

Political Ecology of Human Security

3.1. The Preliminaries

For a long time, the concept of state security dominated the academic discourse. The state security again had two distinct aspects. Since the treaty of Westphalia¹ in 1648, state security became central to such theories as the theory of sovereignty and balance of power, in the aftermath of wars regarding the territorial control. The Westphalian peace represented security concerns of old empires and emerging nation states. At a later date the doctrine of balance of power was complemented by the theory of collective security of the states as a guarantor of peace. The limits notwithstanding, these theories represented state security as a dominant form of security. The other aspect of security was concerned with state as the provider of security for its citizens. As early as sixteenth century, Thomas Hobbes² made human security as co-terminus with security of life and argues that only state could provide such a security. Over the years, we have seen a gradual elaboration of the concept of security through newer understandings of insecurities. One such extension of the concept of state security particularly the second aspect of state security concern with the state as the provider of security has been made by taking into account an expansive

notion of insecurities. This is the contemporary idea of human security which articulates various security concepts in a holistic manner. In such an approach of human security, poverty, militancy, terrorism, environmental destruction, cultural repression, all get entangled from individual or community standpoint. In this approach, even state is often considered as a source of insecurity for the humans. Nevertheless, the approach to human security is not developed but developing one and can be considered as a source of many other distinct approaches some of which being developed along different lines. A political ecological approach to human security may be seen as a variation of human security approach.

Human security³ is an ancient phenomenon. Threats of famine, war, drought, flood, wild animals, plague, and enslavement appear in ancient writings across the world. What has changed, and changed considerably, are the kinds of insecurity that peoples face, and the institutional possibilities of tempering that insecurity. The question of environment and environmental or ecological securities often raises some profound issues for social sciences and policy makers. The environmental changes as in the cases of deforestation leading to global warming, excessive carbon and CFC emission leading to the depletion of Ozone layer are directly or implicitly related to the action, interaction and reaction man-nature relationship. To this extent the abnormal activities of mankind and their infiltration into the process of nature thereby disturbing its natural process often creates situations of human insecurities. However, there are cases where the normal ecological process of bamboo flowering which despite human non-interference, has been found to be producing externalities having an impact on the human wellbeing and sustainability. The process of bamboo flowering is natural

embedded within its lifecycle of varying years depending on the species. It germinates from the seed, grows, offshoots, flowers, bears fruit and then dies and the new one again germinates from the seed. However in this normal process of lifecycle, the fruits produced by the bamboo are predated by the rats and rodents in the wild having a significant impact on the population growth of these species. With the exhaustion of bamboo seeds, these rodents and rats have no other alternative than to attack the nearby agricultural fields. From this point starts the externalities' having the power to disturb the normal human well being demanding a well developed academic and policy making articulation.

Therefore, a study of the present kind would benefit from a well developed conceptual framework. But, for a world that is primarily in need of direct and effective action, detailed conceptual reflection may seem spurious and distracting. This is because the very terrain under discussion is undeniably perplexing, requiring as it does: precise scientific and technological and environmental analyses of security threats (together with their associated probabilities and key preventive or mitigating measures); familiarity with local, national, transnational, and non-governmental institutional configurations at various levels- from local to regional, national and global (together with cultural understandings of key terms such as sovereignty, dignity, and security); clarity regarding the structure of law and public policy, institutional and community responses, and their various formal and informal support and enforcement mechanisms; and a deep historical appreciation of social security and social security theories and arrangements around the context of the study. Yet, the hope that conceptual

clarity can ease the job of operationalising human security does not seem to be an isolated view.

3.2. Conceptualising Human Security

Although we have summarized the conceptualizations of human security in the previous chapter (Chapter 2: Review of Literature, Section: 2.3), yet for proper contextualization of the development of a conceptual framework, we attempt an elaboration here. Human security has attracted the academic and philosophical worlds since long. Hobbes argued that the commonwealth secures the security of its citizens. Genuine human freedom, he maintained, is just the ability to carry out one's will without interference from others. This does not entail an absence of law; indeed, our agreement to be subject to a common authority helps each of us to secure liberty with respect to others (*Leviathan* II: 21). Submission to the sovereign is absolutely decisive, except where it is silent or where it claims control over individual rights to life itself, which cannot be transferred to anyone else. But the structure provided by orderly government, according to Hobbes, enhances rather than restricts individual liberty, and thus secures his life, liberty and property. Human security is rather a contested concept and it implies a condition of feeling free from threats, anxiety or danger and therefore as a state of mind in which an individual feels safe from harm by others.

