team made things worse from the point of view of the Ministry. The Ministry and the Central Water Commission rejected the country study produced by the team. The final chapter of the whole story was the release of the WCD Report in November 2000, and India's comprehensive rejection of that Report.

It must be noted that the WCD was by no means an 'anti-dam' Commission. Its membership did not represent countries or governments but different points of view. If some could be regarded as opponents of large projects, there were others who were supporters; the membership included the CEO of the Australian Murray-Darling Basin Organisation, a past Chairman of the International Commission on Large Dams or ICOLD (a body of engineers), the CEO of Asea Brown Boveri (suppliers of equipment for dam-building), and so on. The WCD Report did not say that all dams were bad or that no more dams should be built. It said that past decision-making on dam projects had been bad, and proposed a number of measures to ensure good decision-making in the future. These included asking questions about rights and risks (whose rights are affected by the project? who bears the risks and social costs of the project?); about equity and social justice; about a participatory, consultative approach to project planning and implementation; and about securing the 'free, prior, informed consent' of those likely to be affected by the project. Some of these were principles earlier accepted even by the Government of India, but now they came to seem negative and loaded against projects. The feeling that the approach and principles proposed by the WCD would make it more difficult to push projects through was shared by governments with large dam-building programmes (e.g., China, India), project planners and managers, consultants, contractors and equipment suppliers to projects. The World Bank, which along with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) had been initially instrumental in the establishment of the WCD in an effort to break the pro-dam/anti-dam logjam, became cold towards the WCD because it (at the official level, if not at the Board level) was anxious to get back into the business of lending for big-dam projects from which it had stepped back following the Narmada and other controversies. A senior World Bank official visited all the Governments in this region and mobilised opinion against the WCD's Report. (This statement is based on informal personal knowledge and cannot be substantiated with documentary evidence.)

In February 2001 the Asian Development Bank held a meeting at Manila to discuss the WCD Report. (I was an invitee.) At that stage the ADB had an open mind and wanted to consider the WCD guidelines, but the World Bank was definitely against those guidelines. The Government of India did not participate in that meeting (as was only to be expected), but other Governments of the region were well represented. The leader of the Chinese team expressed himself very strongly and made points similar to those made by the Indian MOWR in their posting on the Web. The representatives of other Governments, namely, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Viet Nam, etc, were more restrained in their language, and were prepared to find some merit in the Report, but in essence they were all against the approach and procedures suggested in the Report. All these countries had dam-building programmes, and felt that their efforts might be hampered by the Report, if it were to gain general acceptance. It must be noted that while the voices of the dam-building Governments were prominent – that of China was particularly strident – other points of view, such as those of project-affected people, environmentalists, etc, were not much heard at the meeting; the voices of NGOs were few and muted.

In fact, what we had was not a reasoned argument. The attempt was not to *deal* with the WCD Report, but to discredit it so that it did not have to be taken seriously. The dam-builders seemed to have decided to undertake a campaign towards this objective. This was clear from the letter No. 395/CPU/IHA dated 22 March 2001 from the Indian Committee of the International Hydropower Association (signed by C.V.J. Verma, Executive Chairman and President, International Commission on Large Dams) to the Indian Planning Commission, which said, among other things, the following:

A copy of Proceeding Volume of the Conference on Water Resource Development Irrigation & Hydropower at New Delhi on 1-2 February 2001. The Conference was a great success and substantially benefited not only our country but also a number of other developing countries. By and large the benefits have been:

1. For the first time the three organisations – International Commission on Irrigation & Drainage, International Hydropower Association and International Commission on large Dams have come on a single platform and these represent 25,000 members in 81 countries.
2. Government of India have issued official rejection of the report of WCD.
3. We were able get the WCD meeting scheduled in India for 12th February 2001, basically for propaganda purpose, cancelled.
4. Acceptance of the WCD report by funding agencies, specially the World Bank, scheduled on 15th/16th February, 2001, did not succeed by WCD in spite of their high profile.
5. Similarly, we could interact with other countries specially China who could also influence ADB not to accept the WCD report.
6. Finally at the Cape Town meeting in the last week of February 2001 considerable amount of pressure could be exerted by Forum members so as not to accept the WCD report on toto.
7. The various industries connected with power development in the developed countries especially in USA, were advised so that they could join hands with the developing countries to oppose the acceptance of WCD report in their own interest.
8. We have been able to address President, OECD not to accept the WCD report in their meeting in Paris.

The motivations behind this campaign may have been entirely honourable. Quite possibly, those who were interested in building dams (governments, international organisations related to dam-building) were convinced that the world needed many more dams; that this constituted 'development' and was for the good of humanity; that the WCD Report was likely to come in the way of this noble enterprise; and therefore that it was necessary to eliminate that danger. It was, however, clear that we were no longer in the realm of civil discourse; this was war. This explained the ferocity of the attack on the WCD (perceived as the enemy) and the attempts to denigrate anyone associated with it in any way.

The confrontation over the Narmada project, and the strong official resentment of the adverse report (1992) on the Narmada Project by the Independent Review (or 'Morse Commission') instituted by the World Bank, had already had the unfortunate consequence of a hardening of the official attitude, and an aggressive defensiveness about big-dam projects. There was a strident reassertion of the engineering point of view, and a downgrading of other perspectives which had begun to gain modest ground. (This was what I had referred to earlier as a retreat from enlightenment.) Unfortunately, the establishment of the WCD unwittingly accentuated the polarisation even further, at least in India. The hardening of the official attitude became even more pronounced. My association with the WCD as a consultant and a member of the country study team made me even more of a *persona non grata* with the Ministry of Water Resources, the Central Water Commission and the engineering community in general.

