Working Paper Number 177

More Than Meets The Eye: Re-Reading Forest Policy Discourse In Bangladesh

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This article attempts to deconstruct the Bangladesh forest policy discourse by examining its key purport, narrative structure, and underlying messages. By examining the country's principal forest policy documents from a discourse *perspective, the study argues that the Bangladesh state's policy response to the 'problems' and 'development of forestry sector' has been rhetorically loaded but politically cautious, covert and calculated. Under the conditions of* governmentality*, the policy and plan prescriptions, as part of discursive regime, are presented as technical instruments for promoting efficiency and effectiveness in the forestry sector. The power and politics inherent in this exercise are constantly cloaked; yet these are pervasive, and find expression in their ability to serve certain practical systematic purposes. These are: as* classificatory devices *to categorise and name target groups and services rendered; as* narratives *to justify (or condemn) a particular scenario and course of action; as* rhetorical devices *and* discursive formations *that function to empower some (e.g. public forestry officials) and silence others (e.g. restrictions put on 'land grabbers' and 'encroachers'); as* political technologies *to depoliticize and shape 'target group' conceptions and distribution of services; as* escape hatches *to* hive off *difficult responsibility and accountability questions; and as a* lever *to muster and wield power on the part of the state. Ultimately, the policy discourse and the associated formulation exercise may contribute both to the* depoliticization *and the* bureaucratization *of the development process. The paper concludes with a call for increased research on this relatively less-explored area of study.*

February 2009

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1. INTRODUCTION

Adapting the famous metaphor from Koestler (1976), Shore and Wright (1997) viewed and explored policy as the 'ghost in the machine', and argued that: '[policy] is the force which breathes life and purpose into the machinery of government and animates the otherwise dead hand of bureaucracy' (Shore and Wright (1997:5). In this article, I attempt to shed light on the much spirited ghost of forest policy within the bureaucratic machine in Bangladesh by examining the relevant official policy discourse.

Bangladesh's official forest policy, in the main, is expressed in two key government documents produced under the purview of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF): the National Forest Policy 1994 (GoB 1995) and the Forestry Master Plan: Main Plan 1993-2012 (GoB 1994). The discussion here is based on an examination of these two materials. The analytical approach of the study is further explained in the next section.

The National Forestry Policy 1994 (hereafter NFP or the Policy) was formally 'declared for the general public' via the gazette notification (#PBM/Pori 1/FSM/Kari-34(Part)/109) on 31 May 1995. It consists of about 8 pages. After a general introduction, it has three sections: 'Preconditions for the development of the forestry sector', 'Objectives of the national forest policy', and 'Statements of the national forest policy'. The Forestry Master Plan (hereafter, FMP or the Plan) is a longer document with some 200 pages (162 pages of main text plus 6 appendices). It contains five major chapters: 'Background assessment', 'People-oriented forestry', 'Production-directed forestry', 'Institutional strengthening', and 'Plan implementation'.

The significance of the research reported in this essay is based on the following rationale. First, research on forest policy in Bangladesh is strikingly limited (see section 2). The existing literature is predominantly technical in nature. Analysing forest policy from a discourse perspective has not been done so far.

Second, in the field of development studies, there has lately been something of an upsurge in interest in the various forms and tools of discourse analysis (see, e.g., Gasper and Apthorpe 1996, Apthorpe 1986, 1996, 1997, Seidel and Vidal 1997, Gasper 1996a, 1996b, Shore and Wright 1997, Clay and Schaffer 1984, Schaffer 1984, Wood 1985a, 1985b, Crush 1995, van Dijk 1990, Potter and Wetherell 1994, Fernandez 2008). Any attempt to contribute to this global body of knowledge, especially sharing the experiences and observations from the South, is a worthwhile exercise.

Third, the general significance of policy and associated discourse analyses are now unequivocally established. Shore and Wright, among many others, make the case as follows:

> Policy has become an increasingly central concept and instrument in the organization of contemporary societies. Like the modern state (to which its growth can be linked), policy now impinges on all areas of life so that it is virtually impossible to ignore or escape its influence. ... Policy language and

> discourse provides a key to analysing the architecture of modern power relations (Shore and Wright 1997:4 & 14).

Policy ideas and discourses, as Ferguson (1990:xv) observes, are 'not just an abstract set of philosophical or scientific propositions, but an elaborate contraption that *does* something [and that] have important and very real social consequences'. Some of these functions and consequences include the 'construction of a particular structure of knowledge around [the targeted] object [of development that justifies a particular kind of intervention]; 'expansion and entrenchment of bureaucratic state power'; and 'a representation of economic and social life which denies politics and … suspends its effects' (Ferguson 1990:xiv-xv). Apthorpe too similarly emphasizes the importance of 'critical scrutiny' of policy as discourse:

> The language and the writing of policy and research on policy function as a type of power. Often the primary aim of policy is to persuade rather than inform, yet rarely is it subject to critical scrutiny (Apthorpe 1997:43).

Fourth, within the tradition of discourse analysis, 'policy documents' as analytical material have received special scholarly attention (see, e.g. Seidel and Vidal 1997, Shore and Wright 1997, Pain 1996). This study is based on an analysis of such documents. Fifth, in the realm of development and policy studies, discourse-based research has an additional significance, because, as Apthorpe (1996:20) argues, '[d]iscourse and discourse analysis in their various incarnations have not been given the prominence they deserve in development studies, and development policy studies in particular '.

The analysis is organised in four sections. After this general introduction, the next section reviews selected literature on, first, policy as discourse and the associated analytic tools, and secondly, forest policy in Bangladesh. The third section examines the forest policy documents in Bangladesh from a discourse perspective. By way of concluding, the last section recapitulates the key arguments of the study, and argues for increased research on this relatively less-explored area of study.

2. A SELECTED REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Policy as Discourse

The literature on 'policy' and 'discourse analysis' is voluminous, diverse, and not easily amenable to quick collation and articulation. A full length treatment of this literature is beyond the scope of this paper. Here I attempt to outline selected key post-positivist theoretical approaches to policy that have an immediate relevance to the purpose of my study.

Although it is convincingly argued that 'discourse analysis of policy-stating, -arguing and –justifying provides a rewarding way to consider development policy' (Gasper and Apthorpe (1996:1), the concept of 'discourse' and the method of 'discourse analysis' defy any universal definition, and all are bedevilled with heterogeneous connotations and widespread ramifications (White 1994, Potter and Wetherell 1994). Based on a

substantial review of literature, Gasper and Apthorpe (1996:2-6) collated the major contemporary uses of the term 'discourse'. These may be summed up as follows:

> (i) as an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categories through which meaning is given to phenomena;
> (ii) as an extended stretch of language or an extended discussion within a particular intellectual framework;
> (iii) as conversation, debate, exchange;
> (iv) as practice and theory – material activity which transforms nature and society and the modes of thought that inform this action;
> (v) as a modernist regime order of knowledge and disciplinary power.

One encompassing view of policy 'discourse' is to simplify it as 'a way of talking about policy and conducting policy analysis' (Apthorpe 1994:128) or 'a particular way of thinking and arguing' about policy (Seidel and Vidal 1997:59).

In the broad theoretical realm of 'policy as discourse', the tradition of 'genealogical and discursive' approaches to the understanding of policy occupies a special place, and the works of French philosopher Michel Foucault manifestly stand out. Discourse was central to the thinking of Foucault. Lemert and Gillan summarizes Foucaultian views on discourse as it relates to policy:

> Roughly put, discourse is simply language practiced. … However, as a more inclusive instance of language use, its analysis is limited neither to the customary elements of linguistics (semantics and grammar) nor to linguistic's basic units (the sentence, the proposition). Discourse, therefore, is susceptible to analysis in relation to the other aspects of social life: politics, culture, economics, social institutions (Lemert and Gillan 1982:129-130)

Foucault approached policy as *Governmentality*. Governmentality broadly refers to a series of regulatory strategies that are heterogeneous, indirect and concerned with the operations of power in modern society (McNay 1994:117-118). Governmentally often finds expression in the practice and conduct of government in the political domain. 'Government as an activity', argued Foucault, ultimately addresses the 'relations concerned with the execution of political sovereignty' (Gordon 1991:3). Essentially governmentality, as Gordon further elucidates, is the 'rationality of government' which

> thus mean[s] a way or system of thinking about the nature of the practice of government (who can govern; what governing is; what or who is governed), capable of making some form of that activity thinkable and practicable both to its practitioners and to those upon whom it was practiced (Gordon 1991:3).

Much of governmentality is about power – a 'specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means, apparatuses of security' (Foucault 1991:102). Fernandez further explains:

> 'governmentality' … describes the management of the conduct of a population through calculated and rational activity, undertaken by a multiplicity of agencies that include but are not reducible to 'the government', employing a variety of forms of knowledge and techniques (Fernandez 2008:52).

Foucault's understanding of the above issues (i.e. the mechanics and application of power, role of government, politics of institutions etc.) arose out of his insights and experiences gained in the process of applying the genealogical method to the examination of a series of disciplinary discourses such as medicine (Foucault 1975) and criminology (Foucault 1977).

The analysis of governmentality, Foucault argued, requires an examination of *Political Technologies* as this is one major 'tactic' by which power is exercised without making it too obvious. 'Political technologies' refer to rational, modern structures, systems and relationships of government that have disciplinary effects, and that provide for the methods by which a political problem is recast as a scientific or technical problem (McNay 1994:113-117, Fernandez 2008:52-53). As they relate to discourse, 'political technologies advance by taking what is essentially a political problem, removing it from the realm of political discourse, and recasting it in the neutral language of science' (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982:196). For policy analysis, political technologies have a special significance; as Shore and Wright astutely note:

> Policies are most obviously political phenomena, yet it is a feature of policies that their political nature is disguised by the objectives, neutral, legal-rational idioms in which they are portrayed. In this guise, policies appear to be mere instruments for promoting efficiency and effectiveness. This masking of the political under the cloak of neutrality is a key feature of modern power. Foucault identified 'political technologies' as the means by which power conceals its own operation (Shore and Wright 1997:8).

Political technologies call for 'expert knowledge' to frame, define and resolve problems in neutral, rational, scientific manner. Thus the role of legal-rational technocrats and institutional apparatus comes to the forefront.

