



Securitization, three streams model and biodiversity in the Global South: A case study of Western Ghats of India

Justin Joseph^{a,*}, Anjan Kumar Sahu^b, Juha Vuori^c

^a Centre for Climate Change and Environment (CCCE), Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT) Chennai Campus-India, 600127, India

^b Department of Political Science, University of Allahabad, 211002, India

^c Department of Philosophy, Contemporary History, and Political Science, University of Turku, 20014, Finland

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ABSTRACT

Biodiversity conservation is one of the most contentious issues in the Global South, particularly political authority's methods and objectives of managing conservation. This paper studies how political authority deals with biodiversity conservation, and how different stakeholders respond to the conservation policy. In doing so, the study employs the securitization framework and blends it with the Three Streams Model to find out the political authority's securitization process (which is state-driven and top-down). Additionally, Narrative Policy Framework is employed to study the response of stakeholders (primarily local) to the securitization process. Thus, the central objective of the paper is to examine the securitization of the Western Ghats, especially with reference to Kerala, India. Based on the case study, the study finds that audiences in the Global South are capable of opposing securitization of biodiversity. In conjunction with functional actors, audience form assemblages and resist the deployment of extraordinary measures, thereby opposing securitization.

1. Introduction

Even though biodiversity is our strongest natural defense against climate change impact (United Nations, 2024), its significant loss is an unconventional threat to the human-nature harmony across the world (CBD, 1993; Lele et al., 2010; WHO, 2025). Kofi Annan (2005) identified biodiversity as a significant aspect of environmental sustainability as its degradation is a threat to water, health, livelihood and food securities both within and across the countries. Though a multitude of actors are involved to protect biodiversity in the Global South, the role of political executive is consequential as they are the legitimate and authoritative agents to intervene (Brechin et al., 2002). Political authority is undoubtedly a significant actor in shaping the nature of an environmental sector (Buzan et al., 1998; Smith et al., 2003; CBD-UN, 2021). However, how far and to what extent they determine the safeguard of world's biodiversity, particularly in the context of the Global South, is crucial to investigate. The protection of biodiversity in the Global South is a pressing concern as, according to the latest UNESCO report, out of the 36 biodiversity hotspots, 29 are in the Global South (Asia-13, LAC region-8, Africa-8), while remaining hotspots are in Europe (1) (the Mediterranean Basin which is shared with North Africa), North America (2), Australia (2), New Zealand (1), and Japan (1) (Compiled from UNESCO

data, 2024). Of the 748 biosphere reserves of the world, 488 are located in the Global South (Latin American and Caribbean LAC 134, Africa 126, Asia + Russia 221), and 23 of them are transboundary reserves (Compiled from UNESCO data, 2024). These data raise a significant question about the critical role and capacity of political authority to save biodiversity in these political systems.

Considering the urgent need for policy intervention to avert biodiversity degradation, there has been an increased role of government institutions and policies that advocate for achieving human-nature harmony. However, the intervention of political authority in the name of protecting environment has been overshadowed by the state-led pursuit of economic development for many decades as the majority of the post-colonial societies were underdeveloped and poverty-stricken. However, in the post-Stockholm Conference, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, political authorities in countries like India began to have legislative interference towards environmental protection— for instances, the Wild Life (Protection) Act of 1972 and the Environmental Protection Act of 1986. These legal initiatives triggered the creation of exclusive Protected Areas (PAs) (Lele et al., 2010). Despite having private players, state agencies, scientific communities and policy reforms, the modus operandi of managing biodiversity is still polemical and challenging (Adams and Hutton, 2007; Pascual et al., 2021). Against this

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: justin.joseph@vit.ac.in (J. Joseph), anjanjnu@gmail.com (A.K. Sahu), juha.vuori@tuni.fi (J. Vuori).

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backdrop, what would be the other possible measures to be undertaken by the political authority to ensure human-nature harmony when the current conservation practices are not completely successful? Related to the question, what would be the implications of alternative measures and the response of the audience to the actions of political authority?

To address the above questions, we find two possibilities to contend with biodiversity loss. First, political authorities can prioritise biodiversity conservation as the highest political goal and resort to extraordinary measures to save biodiversity. The process of executing exceptional policy measures to safeguard the referent object (biodiversity) is known as securitization (Wæver, 1993; Buzan et al., 1998). Political authority can choose any sector to elevate it from low politics to high politics using the official state rhetoric and public support. In other words, political authority has the privilege to determine the referent object and take necessary measures to protect the object (Buzan et al., 1998).

Second, there is another possibility of the employment of extreme measures like militarization of conservation by political authority as argued by Elizabeth Lunstrum (2014). As military has emerged as an integral part of addressing climate issue (Jayaram and Brisbois, 2021), many countries of the Global South rely on their military as a prominent agent in securing biodiversity—such as Guatemala (Ybarra, 2012), Brazil (Marzec, 2014), South Africa (Smith and Humphreys, 2016), Laos (Dwyer et al., 2016), India (Barbora, 2017; Sahu, 2019), Congo (Verweijen and Marijnen, 2018), Kenya (Maguire, 2018), China (Li and Shapiro, 2020) and so on. However, an overwhelming use of militarization negates the environmental ethics as it involves the use of force and violence that may engender counter-conservation effects in the long run (Duffy et al., 2019).

However, the policy intervention is examined by looking into the three-fold classification of policies: first, normal conservation policies (ordinary and regular means), second, extraordinary policies (dramatic measures), and third, the use of force and violence (extreme). This study concentrates on the second type of intervention by the political authority to protect biodiversity, i.e., the intervention by securitizing the environment through extraordinary measures. The following table underlines the major characteristics of the three critical interventions in the Global South: normal process, securitization process, and military means.

It is clear from the above table that, generally, addressing environmental problems is a part of the normal process of the state and society through contributions from the epistemic community, public participation, legislative and policy processes and so on. This is an everyday democratic process. However, securitization of an environmental sector is an uncommon intervention in politics across the world that involves from the politicization of environmental issues to the extreme version of politicization or securitization (or extraordinary actions), but it does not pre-eminently and primarily hinge on military and militarization of the

environment. It is true that militarization can be one of the consequences of securitization (Joseph and Karackattu, 2022), however, the military is not predominant and supreme in the securitization process. Nevertheless, shying away from environmental securitization was the early advice from the conventional security studies literature. Indeed, not all state interventions to address environmental crises are parts of securitization. Securitization of an environmental sector is above normal environmental conservation attempts as it involves extraordinary measures—a relative concept with respect to the history of particular polities. For instance, extraordinary measures could bypass public opinion and legislative procedures in addressing environmental insecurity in the Global North (Floyd, 2016). However, in the case of the Global South non-democratic polities like China, extraordinary measures involve offering avenues for public participation in environmental policy making (Joseph and Karackattu, 2022). Hence, securitization is not synonymous with militarization, though the latter is an important ingredient of the former.

This study examines how environmental sector is interpreted and securitized in the context of the Global South. Thus, the central argument of the paper is to employ the securitization framework to analyse the protection of biodiversity in the Global South with a special reference to the Western Ghats (WGs) region of the state of Kerala, India. The study argues that the audience in the Global South like India are heterogeneous with diverse interests. They are even capable of challenging securitization of environmental sector through the formation of anti-securitization assemblages.

The paper is divided into the following sections. In the introduction, the paper briefly outlined the issue of biodiversity loss and types of environmental intervention in the context of the Global South. The second section sets out the Securitization Theory (ST) of the Copenhagen School as an analytical framework and its interrelationship with the Three Streams Model (TSM) to explain the extraordinary political intervention. The third section maps out the application of some selective methodologies that combines ST with the policy streams approach, and the narrative policy framework (NPF). The fourth section illustrates case study of policy interventions in WGs and the politics of resistance in the Indian state of Kerala. The concluding part mentions the major findings of the paper.

