Original article

Dams as Spaces of Architecture: State Iconography in Jammu and Kashmir

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Abstract:

Dams have only been understood as hydraulic projects and no attention has been given to the production of space and place in and around these projects. This article looks into the production of spaces due to these projects and the politics that ensues. This article would look into the claim making and state formation processes that these dams entail.

Keywords: State Formation, Claim Making, Production of Space

INTRODUCTION

Space is determined by the capability to control or diminish flow of certain material information between two objects (Parsae, Parva, & Karimi, 2014). Despite the objectivity in the spatial and temporal difference between the two objects, the material subjectivity of a particular economic structure of the society do play their role in shaping the idea of space. Herein perception becomes important in space creation (Parsae, Parva, & Karimi, 2014). Analyzing this perceptual context, we define space in terms of its dialectical relation between external and internal dimensional structure of an architecture. The external structure comprises of the design and material constituents of architecture while the abstractive internal structure is the socio-economic significance of the architecture. The internal abstractive structure has been perception creating objectivity in the architecture. The perception created around this external structure more frequently exceeds the scientific productive interaction of human with nature.

Dams are one such architectural creation created for the transition of resources from the disposed class toward the class that has the control over capital. By doing so it also creates an ecological imbalance thus hindering the scientific symbiotic relation between man and nature. The two objects in this i.e. disposed and capital owning class create a space wherein the transfer of material in form of resource occurs. The internal structure in dam is the ruling class politics of resource appropriation and management of monopoly over resources while the external is the cemented phallus like built-ins. Space provides the base for place formation. And here in case of dam we see that the external structure of it do creates disciplined place.

State Formation and Claim Making

We need has to note that architecture and more aptly Dams in the third world countries has a specific social and spatial connotation within the colonial setup (King). The connotation is specifically linked to the dominant discourse within the theory of knowledge. In this way architectures are a tool to reproduce and reinforce the hegemonic influence of the imperial capital. With a specific culture milieu this built in environments and urban designs give a commonsensical sanction to the process of semi colonialism within the third world countries under the garb of globalization.

State Formation and Claim Making

Dams are the designed in a way that beacons power assertion in a space to reproduce the dominant theory of knowledge and the sociological discourse associated with it (Leslie, 2005). Jacques Leslie writes that making of Hoover dam was a miraculous design that had enforced the US neo imperialist forces in settling among the third woorld countries, the allied victory in World War 2 depended upon the warplane and the ships built by the help of hydroelectric current (Leslie, 2005). But for the dams the realization of the America`s super power would not have been possible. Dams as a structure defines the will of nation and is in this way maintains the nationalism of the dominant class of the society (Leslie, Deep Water Pg.4, 2005).

Space claim by the imperial forces through the project of modernism like the large water projects has increased the imperial assertion over the resources of the third world nations. What begin as the capitalists` architectural need to facilitate capital accumulation finds its utility in the imperialist stage of capitalism where these modernist structure became symbols of accumulation by dispossession (Roy, n.d.). It comes as no surprise that the
project of building large dams sees its boom in the period when the neo-liberal projects were initiated, “conquering not with swords and horses but with a ruse of corporate social responsibility and market-based mechanisms, the plunderers of the 21st century are bolstered by a deepening and globalized neoliberal agenda. The package of privatizations, deregulations, and loosening of restrictions on trade and finance prescribed under the “Washington Consensus” for global trade — widely implemented by institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in the 1990s — tipped the balance of power towards the interests of corporate global elites” (Cowman, 2016). All these neo-liberal projects have increased the export of dam as a cultural and economic capital in the underdeveloped regions of the world. The semi-colonial status of the developing countries and the oppressed nationalities has been strengthened by resource extracting models, the perfect examples of which are the dams.