The contemporary discourse on human security is perhaps the most inclusive in its character and most global in its space and scope. The growing dissatisfaction with prevailing notions of development and security in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s can be related to if not traced to the growing concern over human

security. Questions of environmental security along with others regularly intersected with policy advice and empirical research based on the conceptual arguments during the 1980s. The notion of environmental security raises a question as to whether the environment to be understood as a matter of potential security concern or in other case the international politics to be understood as a matter reflecting the happenings within the environment.

During the last few decades, the notion of human security has become a central concern to many countries, institutions and social actors searching for innovative ways and means of tackling the many military as well as non-military threats to peace and security. Indeed, human security underlines the complex links, often ignored or underestimated, between human rights, disarmament and development. The configuration of security threats in this post-Cold War period, characterized by globalization and technological advance is clearly different than it was until recently (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2). Some threats are ancient and persistent; others are unprecedented. But the further energy behind human security arises from an awareness that not only have threats increased; the opportunities to counter the threats have also increased. Technology, as well as political changes has increased the possibility of effective coordination; scientific advances continue to expand our knowledge base; resources to address security threats are partially forthcoming. Thus whatever currently jeopardizes human security, the problem lies in the mismatch between security threats and response mechanisms. The altered security environment can be sketched by superimposing different descriptions of recent changes in the security environment: empirical, analytical, and institutional.

As revealed from the foregoing section, it is argued that human security is a dynamic concept and hence ever evolving. Kofi Annan argues that, in the wake of new conflicts, a new concept of the security is evolving, thus: “Once synonymous with the defence of territory from external attack, the requirements of security today have come to embrace the protection of communities and individuals from internal violence. The need for a more human-centered approach to security is reinforced by the continuing dangers that weapons of mass destruction, most notably nuclear weapons, pose to humanity: their very name reveals their scope and their intended objective, if they were ever used”(Annan: 2000). Annan, argues that peace should mean much more than the absence of war and the notion of human security is not merely to be understood in purely military terms rather it is to encompass economic development, social justice, environmental protection, democratization, disarmament, and respect for human rights and the rule of law. For him, freedom from want, freedom from fear, and the freedom of future generations to inherit a healthy natural environment -- these are the interrelated building blocks of human – and therefore national – security. In the similar lines, Sadako Ogata argues that, several factors contribute to the notion of human security: “First essential element is the possibility for all citizens to live in peace and security within their own borders. The second element is that people should enjoy without discrimination all rights and obligations - including human, political, social, economic and cultural rights - that belonging to a State implies. The third element is social inclusion or having equal access to the political, social and economic policy making processes, as well as to draw equal benefits from them. The fourth element is that of the establishment of rule of law and the independence of the

justice system. Each individual in a society should have the same rights and obligations and be subject to the same set of rules. These basic elements which are predicated on the equality of all before the law, effectively remove any risk of arbitrariness which so often manifests itself in discrimination, abuse or oppression." Ogata argues that threats to human security are varied like political, military, social, economic and environmental. A wide array of factors contribute to making people feel insecure, from the laying of landmines and the proliferation of small arms, to transnational threats such as drugs trafficking, to the spread of HIV. For Ramesh Thakur (1999), human security refers to the quality of life of the people in a society or a polity. For Thakur, anything that degrades the quality of life like demographic pressures, diminished access to or stock or resources, and so on – is a security threat. Conversely, anything which can upgrade the quality of life – economic growth, improved access to resources, social and political empowerment, and so on – is an enhancement of human security. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP: 1994), human security has two main aspects: first, safety from chronic threats like hunger, disease and repression and second, protection from disruptions in the patterns of daily life. Louise Frechette is of the opinion that human Security, in its most simple expression, consist all those things that men and women anywhere in the world cherish most: enough food for the family, adequate shelter, good health, schooling for the children, protection from violence whether inflicted by man or by nature, and a State which does not oppress its citizens but rules with their consent.