Since the 1980s, the new policy literature drawing on Foucault, especially on his ideas of 'governmentality' and the associated 'tactics' such as 'political technologies' has offered new trajectories of analyses, further elaborations, and empirical insights. One dominant theme within these later works is pioneered by Schaffer (1984; also Schaffer and Clay 1984) who viewed public policy as *Political Practice*. Lamb elucidates Schaffer's view:

> … public policy [is] a political process, a process of struggle not only about content of policy – good vs bad, as it were – but also about the agenda or the terrain of policy discussions: who controlled it, how and why' (Lamb 1984:515).

In this context, Schaffer coined the term *Bureaucratics* to refer to the 'politics of bureaucracy', and suggested viewing 'policy is a matter of bureaucratics' (Schaffer 1984:185-186). Besides exploring these themes, the new wave of policy studies draws our attention to a number of other aspects of the analysis of policy as discourse, some of which are particularly relevant to the purpose of my study.

First, while examining policies as discourse, one needs to be aware of the critical 'role of language … to understand the ways in which the choice of a set of words, concepts, symbols, stylistic devices and arguments operates to frame, legitimate, and/or contest policy' (Fernandez 2008:53).

Second, as noted above, policies often entail a *Depoliticising* effect arising out of the use of 'rational' and 'scientific' language to *legitimise* policy decisions and intervention by dominant institutional apparatus (Apthorpe and Gasper 1996; Escobar 1995, Ferguson 1990, Schaffer 1984, Wood, 1985a, Harriss-White 2002).

Third, in the formulation and practice of policy, some linguistic and stylistic devices are used. A careful examination of these devices is crucial, because these produce meanings in policy discourse:

- *Framing* concerns the construction of 'problems' to be tackled by the intervention, and its logical relation to the generation of 'solutions' proposed. In the framing exercise, a particular structure of arguments about policy problems and solutions is presented, and 'alternative arguments and problems/solutions are foreclosed' (Fernandez 2008:53). The framing exercise also distinguishes between some aspects of a situation rather than others (Hajer 1993:45 cited in Gasper and Apthorpe 1996:2). In analysing policy as discourse, an awareness of 'what and whom are included and excluded' is imperative (Gasper and Apthorpe 1996:8).
- Development policy discourses often use *Tropes* -- figures of speech, where words are not used in their literal sense, for example, use of metaphors in descriptions: 'describ[ing] something as something else, to imply a similarity' (Gasper and Apthorpe 1996:7). Use of tropes often serves the political purposes of creating deliberate vagueness over, and masking the political elements in the concerned subject.
- Policies also often adopt a *Story-telling* or *Narrative* structure which wrap selective information, definition and views of problems, solutions, and priorities, and serve as a medium for communicating and making accessible a framework of meanings of that particular discourse (Gasper and Apthorpe 1996, Roe 1989, 1991, Apthorpe 1986). Narratives are 'explicitly programmatic' (Roe 1991:288); they suggest a particular course of action or intervention. Typically the logic of the narrative flows as follows: a 'problem' or 'crisis' is constructed, which, it is argued, requires urgent and immediate 'solution' in the form of an 'intervention'; the intervention is 'unique' – technical, non-political and management related.
- *Labelling* is a 'way of referring to the process by which policy agendas are established and more particularly the way in people, conceived as objects of policy, are defined in convenient images' (Wood 1985c:343). Labels are unavoidable but they also help to present 'the political as non-political' and revel processes of control, regulation and management which are largely unrecognized serves as a device through which to established or maintain their authority (Wood 1985a, 1985c, Apthorpe 1986) For example, as Fernandez notes, the widely used

  > … 'target-group' terminology determines access, through differentiation and disaggregation of individuals who are transformed into 'worthy' recipients of tightly controlled benefits (Fernandez 2008:67).

  On the implications of labelling for broader accountability and responsibility questions, Clay and Schaffer have this to say:

> The mainstream model [of development policy] coincides with the use of apparently innocuous, but again, ultimately pernicious, concepts such as 'target groups'. Most importantly, we see the implication of using this sort of representation of policy as the reduction or avoidance of responsibility (Clay and Schaffer 1984:5).

- Similarly, *Keywords* are used as banners and slogans in support of the intervention and actions proposed by particular policy. Another related style used in policy discourses is the use of *Polar words* or *Binary couples* to refer to and construct 'problems' and propose 'solutions' (e.g. 'underdevelopment' as the problem, and 'development' as the solution) (Gasper and Apthorpe 1996, Apthorpe 1996).

Fourth, discourse analysts also need to be aware of the tendency of the mainstream rationalist public policy model to view public policy as a dichotomous linear process, of two distinct but sequential phases:

> The process begins with a decisions or a sequence of activities which culminate in a decision. The decision also constitutes a 'policy'. Then there is a break. On the other side of this divide is 'policy implementation' (Clay and Schaffer 1984:3).

This dichotomy provides for habitually deploying *Escape Hatches* – justification provided for known causes of policy failure – and a host of other manipulative procedures by policy makers and bureaucracy to shirk responsibility for the outcomes of these policy practices. Fernandez summarizes Schaffer's (1984) arguments as to how this is done:

> This is accomplished first, through the introduction of sectoralism, the creating of new departments and 'hiving off' responsibility for policy agendas on to 'sectoral experts' for better management. Second, the secrecy and impenetrability of the bureaucracy protects them from liability for malfeasance. A wide range of formal and informal rules, procedures, and linguistic codes (such as 'proper channels', 'under consideration') are ways by which challenges are evaded (Fernandez 2008:53).

There is now a growing body of empirical literature examining policy as discourse in relation to the broader socio-economic and political contexts. In a seminal work, Ferguson (1990) conducts an absorbing anatomy of development policy in the southern African country of Lesotho to show how the framing and practicing of development policy as a discourse and its associated institutional apparatus together serve as an 'anti-politics machine' to depoliticize ground realities and whisk all political elements out of sight, and to expand and entrench the bureaucratic state power. Another influential work by Escobar (1995), drawing mainly on a ethnographic fieldwork in Columbia, shows how development policies continue to be mechanisms of control in the post-colonial era in the so-called Third World, and how the development apparatus generates powerful discourses to categorize and shape people's thinking. The study further reveals the process that makes peasants, women, and the environment 'objects of knowledge and targets of power under the gaze of experts'. This process of dominating, restructuring, and establishing authority by development apparatus (mainly propelled by western institutions) progresses in three stages. Batterbury and Fernando (2004) summarize

Escobar's (1995:157-158) main arguments in this regard (and these arguments have a particular significance for the research reported here):

i. The progressive identification of Third World problems, to be treated by specific interventions. This creates a 'field of the interventions of power'.
ii. The professionalization of development; the recasting of political problems into neutral scientific terms, leading to a regime of truth and norms, or a 'field of the control of knowledge'.
iii. The institutionalization of development to treat these 'problems', and the formation of a network of new sites of power/knowledge that bind people to certain behaviors and rationalities.

Besides these two pieces of widely influential research, a number of other studies introduce important empirical insights and lessons. Pain (1996) shows the negative implications of construction of particular themes (e.g. 'mountainous', 'isolated') in the development policy discourse of Bhutan. Moore (1996) examines the changing patterns of American discourse on democracy in Africa and the associated political implications. Drawing on a case study of the Irish itinerant community, Schaffer (1985) unravels the 'peculiar' ways of framing problems and deploying labels to people in order to 'manufacture' justification for delivering services by the policy makers. Glaser (1985) investigates how social and economic elites 'appropriate and change' certain axioms through the use of labels in the policy discourse that constrain the chances for development of the urban lower income groups in Colombia. Similarly, Zetter (1985) and Wood (1985b) shed light on the complex politics inherent in the processes of development policy labelling, 'access', and 'target-group' terminologies in the respective empirical contexts of refugees in Cyprus and rural development projects in Bangladesh, respectively. Seidel and Vidal (1997) investigate the implications of the three discourses -- 'medical', 'gender in development' and 'culturalist' -- on the conception and management of HIV/AIDS epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa. With a more exclusive focus on policies as 'political technologies', a number of studies have shared regional empirical experiences and insights. Vike (1997) explores relationships between reform and resistance in the context of local government-sponsored elderly care policies in a Norwegian industrial community. Hyatt (1997) observes how tenant management policies in Great Britain 'engineered and administered' a particular environment and image of 'the social' person and 'society as a laboratory' that are amenable to intervention through application of various technologies such as urban planning, hygiene, and health. Drawing on her doctoral fieldwork in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, Fernandez's (2008) anatomy of the Indian anti-poverty policy reveals interesting details of the working of various political technologies and the 'policy-implementation dichotomy', and their profound implications for actual policy outcomes. Harriss (2008) also offers insights into how the United Kingdom health policy practice systematically depoliticizes the essentially political problem of inequality in health service delivery -- especially as it relates to Asian ethnic communities. Examples of similar case studies concerning various sectors and aspects of policy as discourse and practice include: Clay (1984) on the rationalization of policy planning by establishment of the Special Planning Units in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka; McCarthy (1984) on policy implications for rural Bangladeshi women as the 'target group'; Harriss-White (2002) on the complex layers of

politics involved in the setting of agricultural policy agendas in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu; and Potter and Wetherell (1994) on the making and reception of a television programme (titled 'Cancer: your money or your life' on 'Channel 4') about the politics of cancer charities.

From this extensive literature, in my (re)reading of forest policy of Bangladesh I have had to be selective in my use of its theoretical and analytical ideas, tools, and considerations. For reasons of tractability, in particular this study draws on the following core concepts:

- concepts and manifestations of 'governmentality' and its associated tactics, notably 'political technologies',
- the process and consequences of 'depoliticization', and the apolitical representation of (essentially political) subjects in policies, and
- the application of various rhetorical, linguistic and stylistic devices and their smoothing effects on the construction or description of selected political elements or contexts in policy documents.

My choice of the above three themes is influenced by a twofold consideration. First, these themes constitute the core of the mainstream (especially Foucaultian) analysis of policy discourse as a political process. Secondly, these themes can be studied through an examination of the policy documents and secondary literature — even in the absence of a full-length fieldwork or empirical investigation as ideally called for (see section 4). These themes traverse and cut across our exploration of the policy documents in this paper, and the main observations arising out of this examination are summarized in the concluding section.