2. Securitization: a theoretical framework

Securitization theory talks about the state intervention to address traditional as well as non-traditional security issues including the threats that stem from human-nature imbalance (Buzan et al., 1998). The post-2020 global biodiversity framework (2021) identified human-nature harmony as achievable through political will at the highest level of government. Such political will and constructive process can be studied through ST as “securitization is the discursive and political

Table 1
Three types of environmental intervention in the Global South.

	State Action	Nature state actions	Public participation	Non-state actors	Coercion/force	Type of Greening
Normal Conservation Policies (type I)	Yes	Ordinary	Yes	Yes	No	Democratic
Securitization of Conservation Policies (type II)	Yes	Extraordinary	Less	Yes, not dominant	Possible	Democratic/Non-democratic
Militarization of Conservation Policies (type III)	Yes	Extreme	No	No	Dominant	Non-democratic

All three types are different forms of state actions to deal with biodiversity loss. Three types of state actions can be noted; ordinary conservation policies which is widely observable in political systems across the board. A step further, the state adopts extraordinary measures such as no-go zones to protect the biodiversity. Thirdly, there can be extreme types of state actions such as assigning the armed forces to protect biodiversity. The degree of public participation decreases as means of force increase from type I to type III. Since securitization is a state lead process and militarization is a higher degree of it, the role of non-state actors is not dominant in type II and it is nearly absent in type III. Coercion or force is an important instrument of state action in type III. When type I is about consent and participation, type II can be a mix of consent and force. As a result of these features, we can understand that when normal conservation policies are democratic in nature, securitization either democratic or not depending on the political dynamics. It can also be noted that militarization of conservation policies is undoubtedly a non-participatory, non-democratic intervention (Source: compiled from literature¹ by the authors).

process, through which an *intersubjective understanding* is constructed within a political community to treat something as an *existential threat* to a valued referent object and to enable a call for *urgent and exceptional measures* to deal with the threat” (Waever, 2008). As it is an inter-subjective exercise, the process of securitization involves the following major ingredients (Buzan et al., 1998).

1. Securitizing actors: Actors who declare a particular issue as a threat and a particular issue as a referent object.
2. Speech Act: Actors not only declare a threat or referent object, but take necessary measures to defend the referent object. It is a politico-linguistic exercise by the political authority through various print, speech and media mechanisms to influence the audience about the necessity and advantages of any extraordinary measures.
3. Referent object: A sector/object which has to be protected as the destruction of the object triggers unprecedented damage.
4. Threats: Threats are directed towards referent objects. It means referent objects are threatened by the threats as designed by the securitizing actors.
5. Extraordinary measures: Securitizing actors undertake extraordinary measures— suspension of democratic practices, reliance on secrecy, mobilisation of military and so on— to save a referent object from a threat.
6. Audience: They are the people who have to be convinced by the securitizing actor in order to accept the securitization of an issue.
7. Facilitating conditions: It means condition or situation that assists the formation and execution of speech act.
8. Functional actors: Actors that are neither the securitizing actors nor the audience but still influence the securitization process.

Securitization theory has been employed as a major theoretical framework to examine a range of conventional and unconventional security issues of the Global South such as environment, anti-nuclear weapons and terrorism and so on (Abdenur et al., 2019; Barthwal-Datta, 2012 Sahu and Mohan, 2022; Xie and Warner, 2022; Vuori, 2011; Joseph, 2020). In other words, the deployment of securitization as a critical framework is a regular phenomenon in the Global South. However, a micro-level analysis of securitization of process assists to deeply comprehend the nature of an issue and its political implications. The case of Kerala is a useful study to understand the securitization process of biodiversity conservation in the Global South.

In the context of biodiversity conservation, political authorities adopt policies towards conserving natural resources as parts of securitizing biodiversity. Hence securitization in the environmental sector can be defined here as political authority’s intervention with extraordinary measure to alleviate or prevent ‘threats from human activity to the natural systems or structures of the planet when the changes made do seem to pose an existential threat to (parts of) civilization’ (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 30). In the case of securitization of biodiversity in India, this paper illustrates that the referent object is biodiversity conservation, securitizing actors are the Indian political executive, and the functional actors are the interest groups who support or oppose the intervention. Now, the idea of extraordinary measures is understood as a relative concept with respect to the history of particular polities as the Global North and the Global South have divergent political systems and functions, even though there are variations within the political systems of the North and the South (Floyd, 2016; Joseph and Karackattu, 2022). In the case of India’s biodiversity conservation, extraordinary measures can include prohibiting human activity by demarcating exclusive no-go zones, granting new powers to agencies such as forest department, and suspending democratic mechanisms. Despite the differences in the political systems, performative *speech acts* of the political authority play a vital role in constructing the security discourse and gaining legitimacy to undertake extraordinary measures to address biodiversity loss.

In spite of the strengths to explore the role of political authority in biodiversity conservation, ST doesn’t envision an active role for public

participation when compared to ordinary conservation frameworks such as Community Based Conservation (CBC), Enterprise Based Conservation (EBC), and Payments Based Conservation (PES) (Lele et al., 2010). In other words, securitization revolves mainly around the *securitizing actor* (the political authority), *the referent object* (biodiversity conservation) and the *functional actors* (the agencies that influence the top-down securitization efforts from the state). Scholars argue that there is not a sufficient account on the role of societal actors in the process of securitization (Floyd, 2016), thereby restricting the role of society as an ‘observers’ or ‘audience’, instead of ‘participants’. In the original version of securitization, societal actors are part of the theory (Waever, 2008), and have significant impact on the contestation of securitization through desecuritization— the case of China is a point (Vuori, 2011).² We recognize that the under-representation of the audience in ST is mainly because of Eurocentrism, and the application of ST on the Global South can assist us in enriching the existing theory. To achieve a comprehensive understanding on the role of the political authority and societal agencies on biodiversity conservation, this study looks for participatory efforts from non-state agencies and state structures. To examine the engagement between state agencies and societal actors, the following section strives to analyse ST by linking it with TSM and NPF.

2.1. Our approach to political interventions and biodiversity conservation in the global south

Securitization theory has been blended with other frameworks especially when it is applied on the Global South settings as explored by Juha Vuori in linking identity politics with securitization in the context of China (Vuori, 2024). Fasakin (2022) synthesizes decolonial theory and ST to study post-colonial Nigeria. Mark B Salter (2008) observes that securitization takes place within different sociological settings. However, our study dissects securitization into different sub-processes that enables micro level analysis of political intervention and the audience responses. Since securitization is a political process (Buzan et al., 1998), alike biodiversity conservation (Brechin, et al., 2002), our aim is to bring out the nexus between these two— securitization and biodiversity conservation. In doing so, we have applied John Kingdon’s (1984) Three Streams Model (TSM) to map out the flow of securitization processes. It means TSM helps in understanding the various phases of political intervention and its significance that triggers the securitization of biodiversity— the referent object.

The Three Streams Model (TSM) comprises *problem stream*, *policy stream*, and *politics stream* (Kingdon, 2013). *The problem stream* means a critical and public issue that obligates political authority to address the matter. However, the issues are perceived as normal across the nature of political systems. As far as democratic polities are concerned, protests are also part of the daily affairs in the problem stream as it is one of the ways to aggregate public opinion demanding political intervention or to express discontent. An increasing demand for biodiversity conservation can be observed in *problem stream*. The demand may emerge due to the increasing habitat pressure from the impact of human activities and also, from hazardous events such as natural calamities (BBC, 2025). Dominant channels of demand articulation include civil society organizations, epistemic communities, socio-ecological movements and social media platforms (Almond and Coleman, 2015).

