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Title: Environmental Publics in the Indian Case: situated interpretations of nature and democracy in addressing resource conflicts

Despite building strong institutions Indian democracy has been unable to resolve the myriad environmental controversies across the country. Several projects such as dams, power plants and mines, have been stalled through peoples' resistance movements, forcing the nation-state to rethink the discourses of development. The Indian social science scholarship has produced a robust critique of this politics of development through ethnographic studies of grass root mobilisation, characterizing it as the 'environmentalism of poor'. This critique, while taking account of the internal contradictions within movements, drew attention to the reproduction of social inequalities legitimised through the development discourses.

My doctoral thesis aims to put this scholarship in conversation with science and technological studies and materialist political geography, to move beyond the study of competing political ideologies and shift focus to the sites of political practice where such ideologies and discourses are performed. Using the case studies of controversial bauxite mining projects in Andhra Pradesh state research will examine whether the existing institutions facilitate democratic political engagement over the matters of mining. It will be argued that these institutions (such as environmental clearance) by producing the 'objects of governance' predetermine how the concerns are to be framed and performed. Tracing the performance of 'environmental' and 'economic objects' at sites such as courts, expert committees and legislative assembly, it will be shown that politics is increasingly being displaced to expert institutions which limits the possibility of public participation and generates serious democratic deficits.