In examining Bangladesh forest policies my method is what may be called an 'emancipatory reading' (Apthorpe 1996) or 'reasoned reflection' which concerns 'a disciplined examination of *both* text and context as complementary' (Gasper and Apthorpe 1996:5) and a 'critical reflection about the assumptions in any policy [and its] political values' (White 1994:508). Further, while examining the overt contents (i.e. texts, stories) of the policy discourse, it is imperative to keep an eye on the wider social, political and historical contexts within which the policy texts are produced and told. At this point, however, it is important to note that the text that follows does not make any claim for a 'neutral' or 'apolitical' representation of the subject. As Sparkes rightly argues:

> [No] text [can be] seen as neutral and innocent representations of the realities of others. The days of innocence are gone. All of us, as positioned authors, are clearly implicated in the construction of our text, and this needs to be acknowledged (Sparkes 1995:189).

In relating and locating my analysis within its larger context, I review historical evidence and contemporary secondary sources. I respond to the issue of impossibility of 'objectivity' in a number of ways: by being aware of it; by cross-checking the literature; and by relying on the key literature that has a reputation for empirical and/or methodological thoroughness.

Forest Policy Studies in Bangladesh

Forest policy research in Bangladesh is generally limited. The available literature considerably varies in terms of quality, analytic orientation, and methodological approaches. Some work merely offer a compilation of the official policy statements (e.g. Banik 2002), while others contain limited legal and technical interpretations or a critique of particular policies and associated regulations (e.g. BELA 1996, Banik and Khan 2001, Roy and Halim 2001, Gain 2001). General overviews of the policies are also available; but most of these works are superficial in their analyses and interpretations (e.g. Ali 1991a, 1991b, Wadud 1989, Anon. undated). While discussing forest or natural resource management practices in general or the limitations of Bangladesh forestry, a number of studies have briefly touched upon 'policy issues' (e.g. Hossain undated, Gain 1998, Chakma *et al.* undated, Halim *et al.* undated). These works often focus on institutional weaknesses and constraints on policy 'implementation' or on the effects of policies on a certain 'aspect' or 'component' of forest management e.g. 'participatory forestry'. A few donor-led 'commissioned studies' (mainly consultancy reports) are also available that discuss policy matters mainly with the aim of recommending roles for the government and the donors concerned (e.g. Chowdhury and Hossain 2008, Khan 2001). Over the years, the government has also commissioned 'specialist committees' or 'task forces' to review the performance of the forestry sector (including a focus on forest policies and legislative frameworks), and recommend ameliorative measures. Notable among such reports are Task Force (1987) and Rashid (1986).

Academic literature on the subject - with reasonable analytical depth or rigour - is strikingly exiguous. Millat-e-Mustafa (2002) presents a historical review of forest policies since the British colonial times. Based on a secondary review, the study highlights the processes leading to the growth of authoritative forest administration in this part of the Indian subcontinent and government-led revenue optimization. A few empirical studies examine the effects and implications of state policy changes for forest based communities in various parts of the country. These studies adopt different analytic and methodological perspectives. From mainly a 'political ecology' angle, Rasul (2003, 2005, 2007) assesses forest policy induced changes among shifting cultivators in the Chittagong Hill Tracts region of Bangladesh. Khan (1998a) offers a relatively thorough examination of historical and archival records on forest policies to trace the evolution of these policies from the pre-colonial period to the late 1990s. In an explanation of the process of 'alienation', the study also examines the impact of such policy changes at the sub-national level, and identifies two broad trends that are argued to have continued to date: the progressive commercialization of forestry practices, and the result systematic alienation of the local communities. Roy and Halim (2002) also investigate the effect of changing state policies (including forest policies) on the structure and use of Village Common Forests (forested areas that are used by village communities on a collective basis and regarded as their common property) in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and unravel a process of 'state appropriation of village commons' through various policy and institutional measures. Roy (1987) offers some brief but interesting insights into the inherently commercial character of forestry development planning in Bangladesh. Based on historical and official documents, Ali (2002) offers an interesting analysis of the

changes in the major attitudes of forest users towards forest and land use issues (e.g. illegal harvesting, encroachment and shifting cultivation). He argues that 'scientific forestry' introduced during the British regime had a strong influence on the people of Bangladesh, and that the continuation of the forest policy after independence ensured those changes became 'socially embedded' and path dependent. Although the article claims to have attempted a 'discourse analysis', there is no explanation as to what is actually meant by the term 'discourse'. Moreover, the use of the term is not consistent in the study; in one place it talks of 'discourse analysis on people's attitude' (p.214), but elsewhere it is changed to mean 'discourse analysis on administration' (p.215). Despite this reconditeness, some of the study's conclusions are insightful. Tracing the links between the dismal state of forest loss and successive state policies, for example, the article concludes that:

> … the attitude of people towards forest land use for fuel, food and shelter has developed over a long period of deprivation. Such deprivation originated from the malpractice of policies and maltreatment of forest users by the departmental administration. When the forests were reserved and people's right of use was taken away, they concluded that the forest was no longer their own. The alienation of people from the forest made them wasteful in their use of the forest and reluctant to create new forests … It is suggested that while the difficulties of forest land use are not solely attributable to one policy or another that attitudes might have been different if policy instruments were designed in a way to avoid alienation and instead invited people's participation (Ali 2002:220).

Muhammed *et al.* (2008) conduct an analytical review of successive forest policies together with a questionnaire-based interview with 24 'experts' to identify the 'strengths and weaknesses' of the policies. The study concludes that the first two forest policies (1894 and 1955) were 'exploitative' and 'regulatory', while the third policy (1979) contained 'contradictory elements' and 'inconsistent statements'. It considers the current forest policy of 1994 (the one I attempt to examine here) to be 'the most elaborate policy in the history of the country' and claims that participatory social forestry has been 'institutionalized under this policy'.

As the above review of literature suggests, discourse analysis of forest policies remains almost an unexplored area of research in Bangladesh.

3. RE-READING THE BANGLADESH FOREST POLICY AS A DISCOURSE

In this section, I attempt to deconstruct the Bangladesh forest policy discourse which typically follows a 'narrative structure'. Development policy and planning, as noted in the preceding section, often employs a narrative structure comparable to the 'archetypal folktale' or 'story' (Roe 1989, 1991). Gasper and Apthorpe (1996:9; also Apthorpe 1986) outline the standard sequence of such a 'folktale':

> A problem (often a 'crisis') is encountered; it will be 'solved' through the epic endeavour of a hero (the project/policy), who faces and overcomes a series of trials (constraints), and then lives happily ever after.

A careful reading of the forest policy documents in Bangladesh discerns the above structure. In the case of Bangladesh forestry, the logic of the narrative flows as follows:

> Presentation of a (grave) 'Crisis' => requiring (immediate and urgent) 'Solution' => the solution should come in the form of a (technical, apolitical) 'Intervention' => the intervention will require certain 'Preconditions' to be met => the intervention must be led and managed by 'Technically Qualified Experts' and 'Specialists' => once the intervention is thus planned and formulated, its actual 'Implementation' process will have to be separately contemplated and executed.

In tracing and elucidating the order of the above narrative, in what follows I examine the key purport, phases, and underlying message of the forest policy discourse in Bangladesh. This examination of the policy documents is informed by the three themes (governmentality, depoliticization, and the application of rhetorical-linguistic devices) identified in the earlier section. We return with a summary of the key observations in relation to the themes in the concluding section. By way of setting the scene for the following analysis, however, a note on the design and stated importance of the policy together with its key players may be useful.

The Plan, the Protagonists and the Legitimacy

In its 'Introduction', the FMP has the following to say about the key authors and actors in the planning exercise:

> Plan preparation was by a 26-man team of local counterparts, national and international consultants spanning a 20-month period from October 1991 to May 1993. Ministry of Environment and Forests seconded a part time Project Director, four fulltime and four part time counterparts. Three long-term counterparts came from the Bangladesh Forest Department and one was from the Department of Environment. Bangladesh Forest Research Institute provided two of the short term counterparts and Bangladesh Forest Industries Development Corporation two. Bangladesh Consultants Ltd and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations fielded six and three national consultants, respectively. FAO has also provided two international consultants while Sandwell Inc and Reid Collins Ltd supplied seven specialists, including the Team Leader (FMP, p1).

As it is plain to see from the above, the FMP has been an exclusive show of 'specialists', 'consultants' and 'counterparts'. The institutional 'partners' in this exercise were the Asian Development Bank (ADB Technical Assistance # 1355-Bangladesh), United Nations (UNDP/FAO # BGD/88/025), and Government of Bangladesh. Whom the document calls 'counterparts' are in fact career government officials -- a good number of whom are forestry specialists themselves.

The document (FMP) was thus developed by a group of technical experts with virtually no institutional involvement of other relevant sections of the society: NGOs, pressure groups, community organizations, forest-dependent rural communities and indigenous peoples, academia, and researchers. The only indication of any external consultation in

the planning exercise is found under a subsection titled 'coordination', which informs us about 'holding three public forums' (meetings) attended by 'invited participants including other government agencies, NGOs, private industry, media, donor representatives and forest officers' (FMP, pp.1-2). There is no evidence in the document to suggest any involvement of political parties at any stage of the policy formulation exercise.

Moreover, the actual drafting of the document was done exclusively by commercial consultants. The Main Plan was authored by a 5 member team of consultants (namely: R. McFarlane, C. Chandrasekharan, C.Q. Ghani, P.K. Manandhar, and W. Treygo), and except one, all others were 'international experts' 'fielded' by international development and consulting agencies. The only 'national expert' was a retired forest department official 'contributed by' a local consulting firm -- the Bangladesh Consultants limited (FMP, 'Appendix 2: Background Information'). Additionally, we are told about a government committee led by a senior bureaucrat 'guiding' the plan formulation exercise: "A GoB-formed steering committee … chaired by the Secretary MOEF [Ministry of Environment and Forest] guided the planning team" (FMP, p.1)

In the case of NFP, the document arose out of the suggestions and recommendations of the team responsible for formulating the FMP. The FMP contained detailed analyses on policy, and furnished the draft policy text to the government. Subsequently, the government endorsed the proposed text and recommendations of the FMP, and formally announced the Policy (NFP). Except for some cosmetic editing, the basic content and spirit of NFP are drawn from the FMP. In the preamble of the NFP document, this context of its formulation is made clear:

> In the … draft Forestry Master Plan proposals/suggestions have been put forth to amend the national Forestry Policy 1979 after detailed examination and evaluation of it in light of demand of the time and overall prevailing conditions in the forest sector … [I]n the light of the above mentioned proposals and suggestions [made by FMP] National Forestry Policy 1994 has been formulated (NFP, pp.1-2).