The *policy stream* is about the specific political responses from the government to resolve public issues raised in the problem stream using

¹ Buzan et al. (1998); Mason, M. (2012); Lunstrum, E. (2014); Duffy, R. (2014); Marijnen and Verweijen (2016); Duffy et al. (2019); Rydén et al. (2020); Ewert, S., & Stoll-Kleemann, S. (2022); Fanari, E. (2022); Corkeron, P. (2023); Anthony et al. (Eds.). (2006); Trombetta, M. J. (2008).

² Desecuritization means ‘the shifting of issues out of emergency mode and into the normal bargaining processes of the political sphere’ (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 4).

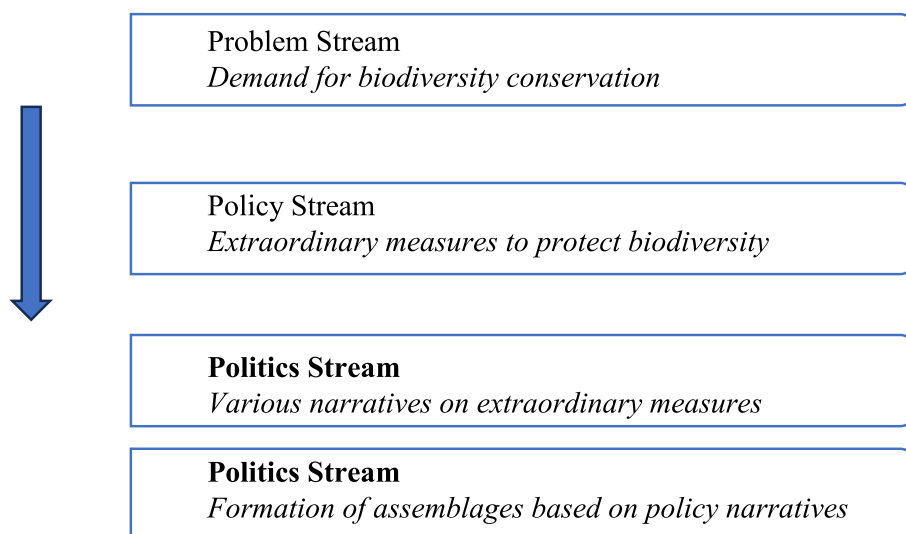


Fig. 1. Temporal sequence of securitization process.
(Source: Compiled by the authors)

various resources at its disposal— such as scientific expertise, bureaucracy, financial capacity, human and other resources, and so on. This is a critical element as the response comes from the political executive which is similar to ST that underlines that influential political leaders, through consensus, undertake necessary policy measures. The second and the most significant connecting point between ST and the policy stream are on the kind of policy responses which are deployed by the government. If a policy involves *extraordinary measures* compared to other policy responses in the respective political system, it marks the beginning of the securitization process. Hence, all policy responses from the government are not securitization moves. Securitization process begins in the policy stream with extraordinary political interventions. The dramatic measures are invoked and legitimized through performative speech acts that not only drive the political authority to underline the seriousness of a problem, but induce them to take necessary and extraordinary measures to contain the problem. If the societal demand for government intervention is consistent and strong in the *problem stream*, the success rate of securitization in the *policy stream* is high. There are instances when the *policy stream* witnesses the origin of securitization without sufficient popular demands— for instance the post 9/11 threat discourse on refugees and migrants. However, the fate of securitization is affected by the power relations between actors involved in the politics. This can be examined further with the help of NPF to unravel the outcomes in the final phase of TSM.

The *politics stream* is about the power competition between various state and non-state agencies that determines the trajectory of the policy agendas. Securitization policies induce conflicts of interests due to the presence of a large number of stakeholders, especially in democracies. In the environmental sectors in the Global South, the politics of conservation in non-western democratic orders like India is in a continuous tussle between various narratives on life, livelihood, development, conservation, and so on, thus, gradually forming assemblages³ between and among the actors either to support or oppose policy agendas. We find that assemblage formation is a key aspect to determine securitization in the Global South. The politics stream— follows the *problem and policy streams*— is a major phase to shape the success or failure of political interventions. In the case of biodiversity conservation, the

³ Assemblages denote the group formation due to convergence of interests. See DeLanda (2019).

⁴ State here means the subnational entity in the Indian Union. Similar to the provinces in China or States in the US.

political interventions to maintain the human-nature harmony from a crisis may be associated with the acceptance or rejection of the audience to the extraordinary measures of political authority.

However, in order to uncover the underlying micro-level nuances of power relations between various stakeholders in securitization in politics stream, we employ NPF as it inform us about the differences in perceptions about extraordinary measures adopted by the political authority to protect biodiversity. Since biodiversity conservation is a socio-political process (Pascual et al., 2021), any modification on the existing patterns of conservation induces changes in the socio-economic conditions of the people. As biodiversity conservation is directly linked to life and livelihood of the respective local communities (WHO, 2025), any attempt to securitize biodiversity without a survey on their feedback about the implications of the extraordinary measure, would be incomplete or counter-productive. NPF enables us to capture the perspective of the audience and more importantly, its consequences for the macro-securitization of environmental sectors.

Accordingly, this study incorporates TSM' temporal sequence to dissect and closely accompany the process of biodiversity securitization, and concomitantly, the NPF's policy narratives to garner audience and stakeholder reaction to the extraordinary measures towards biodiversity conservation. This integrated analytical framework is apt for a grassroots level empirical analysis of securitization that sheds light on the role of the audience as participants in the whole process of biodiversity conservation in the Global South. The origin of securitization as a policy intervention from the state also can be traced using this blended approach (see Fig. 1).

2.2. Dissecting the process of securitization

Before we move on to the integration of the securitization theory with NPF in the politics stream, we examine the entire process of securitization into four phases to capture the nuances of micro level tussles between different stakeholders, which is graphically represented in Fig. II. The initial phase is common to all the political orders: democratic and non-democratic, the Global North and the Global South, and the normal everyday conduct of politics. In this phase, issues (traditional or non-traditional) are being politicized that drives political authority to intervene to address the matter (Phase I: *Normal Politics Phase*).

We consider securitization as a political intervention when exceptional measures are executed. Since the *Normal Politics Phase* is considered as a common practice of political systems, we concentrate more on the next phase, i.e. the *Speech Act Phase* where the political authority

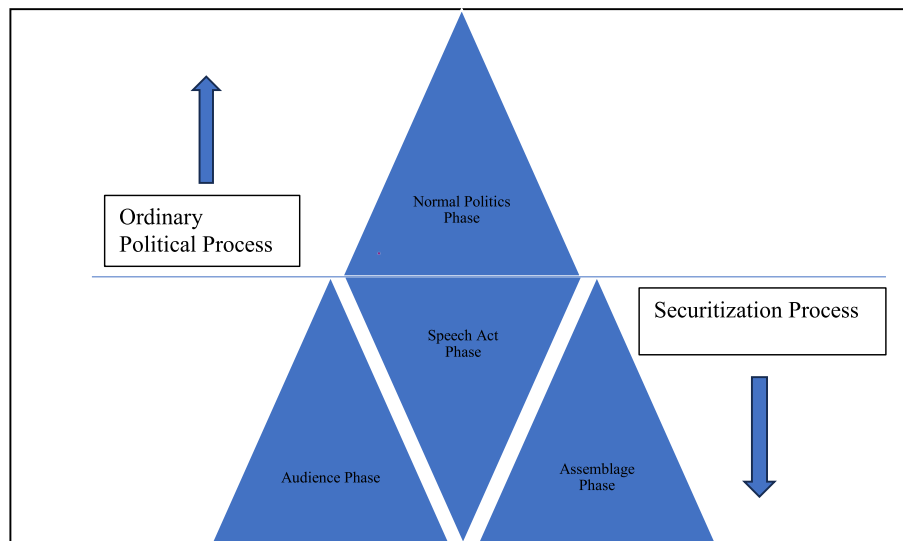


Fig. 2. Dissecting the macro securitization process for Normal Politics Phase, Speech Act Phase, Audience Phase and Assemblage Phase. Together they constitute the securitization process.