Among the other academicians too, the concept of human security has attracted much attention. Academicians like Kanti

Bajpai (2000) argue that, "Human security relates to the protection of the individual's personal safety and freedom from direct and indirect threats of violence. The promotion of human development and good governance, and, when necessary, the collective use of sanctions and force are central to managing human security. States, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and other groups in civil society in combination are vital to the prospects of human security." David T. Graham and Nana K. Poku (1998) argue that, 'rather than viewing security as being concerned with 'individuals qua citizens' (that is, toward their states), our approach view security as being concerned with individuals qua persons' (Krause and Williams: 1997).

A careful analysis of the abovementioned definitions on human security reveals that, the empirical accounts of rising and changing threats are exceedingly familiar in all the societies. Therefore, in a response to a clearly altered security environment, theoretical, qualitative, and quantitative analyses unravel the causal relationships and interdependencies that link or activate security threats and form the basis for recommendations for action. In the case of human security, the urgency of the problems rightly produces a search for insights that can be leveraged to safeguard human security. Rothschild (1995) therefore talks about the historical linkages of human security and roots the current accounts of human security in its conceptual antecedents in European political thought. Today, in an increasingly globalized world, the most pernicious threats to human security emanate from the conditions that give rise to genocide, civil war, human rights deprivations, global epidemics, environmental degradation, forced and slave labour, and malnutrition. All the current studies on security thus have to

integrate the human dimension of security. Thus, since the publication of the United Nations Development Programmes 1994 Human Development Report on new dimensions of human security, major efforts have been undertaken to refine the very concept of human security through research and expert meetings, to put human security at the core of the political agenda, at both national and regional levels and, most important of all, to engage in innovative action in the field to respond to the needs and concerns of the most vulnerable populations. Hence, in the present context, the notion of human security and the role of the state in mitigating human insecurities can be best explained with the help of a synthetic framework, combining the empirical, analytical, and institutional changes that have altered the context of security environment, as outlined above.

However, our problem under investigation being the insecurity produced by natural processes and its political maneuvering, the central concern of such a synthetic framework entails a political-ecological understanding of how insecurity is perceived, felt, experienced and addressed. This implies an investigation of the relationships between the environment, the ecological processes and human security concerns, which are certainly close and complex. A great deal of human security is tied to peoples' access to natural resources and vulnerabilities to environmental change — and a great deal of environmental change is directly and indirectly affected by human activities and conflicts. Hence, we need to proceed with the interactions between the social and the ecological systems in the formulation and elucidation of the political ecological perspective on human security.

3.3. Ecology and Human Sciences – Linking the Ecological and the Political

An adequate response to an environmental process may well require broad social or even international initiatives (Park 1992). From the perspective of political ecology⁴, the environment in question may range from the very largely cultural (e.g. that of the epidemiology of disease in urban settings or even the cultural corpus about health or disease), through the intensely political (e.g. resource endowments for strategic materials) to the fairly significantly natural (e.g. rainforest in remote areas of Mizoram or Bamboo flowering in Mizoram or the climate itself) process which are linked together (Caroline: 1996; Narayan: 1999; Acharya: 2005). Ecological ideas have long had major influences in the fields of health, environmental history, cultural ecology and cybernetic analysis⁵ of social and economic systems, human geography, and development theory. In each case ecological ideas have had to be extended in line with social science understandings of the mutual interaction between human society, human productive activity, and the (now only slightly “natural”) environment.

In the 1960s and 1970s, social scientists under the banner of cultural ecology sought to explore the place of human populations within ecological systems. Using concepts borrowed from ecology (Odum: 1953), general systems theory (Bertalanffy: 1969), and cybernetics, they attempted to explain the evolution of specific cultural practices and institutions in terms of adaptations to ecological systems, and to explain how internal dynamics within systems can actually lead to change and development through time (Bateson: 1972; Flannery 1968,