Resource exploitation has to be normalized in the sense which has been best described by Simone De Beauvoir that the exploited seeks pleasure in the exploitation (Beauvoir, 1949). This is usually done by associating the teleological understanding of water with the modern technological thus when in the semi-feudal country like India the dams are built the Prime Minister terms it “Temples of Modern India” (Express, 2003). Perhaps the godly image of the imperial capital as manifested in the dams compels the comprador government to use the popular religious connotation to facilitate the major hydro power projects. Like Indra the god for rain in India Nehru asks us to rely on dams to tame the river water for the benefits of big landlords and capitalists in India and abroad. The assumed helplessness of the government in third world countries for the presence of an alternative to development project other than the construction of big dams, makes the capital spend in dam holy. Dams becomes the symbols of the nationalism, that rests on development in a bourgeoisie sense but still bind to the feudal roots, giving birth to all together a different understanding and purpose for these big dams in the third world states and in the regions that has been the victim of expansionism by the comprador bourgeoisie government of these states.

Jacques Leslie states that the dams are the collective manifestation of idea of the nation (Leslie, Deep Water Pg.4, 2005). With this idea the Indian and Pakistani state brings in their own assertive ideas of nationalism in the national space of Jammu & Kashmir (Navlakha, 2009). This nationalism unlike the highly galvanized post truth (vishwanathan, 2016) rhetoric is based on material reality that is surfaced around dams. The primitive mean of accumulation by dispossession finds new scope of accumulation and expansionism in the disputed geopolitical space within the Indian subcontinent (harvey, 2004). Dams thus becomes a major tool to implement the pro imperial policies aided by a several other modernist architectures. The core peripheral relation that had a continuing links even before the modern industrial capitalism gets revived in two ways, one by resources extraction from periphery to core and another by policy dictates from core to periphery. This central periphery relation has been termed ‘imperialistic’ by K. Ekolom and J. Friedman (ekholm & friedman, 1982). In the imperialist age of global capitalism what has been termed by Lenin as the highest stage of capitalism land grab and the loot of resources by the financial monopoly capital have been accelerated by setting of comprador bourgeoisie power in the third world subcontinental regions (Lenin, 1916). The proxy work of neo imperial powers, that rose after the decay of the direct imperial rule has made inroads into the geographical space of the oppressed nationalities (lamb, 1994) (ankit, 2014). Ankit in his doctoral work points to the urgency for the capitalist imperial world order to facilitate Indian expansionism in Jammu and Kashmir so as to mask the growing perspective of a communist revolution (ankit, 2014).

The presence of India and Pakistan, funded and supported by the same imperial powers in Kashmir saw its legitimization through dam construction. Starting from Bhakra Nangal dam to the latest Bursar Power Project Kashmir has acted as the constant resource supplying region for the cause of the Indian big bourgeoisie and for its bureaucratic capitalist elites. This has been done at the cost of the people and their lives, the intervention of Indian state in the region has not just arrested the development stage of the nation but has also brought poverty and loss of habitat for the Kashmiris (Ahmad, 2016). The noble act of development centered around architectures and particularly dams are so normalized that they had come to be known as the symbol of modern and progressive Kashmir. There would have been no nobler act of the space claiming than the one which is discussed here.

ACCUMULATION BY DISPOSSESSION

Water retaining capacity for human development has been built since time immemorial (BISWAS & TORTAJADA, 2001) as since and technology advanced and the state changed its form the water structures became a tool to control people and ensure that a particular type of economic structure is reproduced. In India the tradition irrigation system was replaced by the Weberian strong military features that disregarded the traditional social networks among the farmers (Singh, 1990). The role of civil engineers in the irrigation structures in the third world nations under the direct imperial power acts a medium to homogenize the triumph of man over the nature (Singh, 1990). It became clear that irrigation was used as an end to facilitate the imperial loot of the resources rather as a hand maiden for the agricultural development. The shift from the small scale dam to the larger the good concept in dam and irrigation has been the direct result of the modernist architectural intervention in the traditional economy of the colonies (BISWAS & TORTAJADA, 2001).