Speech Act Phase: A stage when securitizing actors designate something as a security threat which necessitates extraordinary measures to grapple with the threat. Securitization begins from this phase as a response to emerging issues such as biodiversity loss.

Audience Phase: A time when audience get a sense of what an extraordinary measure is and how it affects them. This phase witnesses the narratives and counter-narratives to the top-down speech acts and extraordinary measures.

Assemblage Phase: A time when audience transform themselves as participants and take positions in favour of securitization or anti-securitization. Anti-securitization is not de-securitization. Anti-securitization denotes the opposition to the extraordinary measures adopted by the political authority and they might find the securitization moves against their interest. The ability of the securitizing actor or the audience to manoeuvre the functional actors to support either securitization or anti-securitization would result in the formation of assemblages.

(Source: Compiled by the authors).

designates and decrees a particular issue as a threat and undertakes extraordinary measures to mitigate the threat. In that sense, the political authority chooses what is to be securitized and what is not. That is why biodiversity loss is not necessarily invoking extraordinary measures in all political systems. However, success or failure of a top-down securitization move is affected by the power relations between the securitizing actors, audience, and functional actors. It means the speech act of political authority does not ensure the success of securitization. As some issues are linked with multiple actors and socio-economic conditions of the people, especially in the Global South, securitization process may face countervailing forces. Against this backdrop, the *Audience* and *Assemblage Phases* are crucial to comprehend the securitization and anti-securitization processes. However, the assemblage phase is the decisive one to determine the success of securitization which is examined in the next section.

2.3. Assemblage formation in the process of securitization

In the Global South, due to the high diversity of stakeholders and interest groups in the conservation sphere, the assemblage formation is a complex political process that turns out to be supporting or opposing the political interventions. Assemblage formation is an important framework, Manuel DeLanda maintains, that enables us to comprehensively understand “the problem of the relationships between the micro- and macro-levels of social phenomena” (2016, p. 25). In the case of an environmental sector in the Global South, contingent assemblages form as a manifestation of the bottom-up reactions to the top-down extraordinary measures. It is interesting to note that these assemblages, those who form in support or against extraordinary measures, are dynamic and they depend on power relations between participants. Reiterating

the significance of power relations among the participants, DeLanda points out the dynamic characteristics by rejecting the pre-determined nature of or condition for assemblages. Rather, he maintains, “the identity of any assemblage at any level of scale is always the product of a process and it is always precarious, since other processes can destabilize it” (DeLanda, 2019, p. 28). When one dissects the macro-process of securitization into four different phases— Normal Politics, Speech Act, Audience, and Assemblage Phases— DeLanda’s observation is in-line with our assumption that either securitization assemblage or anti-securitization assemblage would prevail depending upon the nature of manoeuvring by the participants. This can be further explained according to the temporal sequences of the case study with the support of the TSM and Narrative Policy Framework (NPF). Here, narrative is used as a ‘communicative interaction’ at the micro-level to shape the nature of an issue (Fischer, 2003, p. 161). Narrative is primarily contextual as it is based on experiences (Fischer, 2003). The NPF is a methodological approach to capture the bottom up reactions to policy initiatives. It also helps to understand how narratives influence individual attitudes and hence aggregates public opinion (Jones and McBeth, 2010). Lawton and Rudd (2014) identify that since biodiversity conservation is an initiative largely depending on contextual agencies, NPF is a useful tool to analyse the societal influence on decision making. The figure below represents the temporal sequence of securitization phases when blended with TSM and NPF.

Securitization process begins with the ‘speech act phase’ and ends according to the nature and scope of outcomes in the assemblage phase. Fig. III explains the flow chart of the assemblage formation on the basis of narratives in the policy stream and the subsequent politics streams. The securitizing actor here is the political authority with the sovereign power to designate biodiversity loss as an existential crisis, and adopts

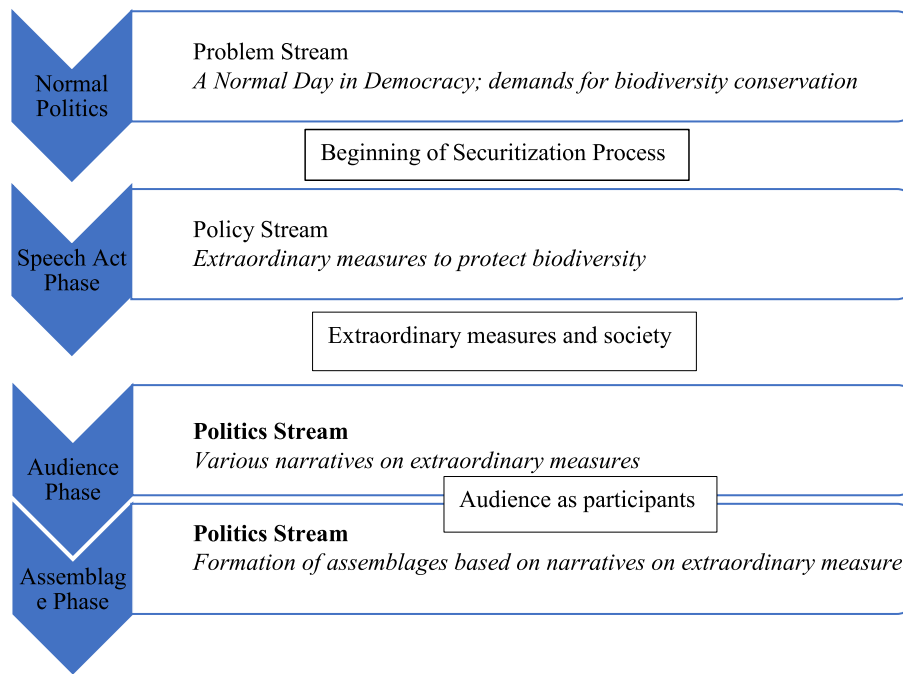


Fig. 3. Temporal sequence of the securitization phases when blended with TSM and NPF. (Source: Compiled by the author).

extraordinary measures to address the issue. Here, extraordinary measures include an unprecedentedly new regulation that restricts/re-defines human activities in any socio-economic sector or a geographic location. Speech acts from the political authorities play a significant role in legitimizing these extraordinary measures and promoting their acceptance among the audience. As a result of various counter-narratives, the audience also constructs their own notions on associated aspects of securitization such as extraordinary measures from a bottom-up standpoint. There are two possible outcomes that would determine the fate of securitization measures: first, securitization assemblage and, second, anti-securitization assemblage. The analysis of the following methodology section further clarifies the securitization and counter-securitization processes in WGs (see Fig. 4).