Nietschmann: 1973; Rappaport 1967; Steward 1955). As this approach became increasingly sophisticated, some investigators sought to quantify energy flows through the ecosystems and the trophic exchanges in which human populations took part. Rappaport (1967) argued that ritual cycles were used to regulate the growth of pig populations, Swindon fallow cycles⁶, and the cyclical patterns of war and peace with neighboring Maring groups. Still, the difficulties of using caloric measures to quantify monetary decisions in complex market economies appeared insurmountable (Moran 1990). Political economy has a mixed lineage descending from radical thinkers such as Karl Marx as well as from more conservative precursors of modern economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo. Yet, the advocates of classical political economy shared an acceptance of the value-laden character of economics and would have considered unacceptable the 20th century separation of politics (in a broad sense) from economics (viewed as a purely scientific enterprise). Different classes had different class interests and hence each was likely to promote policies in its own favor. The non-coincidence of all individual interests, and the potential for collusion, has been at the heart of political economy ever since. Ecology's broad perspectives on our biological and physical environment and its alternative emphases on individual competition and holistic analysis have already shown significant potential for dialogue with the more social and power-centered field of political economy. The debate between proponents of "deep ecology" and those of "eco-socialism"⁷ is only the most recent evidence for the flexibility of ecological models (Devall: 1985; Pepper: 1993). The space for dialogue between political economy, at its best, and ecology is potentially enormous. Thus, the central concern of political ecology has been the understanding of the relationship between social and

environmental change. Political ecology draws on insights from a variety of environmentally related disciplines in the social and environmental sciences. The outcomes of environmental change are often felt unevenly by different social groups. Explaining why and how this unevenness is generated links political ecology to political economy and makes conflict and contestation over resources central to most analyses. Power is a central focus of the political in political ecology. Increasingly, a concern with power relations extends beyond the local level and decenters and problematizes unidimensional treatments of the state, donor groups, nongovernmental organizations, and their related discourses.

In contrast to earlier approaches, which assumed that ecological systems tended toward equilibrium, political ecology recognizes that Ecosystems and social systems are regarded as mutually constituted. In theory, the goal is to develop modes of analysis that encompass and relate social and ecological variables. Political ecology combines and relates different levels of analysis. Conceptualization of these levels requires new styles of analyses since much of the local is permeated by and can mirror and refract the global. Similar complexities exist in linking microhabitats and bioregions to global environmental change and to social factors operating on different scales. Political ecologists usually study the complex interactions between a changing environment and changing society within the context of local histories and ecologies. While Peet and Watts (1996) lament the absence of broader theories, political ecology has tended to yield historically and culturally contextualized conclusion.

3.4. Political-Ecology Perspectives of Human Security

Political ecological perspective implies, as already discussed elsewhere in the present thesis, is the perspective that involves taking into consideration of the relationships between political, economic and social factors with ecological/environmental processes, issues and changes. This academic perspective offers wide-ranging framework with ample scope of integrating ecological science and social sciences including political economy (Peet and Watts 1996, p. 6) in addressing questions such as environmental and social degradation and marginalization, ecological / environmental conflicts, ecological / environmental conservation and control, environmental identities and social movements (Robbins: 2004). Additionally, the perspective also covers the perception of security of life-worlds-both social and ecological-their interactions and inter-relationships, and how they mutually affect one another. Obviously therefore, the perspective covers within its scope, the ethics and politics of conservation. If man is the agent of both extractions of the elements of the ecological system for his own sustenance, and at the same time, an agent of its conservation, unmindful exploitation of the ecological system would at once threaten the survival of man himself, impinging on the question of human security. Therefore, the political ecological frame can address questions of human security, emanating from the natural ecological processes. On the other hand, the agencies of exploitation and management of the ecological systems and processes may also bear significance to the question of insecurity: there may be more tendencies on the part of the agencies in the proximity of the orbit of political power to exploit the resources of nature or remain indifferent to unfitting

managements of the ecologies from such habitations of which such agencies are not a part. Such actions could be explained only from a political ecological framework of sustainable human security. This is because, on the ‘ecology/environment’ side, we argue that work in the field of ‘sustainable development’ has been fundamental in capturing the emergent scientific and social understandings of the intimate coupling of nature and society. Although controversies abound, the fundamental insights that launched the idea of ‘sustainable development’ two decades ago are even more firmly established today: efforts to protect nature will fail unless they simultaneously advance the cause of human betterment; efforts to better the lives of people will fail if they fail to conserve, if not enhance, essential resources and life support systems.