Deeper examination of the dams will bring to our vision that dams are just the instrument of ‘development’ and are not per se development. But when we talk of dam then we probably miss the larger question which drives the need for big dams. The larger question is of development. Development which this dams claim to do has to be questioned (Bharathi,2010).

With the rise in the industrial set up, the rising capitalist mode of production largely relied on the natural space which provides ample opportunity and new ventures for the multiplication of capital. The shift to the exchange value dominance of the resource appropriated from the nature has been the cause of the declining environmental sustainability (COX, 2000). The shift was marked by the increasing penetration in the other part of the world the national character of the bourgeoisie since its inception has been revolutionary it has made the society cosmopolitan, Marx and Engel in the communist manifesto point to that “The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country” (Marx & Engels, 1948). The expanding and increasing advancement in the capitalist economy gave rise to the imperialist stage in capitalism, that is marked by monopoly state capital (Lenin, 1916). The decaying rule of direct imperialism gave way to the semi colonial states in the third world countries, the neo imperial powers preserved their rule by such architectural development of which the large dams are the examples. Construction of large dams became
very popular medium to preserve the 'original sin of simple robbery' under capitalism which Harvey calls 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey, 2004). Large dams came into discourse through the TVA (Tennessee Valley Authority) that was proposed in America in 1986. This was marked by an increased awe among the people around the globe (BISWAS & TORTAJADA, 2001).

Big dams became synonyms to 'development', the whole imperial power and its structure was deployed to make the TVA type projects a major victory that would mark the stage of semi-colonialism in the third world resources rich regions. Countries like India and Egypt followed the TVA like projects (BISWAS & TORTAJADA, 2001) that was made possible through huge imperial funding for the big dam projects. Eminent leaders of the big comprador bourgeoisie within these semi-colonial states welcomed the funding of the World Bank for the dam projects. The leaders of Ghana and Egypt, Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah and President Gamal Abdel Nasser respectively saw in this structures the emancipation of their country from the colonial legacy (BISWAS & TORTAJADA, 2001). President Nasser termed this as the 'second independence' of the Egypt (Verhoeven, 2012). But what they deliberately hid was the process of semi-colonialism through these projects. Riding on the interest of the big bourgeoisie at home and the imperial bourgeoisie the semi-colonial state like India transports the same modernist architecture in the frontier space so as to please imperial powers while at the same time accelerating the big bourgeoisie expansionism.

In Kashmir too the imperial capital has made inroads by riding on the back of the semi-colonial Indian state (Ankit, 2014). The geo-political location of Kashmir on the points where three empires meet has made it more vulnerable to the internal contradiction among the empires. Empires stands on resources from far off places. The bourgeoisie looks for every possible natural space that can be converted into an absolute space for capital expansionism. The profit motive drives the national bourgeoisie out of his nation state to the last possible space in the universe. Kashmir being the heaven of the earth cannot be expected to have been singled out from the imperial sight (Suhail, 2018). The brutal regime of Dogra Empire was brought into Kashmir by the British who had gifted the region to the Dogra ruler named Maharaja Gulab Singh for 75 lakh Nanak Sahi. The rule brought havoc to the peasantry class. The exploitative feudal monarchy was set up, the free land ownership by the peasantry was put to an end, all the land was brought under the control of the king while the feudal lords were made intermediator between Maharaja and the peasantry (Suhail, 2018). Huge taxes were collected from the peasantry class. The period saw the emergence of feudalism in 1931 similar such revolt sprouted (Suhail, PIECES OF EARTH The Politics of Land Grabbing in Kashmir P.77, 2018).