Although the government is quick in claiming authorship of the documents (NFP and FMP), a careful reading of the textual evidences shows otherwise. The opening sentence of the FMP reads: "[The] Government of Bangladesh, assisted by [the] Asian Development Bank and the United Nations Development Programme, is preparing a long term plan to preserve and develop the nation's forest resources" (p.1). Similarly in the first two paragraphs of the NFP the government claims to have 'formulated' the policy, but subsequently in paragraph 9, the document reads: "the government has expressed desire to *adopt* the following things as a part of the National Forest Policy" (NFP, p.2, emphasis added). The 'following things' refer to the draft texts prepared and forwarded by the FMP consultants for 'adoption' by the government.

Notwithstanding such claims by the government, the content, purport and style of the Plan and the Policy were, in the main, authored by a group of international and national consultants and experts, and government's role was reduced basically to endorsing and formally approving the already drafted document.

In many parts of the documents, policies are portrayed as 'most essential' for the resolution of 'many problems' in the 'forestry sector'. FMP, for example, makes the following case about significance of policies and plans:

> Policies define agreed or settled courses for adoption by governments and institutions … Policy provides a basis for legislation, plans and prescripts, and a framework to continuously correct institutional inadequacies to maintain dynamic growth. A policy thus provides an important means to achieve goals considered essential and desirable (FMP, p.113).

The document (FMP) does not describe these 'institutional inadequacies' in any detail, except a brief listing of the 'major institutional issues' in a box (FMP, p.112). The 'issues' identified and listed are: 'Inadequacies of current National Forest Policy 1979'; 'Irrelevance of the current Forest Act 1927'; 'Weaknesses, shortcomings and conflicts in the functioning of the public forestry organisations'; 'Lack of an effective and coordinated system of human resource'; 'Poor impact and weaknesses of forestry research'; and 'Inadequate forestry extension effort' (FMP, p.112). There is no further explanation of how these 'issues' have been identified in the first place. This discussion on 'institutional issues' occurs in the document in the context of making a robust case for the urgent need and significance of developing 'appropriate' policy (FMP, p.112-115).

Based on the above rationale, both FMP and NFP argue that 'development' of the forestry sector therefore calls for formulation of 'appropriate' plans and policies – of course, by the government. Without the government's active interest and intervention, these documents tell us, 'development' of the forestry sector by 'tackling' the grave 'problems' is simply 'not possible'. The FMP further goes on to claim that one main reason for the dismal condition of the country's forestry sector concerns the fact that the governments did not give enough attention to the sector:

> Bangladesh's forestry has traditionally received very little government attention and as a result the policy, legislation, forest industries, research and forest institutions and management are not effective (FMP, p.30).

Similarly, in explaining its 'Scope', The FMP argues that 'the plan forges a long term strategy to *guide* development' (FMP, p.1, emphasis added)

Examples of this contradictory and 'peculiar privileging' (Ferguson 1990) of the role of government and government policy abound in both the documents. Under the spell of what Ferguson (1990) terms as the *Governmentalist Assumption*, it is argued that

> whatever changes have or have not happened in [the country] are to be explained by reference to government policy; … stagnation is due to government inaction and 'development' results from 'development' projects (Ferguson 1990:36-37).

'Appropriate planning' and efficient resource management are thus argued to be the 'key' to the development of the forestry sector. The NFP repeatedly mentions the government's 'initiatives' to 'formulate' various plans and policies (NFP, pp.1-2). The FMP devotes a special section on formulation of forest policy (FMP, pp.112-119) which ultimately offers the full draft text of a new policy based on which the current policy (NFP) was confirmed (FMP, 'Appendix 5'). In the same vain, FMP elsewhere argues that

participatory development in the forestry sector has not made much headway, because we have not had 'appropriate policies and guidelines', and with the introduction of 'appropriate policy', the problem will be solved:

> Piloting a strong and efficient participatory development programme in forestry is not an easy task for the forestry profession of Bangladesh … At present there are no explicit government policies and/or legal guidelines to support participatory development in forestry; this deficiency needs rectifying (FMP, p.42)

A policy and the particular solution that it entails (i.e. solving the 'crisis in the forestry sector' through attaining the 'development scenarios') are thus presented as inevitable and essential; possibilities of any other alternatives or choices are taken off the table – leaving just one 'appropriate path'. Schaffer (1984:185) warns about the implications of this style of policy practice:

> There is seductive danger in any discourse about public policy which presents its practices as inevitable and unproblematic. That, after all, obstructs the question of responsibility, either for not pursuing alternatives, or for what is discussed and what is done.

For some, however, there are clear advantages to be made out of the 'danger' regarding the 'governmentalist assumption' and 'policy privileging'. First, this style of policy practice helps to make a rational case for justifying government intervention in a neutral and apolitical fashion through 'various forestry projects' – the solution to the problem of 'forest resource depletion'. Secondly, the policies are made to look like *the* 'appropriate' course of action – 'essentially' needed to 'guide development'. Some evidence of this phenomenon, what Gasper (1996) calls, *Prescriptive Essentialism* (essentially, "to hold that a policy measure is inherently appropriate" [Gasper 1996:157]) may be found in the NFP and FMP. In several places (e.g. FMP, pp.1-3, 37-40, 113-117; NFP, preamble), government policies are portrayed as the 'guide to develop the forestry sector' and provide 'solutions' to the sector's 'crisis'. Without such plan, development is untraceable. Thirdly, this essentialist style in prescription further goes on "to call not just for virtuous policy means but provision of its prerequisites for success" (Gasper 1996:160). These prerequisites are prominently featured in FMP and NFP, and serve, as I shall discuss in later section, to expand government power and pave the way for masking accountability.

The Crisis

Here are some relevant excerpts from the documents (FMP and NFP):

> Historically, a rapidly expanding population, combined with inadequate management undermined the forest resources of Bangladesh. They continue to dwindle and below acceptable levels. At the same time, forests are gaining importance for their environmental role, in improving the biological productivity of the land and in conserving biologically. Forests are also an important resource for economic development. In the interest of the health and welfare of the Nation, there, it is necessary to reverse the trend of forest resource depletion and to promote expansion, conservation and sustainable management of this valuable resource (FMP, 1993:37).

> Forest went unprotected because of population pressure on one hand and lack of law enforcement on the other (FMP, 1993:13).
>
> … abnormal and quick depletion of forestry resources owing to numerous socio-economic factors … (NFP, preamble, p.1).

As the above suggests, the main 'crisis' identified is loss of forest cover in the country owing to growing population and ineffective enforcement of law. The predicament of the 'crisis' is variously termed as: 'forest resource depletion', 'deforestation', 'dwindling resource' etc.. The crisis is exacerbated by other related 'problems' such as 'inadequate management', 'lack of scientific management', and 'lack of appropriate policy/guidelines'. One may also note that the above cited statements contain considerable degree of ambiguity and value judgments.

In the NFP's *framing* of the problem of 'forest depletion' or 'deforestation', some facts and information are deliberately included and others are excluded. It cursorily mentions of some 'socioeconomic factors' just for once (in the preamble, p.1), but does not develop discussion of what these factors actually are. Studies on Bangladesh forestry have identified some of these factors of forest loss – including the following:

- organised commercial logging by a powerful alliance among private loggers, local government leaders, political party bosses, a section of the relevant public officials mainly from the forest, police and land-revenue departments;
- widespread corruption, connivance with commercial exploitation of forests, and inefficiency on the part of the government agencies especially forest department;
- complicated land tenure and record management system;
- historical enmity between forest-based local communities and relevant government agencies;
- progressive weakening of local rights, exclusionary policies, and imposition of stringent regulation for policing and reservation;
- custodial and authoritative mode of public forest management (see, e.g. Rasul 2007, ICA 2008, TIB 2008, Khan 1998, BRAC 1986, Biswas and Chowdhury 2007).

At this point, a probe into the historical trends in forest policies may be useful as these have relevance for the present state of forestry in Bangladesh including the phenomenon of forest loss, and may place FMP's framing of the 'depletion of forestation problem' into broader perspective (see Box 1).

Box 1: Historical Evolution of Forest Policies in Bangladesh

The historical development and evolution of the public forest policies and practices in the Indian sub-continent (including Bangladesh) manifest two interrelated trends: (i) state-sponsored organised commercialisation of forestry and (ii) progressive alienation of forest based communities from forest use and management (for details, see Guha 1989,

Gadgil 1989, Rajan 2006, Khan 1998a). The very first steps towards regular conservancy of forests in India were prompted by commercial motives. In 1800, for example, a Commission was appointed by the government to enquire into the availability of teak in Malabar forests for commercial exploitation (FRI 1961:72-3). In 1806, while wondering about 'the question of regular supplies of timber to the Navy', the post of first Conservator of Forests in India was created; and 'his work was to arrange the exploitation of forests' (Dwivedi 1980:12).

In 1894, British India's first forest policy was formulated. It 'gave preference to agriculture over forestry' and proposed, 'demand for cultivable land can be, to some extent, met by clearing forest areas' (Hussain 1992:18). Understandably, it gave renewed impetus to the process of 'land-clearing' that had long been active in Bengal, causing considerable damage to forested tracts. It also made it clear that, 'Royalty for the Government must be collected for various facilities enjoyed by people' (cited in Rahman 1993:24; also see, Wadud 1989:5). These facilities included limited 'concessions' for pasture and fuel wood collection. Rahman argued that 'the main aim … was to collect revenue and to satisfy the local population by granting so-called rights and concessions' (Rahman 1993:24).

Based on an extensive survey of archival official documents, Rajan identifies the key characteristic features and trends concerning of 'colonial forestry'. They can be summarized as follows: 'large timber monocultures [for commercial production]'; 'coercive and repressive practices toward local people'; 'the basic conviction held by the forestry community that the best way to manage empire forests was to place them under strict control of colonial forest departments backed up by strong legislation'; '[attempts to provide increased] political authority for the foresters'; [an attitude of neglect] towards local populations whose claims were deemed illegitimate because of their ostensible scientific ad technological backwardness'; and 'introduction of an authoritarian technics in the realm of forests' (Rajan 2006:198-99). Of these trends, Rajan observed, 'Indian forestry by the turn of the century increasingly became a profitable enterprise for the state. Whereas revenue and expenditure respectively had been [pound sterling] 360,000 and 220,000 in the period 1864-5 to 1868-9, they had climbed to 950,000 and 600,000 by 1882-3' (Rajan 2006:86).