3. Methodology

This study employs multi-method approaches to gather evidence in the process of political intervention for biodiversity conservation as “there is a growing consensus among social scientists that research programs advance more effectively through the collaborative use of different research methods” (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Since securitization is a process which is constructively endorsed by state and non-state actors through various practices, this study employs discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews to examine how political authority and audience handle the securitization of biodiversity. A threat discourse is being constructed and unfurled about biodiversity loss by various actors and political authority justifies the actions to mitigate this threat by endorsing this discourse. In order to grasp the contextualization of biodiversity conservation in the *Normal Phase* and the emergence of extraordinary measures in the *Speech Act phase*, discourse analysis is useful as this method is concerned about the production of meaning through talk and texts (Ghica, 2013). Discourse analysis is a methodological approach for the production of new enquiries to different socio-political processes (Tonkiss, 2004), enabling us to uncover “activities between structures and groups in politicization of environmental discourses” (Neumann, 2008), and importantly, it is not restricted to any specific phase but common to all four phases— *Normal, Speech Act, Audience and Assemblage Phases*— in the context of biodiversity

conservation in the Global South.

A particular political intervention for biodiversity conservation at the national level and the reaction of the actors at sub-national local level is selected for further examination as it would help us in finding out the sequence of securitization that produces a particular outcome. This is necessary to locate this study where causal mechanisms play a vital role in explaining the key aspects in the securitization process in the Global South (Bennett, 2004). The case under observation is the process of securitization acts undertaken by the Government of India (hereafter GoI) to protect biodiversity in WGs. As GoI introduces extraordinary measures such as no-go zones by demarcating exclusive sensitive zones, to securitize the WGs region, especially in the state of Kerala, in the *Speech Act Phase*, there can be counter narratives from the audience as securitization might affect their life and livelihood in myriad ways. A counter discourse might emerge in the audience phase to resist the official securitization discourse. At a deeper *Audience Phase*, policy documents, protest materials, pamphlets, political manifestos, and so on narrate the varied ways in which the audience perceive what securitization is for them. Hence textual analysis is employed as a part of discourse analysis to evaluate the context and meanings of these texts. According to McKee, “we interpret texts in order to try and obtain a sense of the ways in which people make sense of the world around them in particular socio-political frames” (2001, p. 8). In other words, this study situates our analysis at the macro (GoI’s securitization) and micro (anti-securitization move of actors in the state of Kerala) levels.

As shown earlier, *politics phase* is the crucial battleground where the success or failure of extraordinary measures are determined through assemblage formation. In order to comprehensively understand the nuances of audience perceptions about extraordinary measures, one of the suitable ways is to survey on their narratives about the same. Semi-structured interview is a suitable method to directly interact with the members of audience to gather data such as personal experience and possible changes in the life and livelihood patterns (Pin, 2023). It is also used to understand how people at the grassroots receive policy intervention from the political administration and how its objectives are concretely translated (Adams, 2015). More importantly, the ways in which counter narratives against speech acts and extraordinary measures can be extracted using the data from semi-structured interviews.

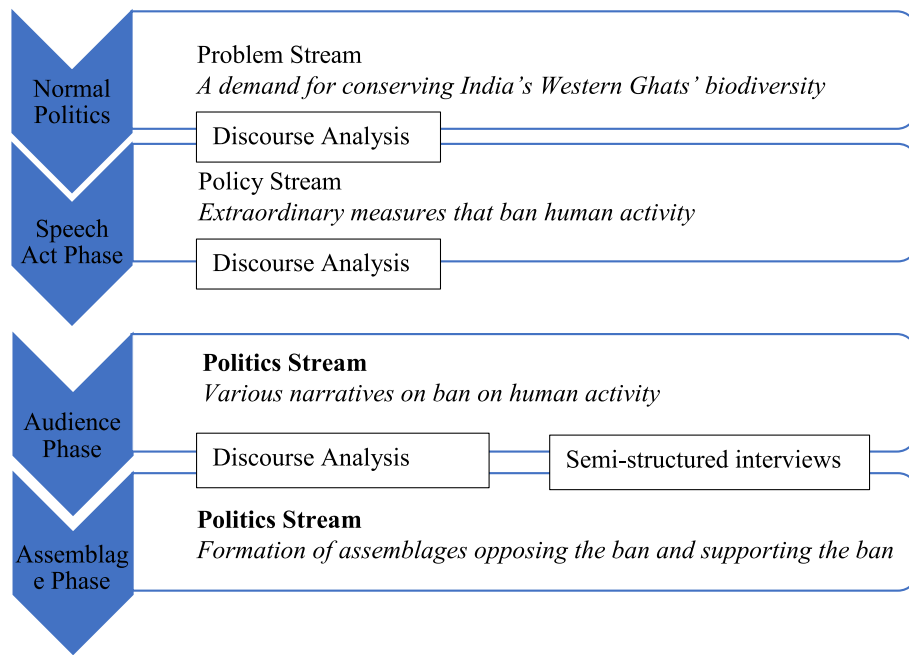


Fig. 4. Integration of theoretical framework and methodology. (Source: Compiled by authors)

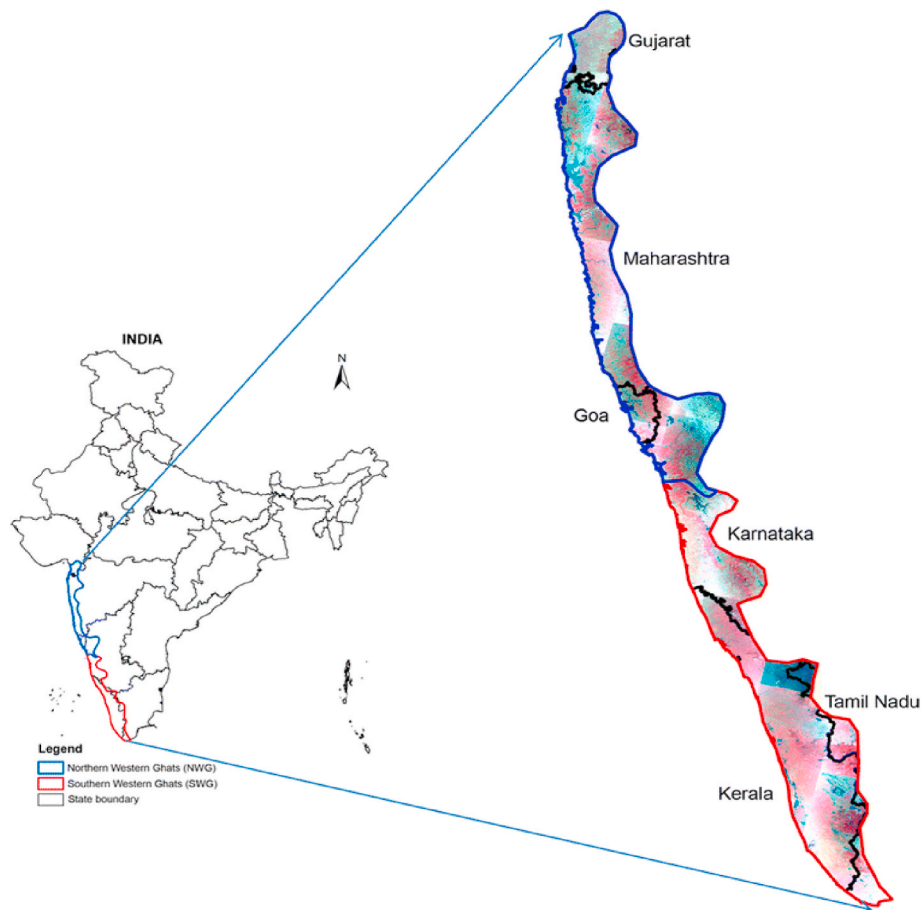


Fig. 5. Map of Western Ghats. Sources: Watershed atlas of All India Soil and Land-use Survey Organisation (AISLUS); India administrative boundary: Survey of India (SOI)