This was the first indirect loot of the resources by the imperial power in Kashmir facilitated by a puppet monarchical type of government. But the revolt of the peasantry was not wasted, after the annexation of Jammu and Kashmir by the Indian state in 1947, the government of Jammu and Kashmir made the land reform act that restricted land ownership. The land distribution was successful and has been able to eliminate the large scale ownership of land by the landlord class, the act restored the peasantry rights over the land resources (Suhail, PIECES OF EARTH The Politics of Land Grabbing in Kashmir P.79, 2018). With this it was anticipated that the act has restored the peasantry right over the resources but law which was a tool to demand passiveness from the peasantry and was an effort to make them forget the real issue of independence has been wrongly understood. Through the TVA like projects the imperial powers again made inroad into the heaven of the earth but this time the back was of the comprador bourgeoisie Indian state. The Salal dam marked the intervention of imperial and the Indian big bourgeoisie capital in the economical space of Jammu and Kashmir. From Salal to Kishanganaga the people of the Kashmir has experienced displacement and death due to the projects while the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC) has increased its turn over to many folds by depriving the Kashmiris from their land, water and forest (Suhail, PIECES OF EARTH The Politics of Land Grabbing in Kashmir P.147, 2018). The news report by Zargar mentions “76% of the total assets of NHPC are located in J&K while its generation in J&K is only around 24% of total generation. Has it come here to occupy our land instead of doing some business” (Suhail, PIECES OF EARTH The Politics of Land Grabbing in Kashmir P.147, 2018).

It is interesting to note here that the expanding semi-colonial state like India extends its bureaucratic capitalism into Kashmir, whereby the landlordism in the region of Jammu and Kashmir is replaced by semi feudal system that is increasingly shifting to bureaucratic capitalism. The intervention of the comprador big Indian bourgeoisie uses the existing feudal structure in Kashmir to amass capital for the imperial bourgeoisie. NHPC uses the class structure of the society to acquire land for the development of hydroelectric plant. They provide ample compensation to the land owners who owns the majority of land, with this they create a norm which is mandated to be followed by the middle and lower land owner. The worst affected are the peasantry, while the big absentee landlords get their compensation and resettlement the small and landless are made to starve (Suhail, PIECES OF EARTH The Politics of Land Grabbing in Kashmir P.110, 2018). The absentee landlords as in Gurez valley (the valley experienced displacement due to the Salal Hydroelectric Project) which are those who have moved to Srinagar and has obtained some government jobs are ready to accept any amount for their otherwise dead capital (Suhail, PIECES OF EARTH The Politics of Land Grabbing in Kashmir P.110, 2018). The bureaucratic apparatus ensures their share in compensation while the local landlords who traditionally enjoyed prestige are forced to part away with their feudal dominance (Suhail, PIECES OF EARTH The Politics of Land Grabbing in Kashmir P.109, 20118).

The imperial capital in Kashmir with the help of the Indian big bourgeoisie has created a condition that has been best described as a process where in the natural resources are expressly and indiscriminately exploited by the imperial capital, large scale plantations carried out in which advanced mechanized techniques are used but this is a provision to ensure flow of resources into the imperial market abroad (Lesmaterialist, 2012). Ibrahim Kaypakkaya points that: “Even if the ownerships relations, primarily large land ownerships, are dissolved at a very slow tempo, these ownerships relations keep their feudal forms of exploitation. The semi feudal forms of exploitation continue, like the duty of half a crop to the landlord, lease, usury, interest-hire. Usurious interest and lease are pumped through imperialist banks. The feudal relations continue with all their acuity in particular in the superstructure. Bourgeois democracy goes always hand in hand with the lash of feudalism. Democracy always carries a feudal character. An important part of the bourgeoisie shows semi-bourgeois, semi-feudal features. All this, namely, any feudal relationships, facilitates the indirect domination of imperialism, they are its pillars” (Kaypakkaya, 1972).
Thus though feudalism may have been disturbed due to intervention of imperial capital in the traditional economy of Jammu and Kashmir it has finds its continuation in bureaucratic capitalism. There always is a nexus between NHPC and the politician and bureaucrats Suhail brings to our notice the process through which the corporation strengthens the bureaucratic apparatus in the region while the bureaucrats use the feudal structure to facilitate accumulation by the corporations (Suhail, PIECES OF EARTH The Politics of Land Grabbing in Kashmir P.130, 2018). Suhail mentions an interview in his book wherein a peasant exposes the unholy alliance between corporation politicians and bureaucrats, he said “The sub-divisional magistrate gets blanket, oil, spices besides bribes from government” (Suhail, PIECES OF EARTH The Politics of Land Grabbing in Kashmir P.137, 2018), converting Jammu and Kashmir into a semi feudal and occupational economy.