The independence of India and the formation of Pakistan in 1947 brought about little change in the nature of forest use and management. The Pakistani period (1947-1971) was a continuation and outcome of the colonial rule, and exhibited similar characteristics. The revenue-orientation of forest policies, the isolation of government officers from people, emphasis on maximum economic return from forests, state patronization of forest-based industries, the maximum exploitation and the expansion of state proprietorship over forests - were the main features of forestry during this period. The Pakistan period witnessed the formation of two forest policies. Though apparently devised to cater the need of a newly independent nation, the Forest Policy 1955 depicted all characteristic manifestations of the colonial forest administration, including the expansion of state territories; the 'scientific' extraction of timbers; the fortification of the bureaucracy by increased training and manpower; and managing all forests through rigid departmental plans (e.g., see Hussain 1992:18). In 1962, a second policy was launched

(The Forest Policy 1962), with the motto that '[t]he management of forests to be intensified to make it a commercial concern', utilization of forest produce was to be improved. The local rights and demands remained as ignored as before.

The first forest policy in the Bangladesh period was announced in 1979. This was 'a two-page manifesto-type statement' with obscure and 'generalised directions', 'mostly focusing on the forest department' (Anon. undated:5 and 18). Its suggestions included 'horizontal expansion of the forest area' under the government, which was to be 'carefully preserved and scientifically managed' by a (centralised) 'cadre of forest officers'; 'setting up new forest based industries'; 'optimum extraction of forest produce'; and the protection of forests from the (so-called) 'encroachers'. Rural forestry and local people received no major attention, except in the form of a vague call for a 'mass motivational drive for tree planting'. In fact, the policy 'expressed the views of the traditional foresters, overlooking the overall development strategy' (Roy 1987:45); and was hardly adequate for addressing the current needs and crises of the forestry sector (Task Force 1991:219, Anon. undated:18).

Based mainly on Khan et al. 2004 and Rajan 2006.

This brief history contains strong political and institutional implications for the government and protagonists of FMP and NFP. In the framing of the policy, therefore, politically sensitive factors have no place; instead the phenomenon of deforestation is highlighted in a brisk, technical fashion, and the processes leading to deforestation, which are essentially political in nature, are cloaked or downplayed. Analysts have often shown this tendency of policy discourse to frame problems in a particular way to suit certain institutions or interests, to mask political elements, and distinguish some aspects of a situation rather than others (see Gasper and Apthorpe 1996:8; Hajer 1993:45). Throughout the FMP and NFP many examples of such *political technologies* may be observed (see Table 1)

Table 1: Selected Examples of Political Technologies Observed in the NFP and FMP

The problems conceived	*Examples of the issues cloaked*	*Technical strategies proposed*
'Deforestation'; 'Depleting forests' etc.	Governmental corruption and connivance; the alliance amongst the vested interest groups of political elites, loggers, local government offices; historical process of state sponsored commercialization and the resultant alienation of forest based local communities	'Afforestation'; 'reforestation'; 'planned plantation' in various types of land; 'reservation', 'silvicultural improvement' for more production; etc.
'Deficiency in forest administration'; 'Inadequate management'	Disempowering destruction of customary/traditional rights (of forest-based communities) by law and bureaucratic discretion; expansion of bureaucratic regime and turf; failure of the forestry	'Scientific management'; 'Sound management'; 'Sustained management'; 'strengthening the forest department'; 'establishment of new social forestry

	institutions to learn and adopt participatory working style and populist values; elite value orientation of the public officials	department'; 'amendment/promulgation of laws, rules and regulations'; etc.
'Unorganized' public sector forest industries	Misuse of the historical public subsidies and patronization provided by the state; political and external influences on the working of the industries; widespread inefficiency and corruption; turf battle among various industries, and between industries and their controlling ('reporting') Ministries	Making the industries 'profit oriented business' by following the principles of 'free market economy', 'new technology' and 'economic rationalization in inputs and outputs'
'Lack of people's participation'	Devising rules and procedures for defining, categorizing, and controlling various 'target groups' while distributing the benefits and services; political processes at work in the day-to-day working of such 'groups'; structural dynamics of the Bangladeshi society that regulate local people's access to decisions and use of public resources; class differentiation; patronage dynamics as they affect resource distribution; etc.	Expansion of 'participatory forestry' 'involving target groups' through various such 'mechanisms' as 'group formation', 'land tenure/lease agreements', 'benefit sharing schemes', 'seed/seedlings supply', 'inputs', 'women involvement', 'credit facilities', 'marketing forest products' etc.

The FMP and NFP continue to promote the historical tendencies of commercialization of forestry. Equipped with effective political technologies, these tendencies are masked under rational and technical languages and the use of *tropes*. For example, instead of 'revenue maximization' through systematic commercialization of forestry practices and products, the NFP chooses to use the phrase 'profit oriented business': "the management of forest lands will be brought under profit-oriented business" (NFP, Statement 10). This dictum also represents a figurative trope, and for all practical purposes gives a free license to the government forestry institutions to go all-out for commercialization and revenue optimization. In the same vein, the NFP stipulates to "bring state owned forest based industries to competitive and profit-oriented management system under the free market economy" (NFP, Statement 15). Here the use of the word 'free market economy' connotes a mere mechanism, or mechanistic result, of the forces of supply and demand. Indeed this particular style of deploying the term conveniently masks the various political, historical, non-economic and extra-market processes that influence and regularise the performance of public sector forest industries. Examples of these processes include: patronage and other political influences on the industries by ruling political elites, endemic governance inefficiency and corruption, subsidies and protection provided historically by the state to the industries, and the impact and effects of government

policies – notably the official ban of extraction of timber jeopardizing regular flow of raw materials (as discussed above).

Besides framing the major 'crisis' in the terms above, the documents point out a number of other associated 'problems' and their possible 'solutions' through means of *polar words* and *binary couples*. In the formation of policy rationales, for example, frequent references are made to 'forest depletion' as the problem, and 'massive afforestation' as the solution. In the same vein, other examples include:

- 'Wastage in extraction and processing of forest products' => 'modern and appropriate technology' (NFP, Statement 13)
- 'Inadequate management' => 'Sustained resource management' (FMP, pp.33-37)
- 'Tribal people … grab[bing] the forest land at will' => 'Impart[ing] ownership of certain amount of land through forest settlement process. The rest of the forest land [to be] brought under permanent protection' (NFP, Statement 20)
- 'Scarcity of wood in the country' => 'Ban on extraction of timber' and 'ban on export of log' (NFP, Statement 18; FMP, pp.13-14)

As Gasper and Apthorpe (1996:7) noted, "[n]othing seems more bold, resolute and brilliant than to put things sometimes literally into 'black' and 'white', and then to proceed wholly on dualism's face values". However, nearly all of the above simplistic, binary assumptions and practices can be, and in some cases have already been challenged. To cite examples, let me examine the last two items in the list: the 'land grabbing tribals', and the 'ban on extraction of timber'.

Government documents have historically blamed forest-dependent indigenous communities, traditionally labeled as 'tribals', for 'grabbing forest land' for shifting cultivation (see, the 'Forest Working Plan' documents – e.g. Ahmad 1938, Cowan 1923, Ghani 1955, Khan 1980). We now have growing evidence from various parts of south Asia to refute this argument (e.g. Roy 1997, Chhauchhuak 2004, Kerkhoff and Sharma 2006, Rasul 2005, Kerkhoff undated). One cogent conclusion comes from Rasul in his detailed study of the impact of forest policy changes in eastern Bangladesh:

> Indigenous people have widely been blamed for degrading South Asia's montane forest resources through the practice of shifting cultivation, yet [historical] studies reveal that indigenous people used forests in a sustainable way for centuries until external intervention. … Shifting cultivation is not solely responsible for deforestation. Many factors including national policies and laws, are responsible for this situation. The process of deforestation originated during the British colonial period, with the pursuit of revenue generation through nationalization forests, weakening traditional institutions and alienating indigenous people from traditional forest management (Rasul 2007:153&160)

As regards the 'ban' or moratorium on timber extraction (initially declared by the government in 1989), a few in depth studies have shown that it has done little to stop or

reduce illicit commercial logging and led to other complications. A national task force report observed the following in this regard:

> [The] moratorium on extraction from government forests without making any alternative arrangements for supply of forest produce for consumption … has resulted in fast escalation of price and general shortage of wood in the country. This has also brought additional pressure on existing forest resources as illegal removals have become more profitable … (Task Force 1991:125).

Similarly, another empirical study while examining the field level impact of the moratorium considered this move by the government 'to be an act of folly'

> … because, first the government is in no position to execute this policy with its meager and sometimes inefficient or unwilling manpower and resources. Second, it is completely regardless of the existing demands of forest products and the field realties ... With the official closure of legal sources of timber, this policy has consequently put renewed impetus to underground commercial logging. … [It] has also put additional pressure on social forestry farmers [as] they are constantly approached and harassed by loggers for trees in their plots (Khan 1998a:231-232).

Notwithstanding the above regional and local lessons and evidences, the government has continued and further extended these policies. Although the policies fail to stand up to the stated goal (addressing the 'problems' of wood, illicit logging and encroachment/deforestation), they contribute to the rationality of the government, or to adopt Foucault's terminology – *governmentality*, by providing the raison d'être for the forest department and relevant other government agencies (e.g. the police) to remain active and present in the scene through such actions as pursuing 'offenders', 'enforcing' the rule, and more generally, "keeping things going [and] still being here tomorrow" (Lynn and Jay 1983:116 cited in Shore and Wright 1997:10).

The Eden and the Epic Endeavour

The FMP builds two 'essential Development Scenarios' of the country's 'future' of forestry vis-à-vis the 'present day or status quo conditions and practices'. The scenarios represent the end result ('solution') and destination of the government policies and action: 'High Development' and 'Optimum Development'. These are the 'Eden' where the NFP and FMP's proposed 'epic endeavour' will lead us for 'living happily hereafter' (Gasper and Apthorpe 1996:9). FMP explains:

> Scenario 1 represents the low development alternative and Scenario 2 the high development option. Scenario 1 adds additional money and peoples and retains existing systems, technology, institutional structures, working methods, laws and regulations, but allow a slight change in any of these areas. Scenario 2 represents optimum development and adopts relevant new technology, incorporates necessary institutional changes to achieve goals and targets (FMP, pp.15-16).

'Adopting' one of these 'development scenarios', we are told, is 'absolutely essential', if the country's 'forestry sector in crisis' is to have any chance of 'development' (FMP, pp.15-17).