I fell further into disfavour in the context of the Government's announcement of a gigantic project known as the 'Inter-linking of Rivers Project' (ILR) in August 2002. The project envisaged some 30 river-links, and was based on the logic of transferring waters from flood-prone rivers to drought-prone areas, or alternatively, from (the so-called) water-surplus basins to water-deficit basins. It was put forward as the answer to all future water problems of India. The 30 river-links would involve around 80 (or more) dams and reservoirs and extensive canal systems. It was hailed by many as a grand vision, and criticised by many others as both unnecessary and undesirable. I was one of the earliest and strongest critics of the project. I wrote extensively on the subject. The engineering establishment set much store by the project and were made angry by my criticisms. The dormant official disapproval of me became alive and active.

One aspect of this episode deserves mention. Among the many points that I made regarding the ILR project, one related to its international dimensions. I pointed out that any diversion of waters from the Ganga might cause apprehensions in Bangladesh. Besides, India had a Treaty with Bangladesh on the sharing of Ganga waters, and the ILR project would have to be examined for consistency with the Treaty.

These cautionary observations made me very unpopular in the Ministry of Water Resources. Soon enough, Bangladeshi commentators raised objections to the Indian project, and some of them quoted my articles. That did not enhance my popularity with the Ministry.

The ruling coalition that announced the ILR project in 2002 was succeeded by another Coalition Government in 2004. The new Government did not abandon the project but was unenthusiastic about implementing it. The project went into the doldrums, and the critics of the project were relieved. However, very recently, the project has been unexpectedly revived because our activist Supreme Court, in a judgment dated 27 February 2012, has directed the Government to set up an Implementing Committee. The argument about the project has begun afresh.

Finally, it is necessary to say a few words on the probable reasons for both the dam debate and the argument about the ILR project becoming so emotionally charged.

A benign view of dams has prevailed for a century and a half in India. Dams have been regarded as wholly beneficial, and their builders have been considered great benefactors. As already mentioned, some early British engineers (Sir Arthur Cotton, Col. John Pennycuick) were deified. The engineering profession has commanded great respect, and it has been customary to talk in reverent tones about 'great engineers' or 'eminent engineers'. The tradition established by Cotton and others has been absorbed by successive generations of Indian engineering students. A certain professional pride and a sense that they are pursuing a socially useful profession has been inculcated in them, and quite rightly so. For a century and a half it has been taken for granted that it is good to build dams for irrigation or for the generation of electric power. Against that background, it must have been extremely disorienting for the profession to be told that dams are not necessarily benign, that they could do a great deal of harm, and that dams must not be built unless they are unavoidably necessary. A highly respected profession which had taken for granted its value to society suddenly found its self-esteem undermined.

Apart from the disorientation caused by the questioning of longstanding professional beliefs, there was another aspect to this issue. With colonial rule came not only western engineering but also the underlying Promethean attitude to nature. The approach of conquest over nature, of controlling or subduing nature to serve human needs, was unconsciously absorbed. This too became thoroughly ingrained, and a realisation that this may not be the right relationship to nature is not easy to accept or internalise. This links the debate over dams to the larger debate on 'development' vs the environment and to the still larger issue of a challenge to the current idea of 'development'. These debates and challenges are also highly disorienting. (The denial of climate change by some is a manifestation of that disorientation.)

There was yet another element in the anger caused by criticisms of the Interlinking of Rivers Project: the magic spell of gigantism. I am not referring to the magnitude of the financial investments involved and the excitement that this might have caused in some quarters, but to professional exhilaration at a tremendous engineering challenge. At the bureaucratic level, the Ministry of Water Resources (earlier not counted among the more important Ministries) found the new prominence that the project brought to it very agreeable. At the professional (engineering) level, there was also an element of nationalistic sentiment involved. In the Water Resources Establishment there was much admiration (tinged with envy) for China for having boldly undertaken the massive Three Gorges Project, and a feeling of regret that India had nothing comparable to show. There was also the rueful managerial feeling that while 'authoritarian' China was able to 'get things done' easily and efficiently, it was far more difficult for 'democratic' India to get anything done at all. From such a point of view, this project was a shot in the arm: here was India's version of Three Gorges. (I cannot quote chapter and verse for this, but heard many such candid remarks in discussions.) The project was an engineering and managerial dream. Criticisms of the project were impediments to the realisation of that dream and caused dismay.

A further factor was the changing economic philosophy. The ideological change from socialism to capitalism was accompanied by the growing influence of the perspective of the corporate world on policy-makers and on civil society. Economic growth at 8 or 10%, the performance of the stock market, ratings of the country by credit-rating agencies, and the rate of inflow of foreign private investment: these became the mainstream (i.e. corporate and urban middle class) concerns. In that ambience, the urging of environmental concerns or of alternatives to big projects or of compassion for hardships caused by such projects, and the questioning of the underlying idea of development, were felt to be out of step with the spirit of the times, and were apt to be received with impatience and annoyance.

In conclusion, let me repeat that this is indeed a personal story, but it also throws light on the changes in values, orientations and attitudes that were taking place in the state and society, and how these affected my relationship with the Indian Water Establishment.

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