The peasants who have the access to the office of the District Magistrate are in a position to get more of the compensation amount. The bureaucrats in J&K see an increase in their fortune through the project around big dams. This class have well served the Indian ruling class for their expansion in the region and now stands competent to share the cake of capital earned through Indian bourgeoisie’s good terms with imperialist in US and UK. But to settle the question of land grab these bureaucrats use the same feudal structure which the imperialist claim to have destroyed (Suhail, PIECES OF EARTH The Politics of Land Grabbing in Kashmir P.104, 2018). The politics of land grab through hydroelectric project like any other political economic project has to be placed within the structure designed for capital circulation (Harvey, MARX, CAPITAL AND THE MADNESS OF ECONOMIC REASON P.49, 2017). Production and realization of commodity is land centric. From the pre capitalist stage to the modern imperial stage of capitalism, land grab in the primitive non capitalist society has been undergoing a steep rise (Magdoff, 2013). For the land to be a commodity it has to be liberated from all the traditional ownership and control it had experienced. To accomplish this task every possible measure is used by the capitalists. This is very well expressed by Woody Guthrie’s song “Some will rob you with six guns, and some with a fountain pen” (Magdoff, 2013). While at some time they use both the measures to facilitate accumulation by dispossession. In doing so they change the class dynamics in the underdeveloped resource rich regions as has been seen by the rising bureaucratic power and the sustaining for feudal structure in a subtle form.

In Kashmir the Indian state through its constitutional provisions as in Article 370 has been creating a normative discourse in which the dams are seen as an architecture for the development while the law is being used to replace the populist demand of freedom by autonomy. This dogmatic nature of Indian colonial law (Supoict, 2017) that facilitates imperial capital into Kashmir has been legitimized by hydro capital. Mega hydro capital is generated through dams for which huge amount of land grab is to be facilitated. Dispossession through dam has been abounding in the region. The accumulation becomes evident in the NHPC asset value that rose to 416% from the time it entered Kashmir. Syed Ali Shah Geelani had rightly put it down “there is a full control of military here. Actually India wants to control all our natural resources. NHPC employs outside people, cut forest trees, destroy environment here. The electricity is produced for the people in India, in Kashmir we have been sufferer” (Suhail, PIECES OF EARTH The Politics of Land Grabbing in Kashmir P.146, 2018). The Kashmiri believes that NHPC is like East India Company that has no purpose to do business but rather it is a plot to ruin the nation of its resources, “our forests has been restructured. We do not have a place to graze cattle, the pathways are destroyed. We do not have clean drinking water and pure water for irrigation anymore” (Suhail, PIECES OF EARTH The Politics of Land Grabbing in Kashmir P.114-15, 2018). NHPC which was authorized by the government of India in the year 1975 with a capital of Rs 2000 million has earned more than Rs 19000 crore from the J&K-based hydro power projects during the past 14 years (YAQOOB, 2016). Every winter Kashmiris protest against the loot of the hydroelectric power from their region, Kashmiri reporter points that “J&K buys electricity for Rs 4000 Cr from power stations on its own soil” (YAQOOB, 2016).

J&K has been acting as the resource stock for the Indian cause to serve the imperial capital, while its own conditions has been deteriorating. NHPC has been acting as a sponge that sucks the resources out from Jammu and Kashmir into the hands of the Indian expansionist state and the imperial capitalists. In Jammu and Kashmir, the Indian state has used its own bureaucratic apparatus to strengthen its hold over the region state government of Jammu and Kashmir. The ‘autonomy’ granted under Article 370 has been used as the grab to channelize the cause of freedom into the demand to transfer cake among the ruling class in J&K and India. The sharing of hydro power has been used in the same matrix, the state government in J&K has been using the same mechanism in which they bargain with the Indian state to transfer the hydro power to the state government. This becomes the election manifesto for the political parties in the region of J&K. In the present government too “it is an important part of the developmental agenda of the PDP-BJP coalition government, says Deputy Chief Minister” (PTI, 2016).