Throughout the documents, an apolitical, technocratic-cum-moral tone is noticeable in the analyses and prescriptions. The context and rationale for the government intervention are developed by highlighting the 'importance' of the forestry sector. In presenting the 'importance', a predominately technical case is made: forestry is important because of such technical reasons as its role in 'improving biological diversity of land', 'conserving biodiversity' 'stabilization of soil' etc. (FMP, pp.30-36). This technocratic stance is then coated with a moral and grand appeal in support of the intervention which is aimed at the solution (i.e. 'reversing the trend of forest resource depletion'. The intervention is required: 'in the interest of the health and welfare of the Nation' (FMP, p.37) or 'above all, in the interest of the total development of the country [and] … its people' (NFP, preamble, p.2).

In further explaining the 'development scenarios', a table is then presented (FMP, 'Table 6: Development Scenarios Defined', pp.16-17) in the FMP. It contains four columns: 'Characteristics' (considered in formulating the scenarios); 'Status-quo' (the current situation); and then two proposed Scenarios - '1' and '2'. 14 'characteristics' are presented; nearly all of them are technical and technological in nature (e.g. 'Land use', 'Land improvement/conservation', 'Technological innovation', 'Environment and conservation', 'Institutional factors', 'Forest management intensity', 'Plantation rotation', 'Plantation growth', 'Forest utilization'). The only social or political point considered in the 'scenario' building exercise is titled 'Social objective', and this is placed at the end of the table as the last 'characteristics'. Interestingly, as regards 'Social objective', under the columns for 'Status quo' and 'Scenario 1', the following phrase appears: 'not considered' – making it clear that the government's present forestry policy and one of the proposed 'scenarios' (# 1) have not considered 'social objectives' at all. Put differently this may be seen as an admission from the official quarters that socio-political considerations in forest management have traditionally receded to the bottom of the government's agenda as compared to government's technical and bureaucratic priorities.

In prescribing 'solutions', a 'management perspective' is also clearly noticeable in the documents. Most problems are posited in a way which can be 'managed' and call for 'rational' managers – 'experts' who can manage. In discussing the 'problem' of shifting cultivation by tribals', the FMP (p.41) for example notes: '… the problem is manageable, if approached rationally'. Similarly, in both the documents, repeated references are made to 'scientific management', 'sustained resource management', 'sound management' etc. Indeed, the term 'scientific management' originated in the early years of the formation of the forest department in the British India in the 19th century, and has ever since been consistently used as a *keyword* in forest policy and plan documents, most commonly in the 'forest working plans' (see, e.g., Ahmad 1938, Cowan 1923, Ghani 1955, Khan 1980). Much of this 'scientific' forestry has been about institutional control and power; While examining the nature of its working in the early years, Khan noted the following:

> The so-called 'scientific forestry' had its footing by this time [circa 1860] whose predominant works included state appropriation of forests, diminution of local rights, maximization of organised exploitation, building logistics and communication networks, artificial monoculture plantation, and hatching the growth of the future 'invincible' bureaucracy (Khan 1998a:159-160).

In charting the path of 'epic endeavour' towards the Eden, a distinction is made between the plan/policy 'formulation' phase and the 'implementation' phase. By thus separating out 'policy' and 'implementation', the responsibility and accountability questions are masked and made blurred, and various devices of *hiving off* are set in motion. 'It contributes to the whole game of responsibility avoidance', noted Shaffer (1984:157-158), '[by] encourage[ing] 'planners' to think that implementation is a problem for someone else'. Here non-achievement of policy goals and promises becomes a case of unfortunate 'implementation failure'; the policy was 'good', but the implementation was 'bad', and the planners and protagonists are not liable as they are only concerned with one ('decision/policy') phase, and not the other ('implementation phase'). Examples of this divide abound in both the documents. The FMP in fact has an exclusive chapter on 'Plan Implementation' (pp.151-162) detailing the investment, cost, financial and budgetary matters as distinct from the 'Plans and Programmes'. The NFP also presents and views 'implementation' as distinct from the 'plan', 'policy' or 'programme'; for example:

- "private initiative will be encouraged to *implement* programmes of tree plantation and afforestation …" (Statement 3);
- "The *implementation* of National Forest Policy will be supported …" (Statement 28);
- "*Implementation* of the afforestation *programs* … will be provided encouragement and assistance" (Objective 8);
- "National *commitments* will be fulfilled by *implementing* various international and government ratified agreements …" (Objective 5, emphasis added).

Additionally, a separate 'Social Forestry Department' is also proposed in the Plan to 'implement' 'participation forestry' programmes (Statement 27).

The government agencies (forest department, forest industries development corporation etc.) are made to appear as a machine for 'implementing' the programmes towards the solution and act as an apolitical tool for 'delivering the services'. Let us take another set of examples. To attain the above 'development scenarios' and 'solve problems' in the forestry sector, the FMP argues and proposes to take 'effective corrective action' by the government (FMP, p.30). By way of suggesting such 'effective actions', the Plan proposes the following measures to be 'implemented' (FMP, pp.33-35):

- 'Establishing standards and strengthening national conservation practices' (including, e.g., 'rationalized boundaries and management plans', 'modifying relevant legislations', 'developing endangered species action plan')
- 'Ensuring forest management sustains existing resources' (e.g. 'altering existing silvicultural systems', 'rewriting forest management plans', 'beginning effective research on species generation requirements')
- 'Improving productivity per unit of time or area' (e.g. 'increase forest productivity on existing and new plantations', 'zoning core and buffer areas for multiple use management')

- 'Equitable access to benefits to … disadvantaged groups' ('rationalizing forest reserve areas', 'developing programmes which support tribal cultures', 'introduce community based resource management programmes')

One may note that: first, practically all the above listed measures are technical in nature. These have been narrated in purely apolitical terms. Even when an essentially social-political goal is addressed (e.g. 'Equitable access to benefits to … disadvantaged groups'), it is to be achieved through some technical and bureaucratic actions (e.g. ('rationalizing forest reserve areas' etc.); secondly, because these are essentially technical actions, as the argument continues, they would be best managed by technically qualified experts who possess the required specialized skills to handle such actions.

For reaching the Eden, in sum then, the endeavour takes the form of a 'deployment of development' (Ferguson 1990, Escobar 1995) which characteristically cleaves planning and implementing roles asunder and packages problems (many of which are not technical in nature) in technocratic and managerial terms in order to make them a suitable object for apolitical, technical development interventions by a 'rational' and 'scientific' institutional apparatus, and providing an avenue for exercise of its power (cf. Ferguson 1990:Chapter 3).

The Trials and the Preconditions

Reaching the Eden is not easy; the endeavour calls for tests, trials, and many preconditions to be fulfilled. Development policy discourses, as noted earlier, not only call for 'virtuous policy means' but also provision of its 'prerequisites for success' (Gasper 1996:160).

The NFP (p.3) proffers five such 'preconditions for the development of the forestry sector'. Without meeting these 'preconditions', it is argued, 'development' will not be 'forthcoming'. The conditions are:

(i) provision of 'several commodities and services which are essential for fulfillment of the basic needs of the people'
(ii) 'equitable distribution of benefits among the people'
(iii) 'creation' of 'scope of peoples participation in afforestation program'
(iv) 'long term political commitment'
(v) 'install[ation of] sound management of forestry resources' and 'conserving the production capacity of these resources' (NFP, 'Preconditions', p.3).

Even from a cursory look at these lofty 'preconditions', one can see that these are more like a 'wish list' – containing vast amount of naivety and romanticism. Any reasonable review of literature on political economy of rural Bangladesh will point to the near impossibility of achieving many of these ambitious and largely unrealistic assumptions. The structural and institutional characteristics of rural socio-polity in Bangladesh that inhibit the 'equitable distribution' of 'benefits and services' arising from development programmes, constrain any attempt to 'fulfill the basic needs of people', and pose

formidable challenges for any 'participatory' initiative -- are now well documented and known (see, e.g., Tepper 1976, Blair 1975, 1982, 1985, Khan 1989, Jahangir 1979, 1982, White 1992, Westergaard 1985, Hartmann and Boyce 1983, Jansen 1986, Van Schendel 1981, Khan 2002). Some of these characteristic features, which have a direct relevance to the forestry sector, include the following:

- highly unequal access to natural and political resources;
- an absence of alternative employment opportunities;
- gross inequalities in social structure;
- severe competition among unequal contenders for scare resources largely within a pervasive framework of `patron-client' and 'caste/status' alliances;
- complex network of social relations that cut across different (social and productive) groupings;
- lack of internal cohesiveness and only a residual degree of solidarity in villages.

Indeed, recent studies of social forestry in Bangladesh have presented convincing empirical evidence regarding how the above unfavorable social and political conditions of rural Bangladesh thwart the performance of social forestry as a 'participatory' programme (see, e.g. Akhter 2008, Chowdhury 2004, Ahmed and Laarman 2000, Khan 2008a, 2008b).

The precondition of 'long term political commitment' is another naïve assumption; yet frequently found in development policy discourses (Schaffer 1984:181, Clay and Schaffer 1984:3, Fernandez 2008:256-265). The political regime in Bangladesh is characterized by chronic instability and fluidity. The enmity and rivalry among political parties, especially the two large and dominant parties (namely, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Awami League), often assume violent forms. National priorities are routinely run down by petty party and parochial interest and patronage considerations. Development policies and programmes taken up by a particular party in power are often shelved and discontinued by the next government formed by a rival party. Notwithstanding this well known predicament of Bangladeshi politics, both NFP and FMP insist on fulfilling this 'precondition' of achieving 'long term political commitment' for 'sustained development of the forestry sector'.

In addition to the 'preconditions', NFP and FMP identify and list a very large number of 'constraints' that need to be overcome for 'forestry development'. Typical examples include: resolving 'political instability', 'manpower training', achieving 'NGO collaboration', achieving 'women's involvement', ensuring 'seedling quality', ensuring 'species-site matching' etc. (FMP, pp.45-48).

As evident from the above, given the sociopolitical realties on the ground, the 'preconditions' and 'constraints' mentioned in FMP and NFP remain abstracted from ground conditions, and face formidable challenges for actual realization. Why these are still pursued in the documents? A mention of such factors may serve at least two purposes.