4. Political interventions, Western Ghats, and the politics of resistance: an analysis of the Indian state⁴ of Kerala

For India, political intervention for protecting biodiversity is crucial as it is directly linked with the livelihood of millions of local people, and thereby contributes to human survival and sustainable development (CBD-UN, 2024). One of the prominent and effective ways of saving the biodiversity is the hotspot method of conservation— an area-based approach ‘where extraordinary concentrations of biodiversity exist’ (Marchese, 2015, p. 301). While looking into the area-based approach, this paper maps out the securitization of biodiversity conservation. In doing so, the study applies the framework introduced above to analyse the politics around political interventions by GoI to safeguard WGs (Fig. V)— one of the four biodiversity hotspots in the country. Other biodiversity hotspots are the Himalayas, Sundaland, and the Indo-Burmese region. WGs— the sole biodiversity hotspot within the jurisdiction of India— is considered to be of immense global significance for biological diversity (UNESCO, 2012). It is a 160,000 km² mountain range that stretches about 1600 km parallel to the western coast of the Indian peninsula (WGEEP, 2011). It has been threatened by the increasing habitat pressures (Expert Committee Report on Western Ghats- HLWG, 2013). The following section examines the securitization moves to protect the biodiversity of WGs with the help of our theoretical framework that blends securitization and Three Streams Model.

1. Problem Stream: Loss of Western Ghats Biodiversity as a threat

A wide range of non-traditional issues such as climate change, environmental pollution, and migration, and so on come under contemporary policy purview in the *problem stream*. The imbalance between human-nature harmony and in over exploitation of WGs resources have led to disastrous consequences (Chandran, 1997; WGEEP, 2011; Expert Committee Report on Western Ghats- HLWG, 2013). All the 44 rivers in Kerala originate from WGs region, which also include 54 major dams. In August 2018, the state of Kerala experienced its worst flooding since 1924 affecting 5.4 million people and claiming over 400 lives apart from causing a huge economic loss of more than \$3.8 million (Hunt and Menon, 2020). Despite the ecological sensitivity and potential security challenges, India severely lacks a comprehensive conservation policy and practice for reducing biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation of WGs that constitutes a global environmental crisis to human existence (UN-CPR, 2022).

2. Policy stream: techno-managerial conservation and securitization of biodiversity

Responding to the reports and studies that outlined the catastrophic onslaught on the natural resources of WGs, GoI constituted the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP)— also known as Gadgil Committee as Madhav Gadgil, an acclaimed ecologist, was its Chairman— in 2010 and the Committee submitted its report in 2011. The Committee asserted that it made use of the conventional reports— such as Pronab Sen and Mohan Ram committees reports— in determining the ecological sensitivity of the region. Subsequently, GoI constituted the High Level Working Group on Western Ghats (HLWG)— known as Kasturirangan Report (KR)— in 2012 and the group submitted its report in 2013. The report of the Committee hardly referred to the conventional methods of determining ecological sensitivity (such as fieldwork), and prioritized geo-spatial technology and managerial processes. The logic of the two committees is discussed later in the coming sections.

4.1. Extraordinary measures recommended by WGEEP and HLWG

As discussed earlier, extraordinary measures are state-driven policies that introduce drastic and exceptional measures which are noticeable and impactful. In the case of biodiversity conservation generally follows

an area-designated practice, WGEEP (2011) took some exceptional measures, particularly designating the entire WGs region of 160,000 km² mountain ranges as an Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA). It suggested important steps like “phasing out the use of plastic bags in shops, commercial establishments, tourist spots, on a priority basis” (WGEEP, 2011, P. 41). We call this demarcation to restrict human activity on WGs an extraordinary measure as human-nature interactions in the region have a very long history of about 12,000 years (Chandran, 1997) while agriculture itself in the area has around 2000 years history (Ranganathan et al., 2008). The report divided the Ghats into three regions on the basis of an ecological sensitivity ranking: Ecological Sensitive Area I (ESAI), Ecological Sensitive Area II (ESAII), and Ecological Sensitive Area III (ESAIII). The Gadgil Committee recommendations include “no-go areas” wherein human activities are restricted from water courses, water bodies, special habitats, geological formations, biodiversity rich areas, and sacred groves. The report also prohibited developmental activities such as Special Economic Zones (SEZs), new hill-stations, red and orange category industries, new railway lines, and major roads in ESA I and ESA II. In addition to its support of the implementation of Forest Rights Acts (2006), WGEEP (2011) recommends the ban of converting public land to private ownership. It also recommends the introduction of the new land use policies, and a complete ban on monoculture plantation and use of pesticides. One of the key drawbacks in introducing WGEEP and its recommendation lies in the lack of *Speech Acts* from the political executive to persuade the audience about the significance of the extraordinary measures on conservation. Even the six state governments of WGs— Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu— bluntly decried the recommendations— including the rejection of the constitution of Western Ghats Ecological Authority (WGEA). There were large scale protests against such extraordinary measures in all the six states after the publication of WGEEP report (see Table 1).

The second committee (High Level Working Group-HLWG) was introduced as a part of the political negotiations between the government and the protesters. The Expert Committee Report on Western Ghats- HLWG (2013) observed that “identifying ESZs without taking into account the human cultural component which is a part of biodiversity, livelihood and developmental needs of human population is one of the limitations of the WGEEP report” (Expert Committee Report on Western Ghats- HLWG, 2013, p. 46). To address the matter, the major aim of HLWG was to convince the disgruntled audience by shrinking the percentage of Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA) in WGs when compared to WGEEP recommendation that demarcated the entire WG as ESA. The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF, 2012), GoI, issued an official order on November 13, 2013 mentioning 37 per cent of WGs region is ecologically fragile reducing its coverage to 188 talukas spread across the six WGs states, and developmental activities in those parts of the WGs should follow the regulations mentioned in the new order. The arrival of HLWG did not resolve major issues in places like Kerala as 123 villages with high density of population are still classified as ecologically sensitive. The following Table II discusses the differences between WGEEP and HLWG in terms of Village Area, Village Number, Population Size, and Population Density.

It is observed that though the overall percentage of ESA was shrunk from 100 per cent to 36.49 per cent of WGs and number of directly affected people reduced from 48,159,085 to 5,212,244 (nearly 90 per cent decrease), activities such as mining, quarrying, and sand mining; thermal power plants, building, and construction projects of 20,000 sq. m and above, township and development projects, and red category industries are still prohibited from the Ecological Sensitive Areas (ESAs), i.e., in 4156 villages (Expert Committee Report on Western Ghats- HLWG, 2013, p. 105). With the recommendations of HLWG, out of 38,863 km² of WGs region in the case of Kerala, 123 villages still remain in the ESA category, demarcating 44.15 per cent of WGs region in Kerala as ESA (Expert Committee Report on Western Ghats- HLWG, 2013, p. 88). Fig. VI shown below compares the ESAs demarcated according to

Table 2
Number of villages and population density in ESAs and non-ESAs of Western Ghats region.

	Village Area in km ²	Number of Villages	Population Size	Population Density
Total Western Ghats region	164,280	18,165	48,159,085	
ESA of WG according to WGEEP	164,280	18,165	48,159,085	293.15
	100 %			
ESA of WG according to HLWG (Natural Scape)	59,940	4156	5,212,244	86.96
	36.49 %	22.88 %	10.82 %	
Non-ESA of WG according to HLWG (Cultural Scape)	1,04,340	14,009	42,946,841	411.61
	63.51 %	77.12 %	89.18 %	

(Source: Compiled by the authors using data from WGEEP and HLWG reports).