It should be understood that the sharing of power between the Indian state and the government of J&K is of no avail as the resource exploitation shall remain intact. This will strengthen the colonial hold over J&K region. The sharing of hydro power if any has to be understood as the project where in the Indian big bourgeoisie uses the bureaucratic capitalist and the feudal remnants of Jammu and Kashmir to maintain the colonial hold over the region. In the year 2000 through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) the government of India has agreed to share the hydel power with the government at Jammu and Kashmir. The hydel power projects that are mentioned in MOU are Kishanganga (330 MW), Uri II (280MW), Seewa II (120 MW), Bursar (1020 MW), Pakal Dul 1000 (MW), Nimuna Bezgo (30MW) and Chutak (18 MW) (BAZAZ, 2018). This would bring some benefits to the ruling comprador class in the region of J&K but the people grievances and the question of freedom will remain unaddressed.

The CPEC project by the Chinese imperialist capital is one such program of the imperial power to create absolute space in Azad Kashmir in disguise of hydro power development. This is demonstrated by the report that highlights that “thousands of acres of agricultural land will be leased out to Chinese enterprises to set up “demonstration projects” in areas ranging from seed varieties to irrigation technology. A full system of monitoring and surveillance will be built in cities from Peshawar to Karachi, with 24-hour video recordings on roads and busy marketplaces for law and order. A national fibrotic backbone will be built for the country not only for internet traffic, but also terrestrial distribution of broadcast TV, which will cooperate with Chinese media in the “dissemination of Chinese culture”” (Husain, 2017). Accumulation by dispossession has been facilitated through such hydel project, while at the same time the strong hold over the region of Pakistan has been mandated by such imperial policy as is envisaged in the CPEC program. In an interview to Radio Pakistan in Mirpur area
of Azad Kashmir, Additional Chief Secretary Dr. Syed Asif Hussain said that “Kohala, Karot and Mahal hydro-power projects have been included in China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). He said Kohala project, being constructed on River Ihelum, will be completed in four years and it will produce 1124 megawatts of electricity. Karot hydro-power project will generate 720MW electricity after its completion in 2020. Mahal power project, which is located at the boundary of Punjab and Azad Jammu and Kashmir, will generate 640 MW electricity” (NNI, 2017).

**CONCLUSION**

Dams has also been the spot where negotiation is built for the sharing of benefit between the ruling class of the occupied and the occupier region. As has been shown by Snedden Mangla Dam royalties have been increasing since 2004, this has been the result of increasing lobbying between the two ruling class of the regions (SNEEDDEN, KASHMIR THE UNWRITTEN STORY P.175, 2013). But is worth noting here that unlike Pakistan the region of Azad Kashmir has a less oppressive feudal set up as the land ownership is equally distributed among the people there, only two percent of Kashmiris in the region do not own land and therefore the feudal dominance is hard to locate in the region (SNEEDDEN, KASHMIR THE UNWRITTEN HISTORY P.167, 2013). But the productivity in agriculture sector has been of not much avail, thus there has been more reliance on the forest products. The Pakistani state has intervened in the productive relation between forest and the people of the region, as a result there has been a rapid decline in the forested region of Azad Kashmir. Which will find acceleration in the implementation of CPEC program.

This clearly indicates the economic, social and natural concerns with which imperial capital uses the value regime at a particular spatial temporal level to accelerate its expansion. The free gift of the nature as provided by the underdeveloped region of the world provides ample scope for its appropriation for the valorization and realization in the capital cycle of circulation (Harvey, MARX CAPITAL AND THE MADNESS OF ECONOMIC REASON P.165, 2017). In the present case it is Jammu and Kashmir that provides free use value to create price.

**References**


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