First, as these are posed as 'preconditions' and 'constraints' on which the performance and 'delivery' of the policy depends, if these are not realized, the government (and relevant planners and protagonists) may attribute the consequent policy failure on the non-realization of these preconditions. Put simply, the logic goes like this: if the 'preconditions' are not met and 'constraints' not overcome, the policy will not succeed, and none but the unfortunate non-attainment of the preconditions can be made liable. This may serve as a smooth *escape hatch* for the planners and protagonists. Indeed, throughout these documents, many evidences of such 'escape hatches' may be seen (Table 2; cf. Schaffer 1984, Clay and Schaffer 1984, Fernandez 2008).

Table 2: Examples of Escape Hatches found in the FMP and NFP

Areas of failures/constraints/inadequacies mentioned	*Escape hatches*
Ineffective protection	Outdated laws/regulations; lenience in law application; not enough 'regulatory devices'; 'lack of effective policy'; 'inadequate manpower' (FMP, pp.30-33, 37-38, 47; NFP Statements 6 & 20)
[inadequacy in] Mass awareness campaign [conscientization]	'Inadequate manpower (in the forest department)'; 'shortage of staff interested and qualified in extension methods; people's 'cultural barriers'; 'poverty' (FMP, pp.41-47; NFP Statements 7 & 20)
[Limited] Women's involvement	'Traditional barriers in Bangladesh culture to full participation of women in socioeconomic activities'
Depleting forest	'Already extreme and rapidly increasing population pressure'; 'harmful' activities of 'land grabbers' and 'encroachers' (FMP, pp.30-33, 37-38, 47; NFP preamble, Objective 6, Statement 20)
[Lack of] long term development outlook of the sector	Lack of 'long term political commitment' (NFP Precondition 4)
[Low] degree of participation	'No explicit government policy and/or legal guideline to support participatory development in forestry'; 'grassroots groups have to connect with NGOs, public sector entities and private sector companies as necessary' (FMP, pp.42-43)
Unproductive use of Unclassified State Forests (FMP, p47)	'Existing tribal rights clouding land tenure situation'; 'political situation' not favorable; 'tribal people grab the forest land at will' (FMP, pp.41-47; NFP Statements 7 & 20)

Secondly, the preconditions are presented in a way that justifies and warrants action and intervention by the government and associated development agencies. These are in fact a list of *things* or an agenda for *action* which might potentially be done for 'development of the forestry sector'. Things that call for 'creation' (of scope for participation)', 'distribution' (of commodities and services), 'installation'…., 'provision'… etc. And the government's forestry institutions are 'rationally' suited to carry out these actions.

The Heroes and the Redeemed

As noted above, the 'deployment of development', it is argued, calls for rational, scientific, and technical problem-solving interventions which are best handled by relevant experts and managers in the government. It is further argued that the government represents 'people', and is morally obliged to act in greater national interest. Throughout the policy documents, the government's role is thus portrayed as crucial, indispensable, immanent, and as the champion of public interest.

In order to perform the above role, a case is then made for 'strengthening' and 'capacity enhancement' of the relevant government institutions. NFP and FMP suggest a wide array of provisions to 'strengthen' the forest department and associated other agencies. Examples of these provisions include the following:

> Forest department will be strengthened in order to achieve the goals and objectives of National Forest Policy. A new department called 'Department of Social Forestry' will be established (NFP, Statement 27).
>
> The implementation of NFP will be supported by strengthening educational, training and research organizations. This will contribute to forestry sector development (NFP, Statement 28)

Besides the NFP provisions, the FMP discusses the rationale, contexts, urgency and ways of capacity development of the state forestry organizations in the chapter titled 'Institutional Strengthening' (pp.112-150). The chapter contains very detailed analyses and proposals for 'strengthening' each of the following organizational aspects: 'Forest Policy', 'Legal System', 'Sectoral Organization', 'Human Resource Development', 'Forestry Research', and 'Forestry Extension'. The chapter ends with detailed estimation of 'costs' and 'strategies' for 'implementation' of the above programmes under the section 'Programmes and Costs'.

Related to the above 'institutional strengthening', a special emphasis is placed on updating the existing and formulating new 'laws, rules and regulations' in several places (e.g. FMP, pp.6-8, 119-120; NFP, Statement 29), Historically such punitive legal instruments have served to expand and fortify administrative power and authority of the public forestry institutions, and fuel conflicts between forest staff and local forest based communities (see, Rasul 2007, Guha 1989, Khan 1998a). The FMP however puts up an entirely different but 'rational' and altruistic justification: 'A viable efficient legal system is very important for effective implementation of policies and achievement of policy objectives' (FMP, p.119).

The NFP lists some 29 activities (in the 'policy statement' section) for 'development of the forestry sector', and most of these activities are to be carried out by the government. These activities are typically described with such phrases as 'tree plantation', 'massive afforestation' and 'special afforestation'; for example:

> Massive afforestation on either side of land surrounding road, rail, dam and *khas* [government land under the purview of the Ministry of Land, locally managed by the Deputy Commissioner offices in the districts] tank … (Statement 6)

> Special afforestation programs will be taken in every city of the country under the auspices of the government in order to prevent pollution of environment … (Statement 6)
>
> Massive afforestation programs in the denuded hilly areas … will be taken under the auspices of the government … (Statement 7)

Frequent use of *keywords* like 'afforestation' immediately makes the role of technical experts (foresters) relevant and rational: 'afforestation' is best done by 'foresters'. Additionally, by referring to the large volume or scale or specialized nature ('massive', 'special' etc.) of the operation, a logical case is made for calling in a large, specialist institutional apparatus (i.e. the government in general, and the forest department in particular).

Where the government is not directly 'executing' or 'implementing' the activities, it still continues to hold its patronizing grip by 'extending technical and other supports' or 'encouragement' to the concerned institution. Examples of this type of activities are:

> … *Technical and proper support services* will be extended for introducing agroforestry on privately owned fallow and hinter land … (NFP, Statement 3)
>
> Tree plantation on the courtyards of rural organizations … can be initiated. The government will *encourage* this type of initiative and *extend technical and other supports* (NFP, Statement 4) (emphasis added).

Implicit in the above 'statements' of NFP is also the assumption that *only* the government forestry organizations have the necessary technical expertise and specialized inputs that are not substitutable, and generously offered to the public 'in the greater interest of the nation'.

In all the above discussions and prescriptions about 'institutional strengthening', the shortcomings of the government forestry institutions are either completely ignored or conveniently downplayed. The major limitations of the public forestry organizations in the Indian sub-continent in general and Bangladesh in particular are now well documented (see, Gadgil 1983, Guha 1989, Shepherd 1992, Poffenberger 1990, Khan 1998b and 1998c, Khan *et al.* 2005). Such maladies include: the elitist and custodian-like values and paramilitary service structures and excessive use of power; a bureaucratic and revenue orientation to forest management; undermining of traditional rights, indigenous knowledge and resource use practices; widespread isolation from local communities; and corruption and connivance with external commercial operators. These have practically no place in the documents. Similar to Ferguson's observation on Lesotho, in Bangladesh too (on the rare occasion) where the forest department "is seen as a 'problem', it is not a political matter, but the unfortunate result of poor organization or lack of training" (Ferguson 1990:65); hence, 'institutional strengthening' is the remedy. In the same vein, although the emphasis on government is made manifest, the questions of responsibility and accountability are not be seen anywhere.

In the face of the global emphasis on 'participation', the FMP and NFP envision 'a new mission' for the government foresters:

> Breaking the barriers of participation is an uphill task and requires involving drastic institutional change. … [D]eveloping forestry through people's participation is a new mission and a new challenge (FMP, p.42)

Equipped with the policy, the barriers will be removed, the institutions will be converted, and 'development of the forestry sector' will be produced. The foresters thus are rationally required to embark on their 'new challenge' and 'new mission'. The word 'mission', as Ferguson (1990:58) rightly notes, suggests 'a religious imagery' preferred by government staff and 'development experts' in their search for 'conversion' in many parts of the 'developing world'. In the context of FMP, as discussed earlier, such 'conversions' concern the transformation: from 'problem' to 'solution', from 'underdevelopment' to 'development', from 'inadequate management' to 'effective management' etc. Indeed, this term ('mission') has a whole history in the context of colonial administration and forest management in the Indian sub-continent, and it reflects a basic tenet of the underlying philosophy of the state. As Anderson and Huber (1988:34-35) argues, the colonial policy of British India had a two-fold 'mission': one to pursue 'imperial interests of commerce' and the other was to 'civilize' the local population including 'the semi-barbarous tribes'. Since the colonial times, the term has routinely been used up to the present time to refer to such processes as reckoning of forest resource for revenue generation purposes, inspection by of high ranking forest officials, reconnaissance surveys and field trips by government officials (see, Gadgil 1989, Guha 1989, Hunter 1876, Khan 1998a).

On reading these texts, one is thus left with no ambiguity as to the identification of the 'heroes' -- the institution(s) in charge: the government, more particularly, the forest department and its associated agencies, and the FMP declares its stance on the matter in no obscure terms: '[The] focus was', we are told, 'on institutional factors – policy, education and training and administrative structures' (FMP, p.1).

Where do 'people' fit into the scheme? They are, as we shall see in the following paragraphs, the 'target' of development to be redeemed by the heroes. These 'targets' are described in the documents by applying various *labels*: 'groups', 'beneficiaries', 'landless', 'poor', 'tribal' etc.. They are 'recipients', 'clients', 'claimants' or 'participants' of the forestry development programmes; put differently, as Wood (1985:355-356) noted, people are transformed into *objects* of intervention (also see, Apthorpe 1986). An examination of the use of such labels in the documents reveals some interesting features.

First, the 'target group' labels are used in a way that presents these groups as isolated and compartmentalized entities (e.g. 'tribals', 'resident population', 'disadvantaged group') and takes no cognizance of the deep rooted structures and relations of patronage, exploitation, dependency, poverty and power that cut across these entities. This particular style of presenting of the 'targets' as *delinked* from these sociopolitical and economic relations and structure, however, does serve a purpose for the forestry institutions and the government as a whole; Wood explains for another context:

> In most programmes in Bangladesh, this delinking enables the poor to be recognized as fragmented objects of a policy of partial interventions – the

> recipients of skill training, credit and services, ghettoed into small scale, income generating activities, an entrepreneurial model in which significant success could only possibly be enjoyed by a few and thereby absorbed without overall structural change (Wood 1985b:470).

Secondly, the target group terminology also has *visibility* (Escobar 1995) and *legitimacy* (Wood 1985a) dimensions: the moral impetrative of reaching out to various 'disadvantaged target groups' helps legitimize the intervention of the 'forestry sector development', while making these groups visible as 'problems', a case is rationally made for solving the problem by intervening.