As Khagram and others (2003) point out, more recently, it has become increasingly clear that much of the interaction between nature and society most significant for sustainable development occurs in what we call the ‘missing middles’. Risks — threats to and opportunities for sustainable development— do not emerge primarily at global or local levels, but at intermediate scales, where both broader trends and the particularities of place come together. Similarly, sustainability is most often achieved by actions that address immediate challenges while focusing on longer-term goals through a series of intermediate range ‘sustainability’ transitions. Human security offers much to this vibrant field of sustainable development. Most notably, human security—like human development—highlights the social dimension of sustainable development’s ‘three pillars’ (environment, economy, society). Moreover, the high importance and urgency given to the elimination of destitution and deprivation over the short-term that is core to human security

reminds proponents of sustainable development that intra-generational equity must not be sacrificed to the altar of inter-generational equity. Goals should be set, actions taken, and progress assessed at disaggregated levels commensurate with respect for the welfare and dignity, the needs and rights, of human beings. But efforts to advance human security, as with human development, will do better to frame their activities based on an interdependent, place-based, and dynamic worldview analogous to that offered by sustainable development than by adopting a perspective that sees environment merely as a set of threats to human security. This is because focusing only on threats overlooks the environmentally related opportunities available to improve human security. Protecting and enhancing the environment can have very positive consequences for people's livelihoods, well-being and opportunities for fulfillment.

While environmental degradation increases the potential for deprivation, displacement and disempowerment, ecosystem integrity is likely to reduce vulnerabilities. Thus, the field of security should be broadened to a more comprehensive notion of 'sustainable security'. Sustainable human security is less anthropocentric because it values the environment in itself and not merely as a set of risks. This more expanded field facilitates critical integrations of state, human *and* environmental security, and parallels the three linked pillars of society, economy and nature central to the field of sustainable development.

The concept of sustainable development has been a contestable concept. The debate between anthropocentric and eco-centric perspectives on development has been fairly abstract (Dobson & Eckersley: 2006) and has failed to resolve the question of what to sustain and for whom. Nevertheless, the debate has undoubtedly

contributed to a broader understanding of security by linking environment and security. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the concept of environmental security got connected with global security concept. Robert Kaplan's vision of the coming anarchy and his proclamation on the basis of environmental deterioration in the third world countries that, "The environment is the national security issue of the 21st century", contributed to a further debate as to whether environmental destruction due to resource use would lead to a war or not, like resource war for water or oil or conflict regarding the global commons. Those who discount the possibility of such wars find fault with a version of environmentalism that is state specific and call for an alternative political approach to environmental governance as they consider not environmental degradation per se but environmentalism (whose cognate concept is the concept of sustainable development) as a threat to the conceptual hegemony of the state centered national security discourses and institutions.

While the above development represents an important source of political ecological approach to human security that is skeptic of state based security system. We have another source in "Social Ecology"⁸ (Bookchin) which links up environment and society. The central argument is that nature is diverse but without any hierarchy. A hierarchy as a feature of society has been a human creation. With the creation of hierarchy where human beings started dominating other human beings, master dominating slaves, the rich dominating poor, men dominating women, domination of nature also took a hierarchical form. The hierarchically top started dominating the nature in different ways which were inaccessible to those below. The development of capitalist economy where the motto became 'grow or die', the socially dominant also became the chief agents of environmental

destruction. Under this situation, sustenance of social domination makes sustainable development irrelevant to the dominated. Social ecology, therefore, argues that a decentralized political system and a check on corporate capitalism can be the best guarantees for human security.

Therefore, combining the knowledge of social and ecological systems, and putting it at the centre-stage of a political system with the consideration that every element of a system or a sub-system is constantly in experience of the flow of power relationships, we propose that any insecurity emanating out of the natural ecological processes in its constant interaction with the social system and its components could be better explained with a political ecological framework of sustainable human security, which synthesises the knowledge of social, ecological and political systems. Hence, we propose to adopt a political-ecology framework in the analysis of the security concerns emanating out of the natural-ecological process of bamboo flowering—the problem under investigation in the present study.