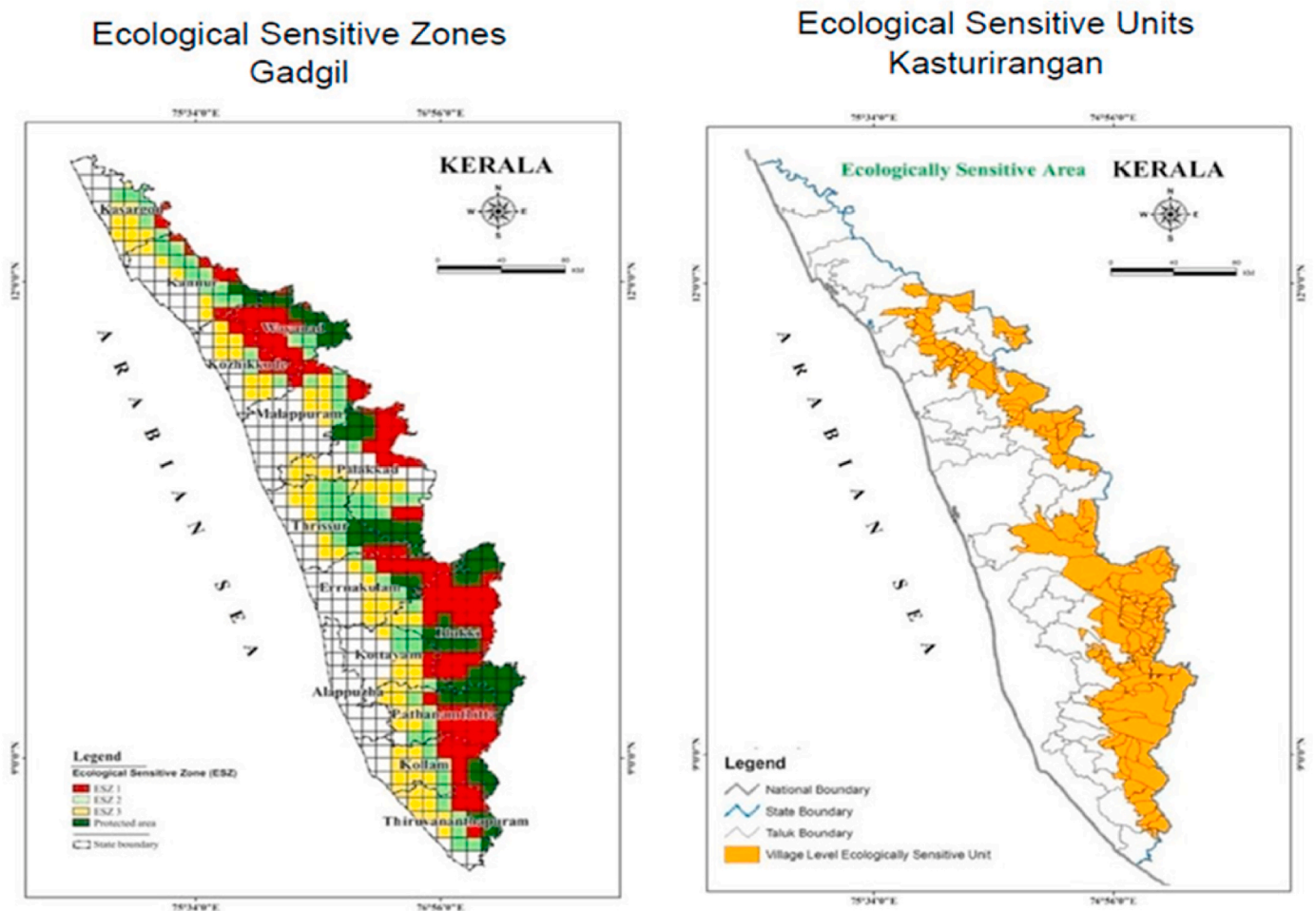


Fig. 6. Area of ESAs in Kerala according to WGEEP and HLWG (Source: Suchitra, 2013).

WGEEP and HLWG in the state of Kerala. With a very high density of population of 860 people per sq. km (Planning Board Kerala, 2017), Kerala’s 13108 km² still falls under ESA or Natural Scape (Expert Committee Report on Western Ghats- HLWG, 2013).

The move to impose a ban on Red and Orange category industries in ESAs evoked public agitation across highlands of Kerala as they included many inevitable agricultural units like coffee pulping, fertilizer units, fish processing units, and spices processing units within the categories. The ban on settlements and townships in ESAs unrolled apprehensions about essential infrastructure developments such as hospitals and educational institutes in WGs (Suresh, 2023).

It is worth noting that recommendations of WGEEP and HLWG are not mere policy suggestions, but extraordinary measures. They are

considered extraordinary when there is a partial or complete ban on human activities in designated areas where decades old human settlements exist. However, due to the paucity of supportive speech acts from politico-administrative authorities, a range of functional actors have occupied this vacuum and built apprehensions about the original outcome of extraordinary measures, thereby influencing the fate of the process of securitization. The next section deeply examines what are the significant socio-political processes involved to influence the top-down securitization efforts, who are the major actors and, finally, what are the outcomes in shaping the state of securitization in the context of conservation of India’s WGs.

3. Politics Stream: Audience Against Extraordinary Measures

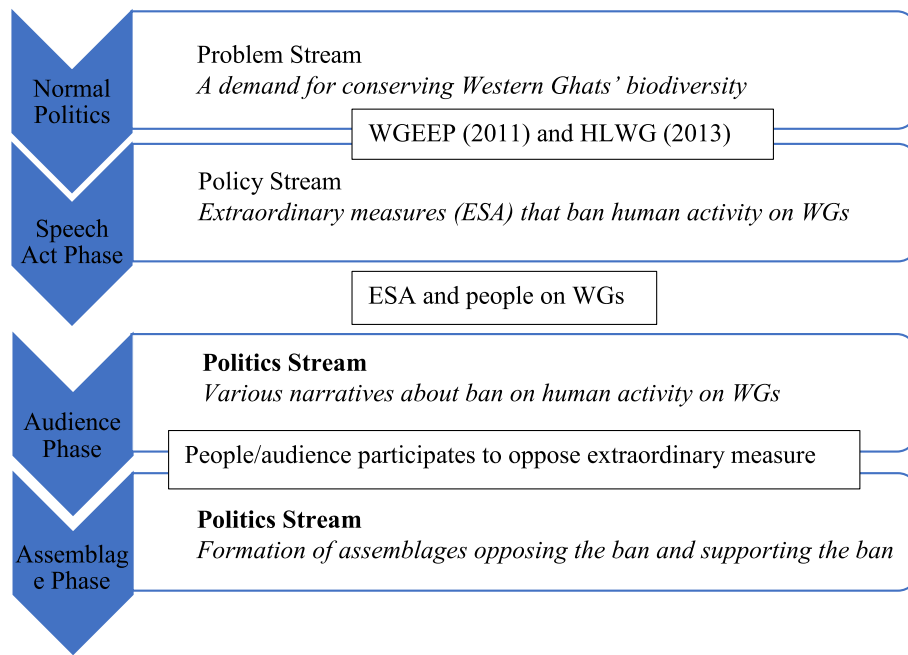


Fig. 7. Theoretical Framework and Empirical case of Western Ghats. (Source: Compiled by authors)