Thirdly, labels also play a role in facilitating *access* (e.g. Shaffer and Lamb 1974) by imposing and determining various rules and regulations, characteristics of categorization and functions of the potential recipients (Wood 1985a, 1985b). The FMP for example provides elaborate suggestions for the 'mechanisms' concerning 'formation of beneficiary groups', 'arrangements for benefit sharing', 'arrangement for leasing land' etc (FMP, pp.42-44). Eligibility and distribution of services of the government's 'participatory forestry' programmes are to be regulated by these 'mechanisms' amongst the various labeled 'groups'. On the wider implication and significance of such labelling in rural development programmes in Bangladesh, Wood has the following observation:

> The survival of the military-bureaucratic oligarchy and the class interests represented by it clearly depends upon a target-group presentation of the problem to provide the apparent basis for meaningful state intervention. Such attempts are crucially supported by foreign aid. In this way a donative discourse might head-off the revolutionary alternative in which the depth of rural contradictions will lead inevitably to the final show-down with the dispossessed rising against their oppressor (Wood 1985b:454).

Fourthly, labels and mechanisms are also a lever on the part of the government for what can be called 'scarcity management'. In the context of examining the effect of access and labelling among the refugees in Cyprus, Zetter noted the following:

> Where scarce resources are to be distributed or political limitations placed on provision, mechanisms will exist to render the 'problem' technologically manageable within the capability of what an agency can or wishes to provide (Zetter 1985:446).

In the case of forestry, the resources and means (e.g. inputs such as seedlings, parcel of land, services like technical advice, agroforestry training) are extremely limited compared to the great demand in the field. Therefore, 'mechanisms' are needed to manage the 'problem' (of paucity of the resource and the ever increasing demand) and the 'operation' (i.e. the management and distribution of the goods and services). These 'mechanisms', as discussed earlier, practically concern various qualifiers, conditionality and categorization for preferential distribution of the scarce resources by the government to the labeled 'groups' (e.g. social forestry farmers, tribals, disadvantaged communities).

4. CONCLUSIONS AND CLUES ON FURTHER RESEARCH

The preceding discussion shows that the Bangladesh state's policy response to the 'problems' and 'development of forestry sector' has been rhetorically loaded but politically covert, measured and cautious (cf. Harriss 2008:46 for the UK health policy). This becomes clear in the process of examination of the core themes (i.e. governmentality and political technology; depoliticization; and rhetorical and linguistic devices) that we introduced in the second section (p.9). Throughout the reading of the policy texts these themes have vividly manifested themselves. Our principal observations and findings vis-à-vis the three themes may be summed up as follows:

- Governmentality and political technologies: Under the conditions of *governmentality*, policies are devised and pursued to serve certain clear discursive and practical systematic purposes, notably: as *classificatory devices* to categorise and name target groups and services rendered; as *narratives* to justify (or condemn) a particular scenario and course of action; as *political technologies* to depoliticize and shape 'target group' conceptions and distribution of services; and as *escape hatches* to *hive off* difficult responsibility and accountability questions; and as a *lever* to muster and wield power on the part of the state.
- Depoliticization and apolitical representation: Closely related to the above is the process of systematic depoliticization of the contents and subjects of the policies. The policy and plan prescriptions, as part of discursive regime, are made to look like apolitical, technical instruments for promoting efficiency and effectiveness in the forestry sector. The power and politics inherent in this exercise are constantly cloaked; yet these are pervasive, and find expression in their ability to label, determine and define groups and services, and to shape and limit perceptions of reality. The moral and ideological imperative of reaching out to the poor ('people's participation', 'target groups', 'social equity' etc.) is presented in a way which rationally justifies intervention by the state and a techno-bureaucratic management of the 'problems' that 'constrain people's participation'.
- Rhetorical and linguistic devices, and their smoothing effects: Policy texts calculatedly use various *rhetorical devices* and *discursive formations* that function to empower some (e.g. public forestry officials) and silence others (e.g. restrictions put on 'land grabbers' and 'encroachers'). This process is further supported by the use of various *labels, tropes,* and the *target-group terminology* which helps to *legitimate* this particular style of development intervention. The proposed model of 'forestry development' (i.e. the 'development scenarios') derives its power in part by creating such *visibilities* around the 'target groups' as 'problems' to be solved and acted on. The hegemony of the state-led institutions is thus protected, and the bureaucratic power is fortified.

In the course of above process, we have also seen how highly impractical and irrational assumptions, conditionality and targets are included in the policies in the guise of rational, scientific, collective, universalized objects, and manipulated to serve the interest of the institutional apparatus. It is therefore not enough just to talk in terms of policy failures and impractically of these policies; these policies have their own reclusive set of

goals and purposes, and they are indeed quite successful in achieving those goals. As Griffin, echoing many others (e.g. Clay and Schaffer 1984) notes:

> Rather than assume that governments attempt to maximize social or national welfare but fail to do so, it might be more suitable to assume that governments have quite different objectives and generally success in achieving them (Griffin 1975:2 cited in Clay and Schaffer 1984:2).

On a broader plane, in its style and purport, the above policy discourse and the associated formulation exercise may ultimately 'contribute to [the] depoliticization and the bureaucratization of the society' (Schaffer 1984:186). Here we show how the development process is depoliticized and bureaucratized. Equipped with such tools as *political technologies* and *bureaucratics*, the policy discourse has relevance and implications for both the processes of 'spread of formalized, rational administrative procedures' and 'the extension of government control' - as Evers (1987) observed in his major work on 'the bureaucratization of societies in southeast Asia'. Indeed, a few probing studies on forest management in south Asia have already pointed to some of such processes and effects of bureaucratization in many parts of the region (e.g. Poffenberger 1990, Khan 1998a).

Although the consequences and implications of this distinctive style of policy discourse are clear from the preceding discussion, a full-length investigation into the roots and causes of the development of the Bangladeshi pattern of forest policy discourse is beyond the scope of my study. A couple of questions deserve further probing in the context of Bangladesh: why do the policy documents still manifest the classic sets of technologies and irresponsibility of power notwithstanding the revealing lessons from over two decades of growing global academic research demystifying the subject? Why do the planners and protagonists want to avoid apparent politics? Answers to these important questions call for thorough fieldwork including empirical engagements with the key stakeholders (e.g. the concerned government officials, consultants, donor agency representatives, members of forest-based local communities, commercial loggers) within the routine setting and culture of their work. In its absence, it is however possible to provide some indicative clues to the answers based on the experience of this research. The development of this particular style of discourse and its associated practices in Bangladesh is certainly not an aimless exercise; it clearly serves certain purposes (notably, the expansion of bureaucratic power, the entrenchment and consolidation of the governmental apparatus, institutional maintenance etc.). Such practices are not necessarily driven by conspiracy or by cynicism. It may also be naïve to assume that the key planners and protagonists, who are often highly educated and well, are completely unaware of lessons and observations reported in the global literature, and the ground realities of Bangladeshi socio-polity. Why do such policy practices still prevail? In this regard, Rew's following observation on Bangladesh's social forestry policy discourse may provide important clues for our purpose:

> The practices are too deeply seated to describe them as simply uncritical or even as overtly cynical. They involve … a complex mixture of institutional pathos, the pressures of political economy, predictable institutional maintenance and everyday legal-rational administration (Rew 1998:x).

The distinctive narratives and representations used in the formulation and application of Bangladesh forest policy discourse, it appears, are selected by the bureaucratic apparatus to provide the necessary entry-points for government development agencies to intervene and deliver goods within a legal-rational and apolitical administrative framework. The results such practices produce and the strategic purposes they serve for this bureaucratic apparatus are, however, very much valued, and these 'resultant systems assume an intelligibility of their own' (Ferguson 1990:256). Although this very exercise is essentially political, any overt reference to politics is scrupulously avoided. Ferguson's experience with the working of development apparatus in Lesotho has resonance for the Bangladeshi situation:

> If unintended effects of a [policy discourse or a] project end up having political uses, even seeming to be "instruments" of some larger political deployment, this is not any kind of 'conspiracy'; it really just happen to be the way things work out. But because things do work out this way, and [they] can so successfully help accomplish important strategic tasks behind the backs of the most sincere participants, it does become less mysterious why [such practices] should end up being replicated again and again (Ferguson 1990:256).

Besides these clues to explaining the fashion and working of forest policy discourse in Bangladesh, a few other factors are also relevant. The continuities of the colonial legacy and the associated mindset and work style are clearly implicated in the policy planning and execution process in Bangladesh. Notable continuities that are manifested in the current policy discourse include: the emphasis on revenue generation, hence the significance of commercial uses; labelling people as 'problems' and 'targets' to be 'managed'; the preeminence of the legal-rational and apolitical bureaucratic apparatus; stringent formal law and regulatory arrangements; and the privileging of state policies as problem-solving devices.

The international aid agencies ('donors') have also typically exerted considerable influence on the policy process – as we have seen in the case of formulation of FMP and NFP. Investigating the politics of the Indian agricultural policies in the 1990s, in another example, Harris-White concluded that '[t]he interests of international aid agencies pervade all … [policy] agendas' (Harriss-White 2002:11). Aid agencies often need to appear above local politics for their long-term political maintenance and require organizational paradigms where performance can be measured for their own bureaucratic/electoral accountability (see Harriss-White 2002). Based on an empirical survey of donors' influence on social forestry policy and practices in Bangladesh, Khan summarizes their implications as follows:

> The immediate implications at the sub-national level … are: an obsession of the field offices with physical targets often at the cost of over-shadowing local demands and choices; creation of a rigid `blue-print' atmosphere where there is little room for staff innovations and flexibility in operation; creation and conveyance of a missionary image for the donors; emergence of a means of influencing and regulating governmental actions by the donors (Khan 1998d:79).

The Bangladesh forest policy discourse in many ways reflects the dominant character of a 'donative discourse' or a 'discourse of institutional givers' (Gasper 1996). The presence

of such elements as a blue-print mode of planning, the chase for physical targets, and promotion of a missionary image for the concerned institutions is easily traceable.

As noted earlier, there has practically been no serious study on the subject of forest policy discourse in Bangladesh. This area of study thus deserves immediate attention from development academics and activists, as at present our ignorance is profound. The ghost in the machine looks well settled in Bangladesh, and it therefore makes good sense to call in 'ghost busters' to shed light on the ghost, and unravel its 'shadow across reality' (Wood 1985c).

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