3.5 Concluding Observations

The study reveals that the notion of security has transformed radically over time. It has evolved from classical postulations on the necessity of individual security in the state of nature culminating in the social contract of Hobbesian thought, to the concerns for national security, and finally culminating with human security in the contemporary discourses on security studies. However, the notion of ‘human’ in human security transcends the individuality of a human person to embrace the generic implication of human beings across generations. In other words, human security today has come to mean security through generations and hence ‘sustainable human security’,

incorporating the fundamental ideas of inter-generational equity and justice. However, the notion of sustainability itself is a multifaceted concept, having its origin in eco-political thought and discourses. The constantly depleting nature of the natural resources and increased human intervention over nature have both contributed towards intensification of conflict amongst humans on the one hand and between humans and the non-human world on the other, creating possibilities of the future generations bereft of access to or enjoyment of the natural resources. The idea that excessive exploitation of the natural resources by the present generation may lead to deprivation of similar enjoyment of claim over natural resources by the generations to come. It would also imply the denial of equity and justice to future generations laying the root of the concept of sustainability. The notion of sustainability therefore impinges on the idea of human security at two levels. First, that un-mindful exploitation of nature may impact the life processes of the present generation. Second, such exploitation of nature may lead to human insecurity situations for future generations owing to unavailability of livelihood resources at their disposal. Yet, at another level, certain natural processes may adversely impact the human security, albeit, without human interference. These issues may be addressed with recourse to ecological knowledge. Contrarily, there are possible situations wherein the centers of power appropriate resources thereby creating situations of insecurity on the part of the powerless. Such issues require an in-depth study of social structures and processes that regulate power dynamics. However, quite often than not the ecological and political dynamics may parallelly and simultaneously impact on human security in their mutual interactions. Hence, political ecological perspective would provide a meaningful framework for the studies on human security. It is this understanding that has

conditioned the adoption of political ecological approach to human security in the present study.

Notes

¹ Treaty of Westphalia- The Treaty of Westphalia actually were a series of peace treaties signed during 1648 ending the thirty years' war in the Holy Roman Empire and the Eight Years' War between Spain and Dutch. These Treaties are considered as a vital landmark for the birth of modern nation states.

² Thomas Hobbes – Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), is considered as the fore-runner in theorizing the security concerns and arguing the necessity of the state as the provider of security.

³ There has been a range of attempts to conceptualize human security over the past few years (Chen, 1995; Thakur, 1997; Frechette, 1999; Suhrke, 1999; UNESCO, 2000; Lodgaard, 2000; Ginkel and Newman, 2000; Graham and Poku, 2000; Hammerstad, 2000; Acharya and Acharya, 2000; Acharya, 2001; Anwar, 2002). On the evolutionary history of human security, see Chapter 2 of the present thesis on the Review of Literature.

⁴ Political ecology is the study of the relationships between political, economic and social factors with environmental issues and changes. Political ecology differs from apolitical ecological studies by politicizing environmental issues and phenomena. The academic discipline offers wide-ranging studies integrating ecological social sciences with political economy (Peet and Watts 1996, p. 6) in topics such as degradation and marginalization, environmental conflict, conservation and control, and environmental identities and social movements (Robbins, 2004, p. 14).

⁵ Cybernetic analysis is a trans-disciplinary approach for exploring regulatory systems, their structures, constraints, and possibilities.

Cybernetics is relevant to the study of systems, such as mechanical, physical, biological, cognitive, and social systems. Cybernetics is applicable when a system being analyzed is involved in a closed signaling loop; that is, where action by the system generates some change in its environment and that change is reflected in that system in some manner (feedback) that triggers a system change.

⁶ For a comprehension of the Swindon fallow cycle- see jhum cultivation cycle.

⁷ Eco-socialism, green socialism or socialist ecology is an ideology merging aspects of Marxism, socialism, green politics, ecology and alter-globalization. Eco-socialists generally believe that the expansion of the capitalist system is the cause of social exclusion, poverty, war and environmental degradation through globalization and imperialism, under the supervision of repressive states and transnational structures.

⁸ Social Ecology - It emerged as a critical social theory and is conceptualized as a critique of current political, social and anti-ecological trends. The newly emerged social ecology advocates a transformative analysis and outlook to the current socio-political and ecological or environmental issues. As an outlook, social ecology stands for a vision of a moral economy that moves beyond scarcity and hierarchy and towards a world that reharmonizes human communities with the natural world.