Identity of the audience depends on the context of the securitization process (Côté, 2016). In securitization of biodiversity of WGs, it is the people who live in the Ghats and those who are directly or indirectly affected by extraordinary measure of ESA demarcation are the audience. As mentioned in policy stream, to restrict human activity in WGs is an extraordinary measure as human settlements on the place have a long socio-cultural history (Chandran, 1997; Ranganathan et al., 2008). As a result, there were a series of protests against both WGEEP and HLWG reports throughout WGs. Extraordinary measures like ‘no-go zones’, ban on infrastructure development, implementation of FRA (2006) sowed seeds of fear and apprehensions among the audience on WGs. Both the ruling— (United Democratic Front-the UDF lead by Indian National Congress)— and opposition coalitions— (Left Democratic Front-the LDF lead by the Left parties)— in Kerala opposed the implementation of WGEEP report (Joseph, 2019). Along with LDF, the High Range Protection Council— an organization majorly catholic farmers, priests and members of the church— jointly held a state wide resistance on November 17, 2013. Protesters blocked all the village roads in Thiruvambadi, Koodaranhi, Kodencheri, Puthupadi and Kavalumpara, and attacked government offices, media, and several public and private vehicles. The protestors who thronged the Thamarassery-Chungam market set a police vehicle ablaze and blocked the route for several hours (The Hindu, November 16, 2013a, 2013b). In the South of WGs regions— like Idukki and Central Kerala— since the extraordinary measures will eventually restrict human activities, people protested against it by symbolically cooking on the streets as a sign of evacuation from the Ghats. Idukki district witnessed huge gatherings of people at various locations such as Thodupuzha, Kattapana, Peerumedu, Udumbanchola, Vandiperiyar, and Kumili resisting the recommendations (Times of India, November 16, 2013). When compared to the frequency and longevity of anti-securitization moves and protests, there were negligible pro-securitization moves in this case. The picture given below establishes the connection between theoretical framework and securitization of WGs. Fig. VII given below represents the enmeshing of theoretical framework, methodology and empirical case of WGs (see Fig. 8).

Following the protests in 2013, state governments including Kerala approached the Supreme Court of India to intervene in the issue to prevent GoI from implementing the recommendations. This started a

new phase in the politics of conservation of WGs as the issue was taken to the court of law marking an end to the direct confrontation between people and the government. The search for a comprehensive policy towards the conservation of WGs remains an unsettled issue. It is important to note that the spate of protests against WGEEP and HLWG reports challenged the legitimacy of extraordinary measures such as demarcation of the entire WGs as ESAs and prohibition of developmental activities. In other words, the state-driven biodiversity policy failed to garner public support and convince the audience in the case of WG. The following section explains the role of the audience, the functional actors and the formation of the assemblage in countering the state-led securitization of biodiversity.

4.1.1. Audience opposing the extraordinary measures: the Catholic Church as a functional actor and religious mobilization in the audience phase

An analysis of the religious composition in WGs area of Kerala reveals that the majority are Christians, whose migration to these regions started since the early 1950s due to the political events in domestic (early decades of Indian Independence with lack of resources) and international milieu (post-World War II with shortage of food grains across the globe) (Shahina, 2013). The Catholic Church has been playing a significant part in influencing the spiritual and material life of the people in WGs since then. The dioceses such as Thamarassery and Idukki manage several educational and healthcare institutions across WGs. The twin factors— guardianship of Christians and the fear about restrictions on their socio-economic activities— brought the church into a direct confrontation with the government on the invocation of extraordinary measures to conserve WG.

The protest in Kerala has two fronts. One is in Northern part that includes the places like Kozhikode, Mananthavadi, Wynad, Sulthanbathery, and Kannur. The other one is in the Central-Southern parts consisting of Pathanamthitta, Kottayam, and Idukki. In both these fronts, which are strongholds of the Mananthavadi and Idukki Dioceses respectively, there was an unprecedented politico-religious mobilization against the reports. In a pastoral letter issued in November 2013, Mar

Mathew Anikkuzhikkattil— Bishop of the Idukki Diocese— warned that “Kerala will become *another Kashmir*⁵ in case the report is implemented”. He referred to the restrictions in Kashmir in terms of property rights and freedom of movement.

Around the same time, the Bishop of Thamarassery diocese, Mar Mar Remegiose Inchananiyil made headlines when he told during a public protest that there would be *another ‘Jallianwala Bagh’* in WGs if the HLWG recommendations are executed (Warrier, 2013). These references to ‘*another Kashmir*’ and ‘*another Jallianwala Bagh*⁶’ are counter-narratives to the extraordinary measures which induced a fear of insecurity among the audience. Regarding the property rights, the general convener of the High Range Protection Council, Fr. Sebastian Kochupurakkal, opined that WG would eventually become a forest land if the reports are executed. He narrated:

In the November 13 order, the government makes it clear that Forests Rights Act of 2006 shall be observed in these areas in letter and spirit. The report also says that even small projects would require clearance from forest authorities and environment impact assessment. Such a situation would make these villages literally forest lands. All forest laws would be imposed there. Land transactions would come to a halt. Plans to provide title deeds (to settler farmers) will come to an end. It would become illegal to even cut the branches of a tree. Development activities would become impossible. Even normal development activities that are required for a modern society would come to a halt. Gradually all such areas would become forest land. People living there will have to move out. We can never accept such a situation.” (Krishnakumar, 2013, p. 4).

Raising an important issue of who should bear the responsibility of environmental conservation, he alleged that the intentions of international institutions of stopping the development of WGs region. Viju observes: “In principle, the report sounds good, but you should read the context. I feel they were toeing the lines of international agencies like UNESCO. While we welcome the fact that the WGs has UNESCO recognition, we do not want this tag to be a stone around our necks and stop all development in this region” (2019, p. 27). A pastoral letter read in Idukki’s churches warned that elected representatives would be “confronted on the streets” if they ignore the people’s sentiments (Ananthkrishnan, 2013). Similarly, in a letter issued on the farmer’s day (January 15), the *Infarm* (the farmers’ association under the Church) described WGs people as the protectors, not destroyers of the region. “The WG biodiversity can be protected only by the people of the Western Ghats, any attempt to evict them from their place of birth would invite unnecessary consequences” (KCBC, 2014). At a few locations, the audience as participants occupied roads along with their domestic animals to register their protests. At many places, the Church also took the lead as numerous priests and nuns joined in the protest. It was unprecedented in the history of public protests in Kerala to see a large number of priests and nuns on the streets demanding the withdrawal of any biodiversity conservation reports. Various auxiliary organs of the church urged its farmers, youth, and women wings to participate in the process of resistance through various counter-narratives to the extraordinary measures. It resembled a cadre-party-like organization with mobilizing protesters in a short time, arranging public meetings, and delivering campaigning through the communicative channels of the church for its followers as well as the general public.

4.1.2. Audience opposing the extraordinary measures: political parties as functional actors and political mobilization in the audience phase

Major Communist parties in the state— Communist Party of India

(Marxist) (CPIM) and Communist Party of India (CPI)— opposed both the reports. After the November 2013 notification, CPIM hosted a convention at Kodencherry in Kozhikode district of Kerala on December 7, 2013, stating that farmers in hilly terrains are worried over the notification of Kasturirangan report on WGs. In his statements, CPI (M) district secretary stated that the convention is being organized to strengthen people’s movement against impractical implementation and anti-people recommendations of HLWG Report. Official weekly newspaper of CPIM— *People’s Democracy*— accused the state government and GoI of creating insecurities among the people. It says, “The doubts and insecurities in the minds of people of the region have been created by the state and central governments and effective steps have to be taken to reassure the millions of people that their livelihood security will be ensured and genuine developmental activities in their habitats will be promoted” (People’s Democracy, 2013, p. 2).

The Left in Kerala carried an impressive record of environmental conservation, but WGs issue invited conflicts between left political parties and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad (KSSP) (*The Times of India*, June 1, 2014). In addition to the street protests, the Left parties took the issue of WGs to the level of legislative battles as well. One of the election promises for the 2014 parliament election read like this “Stopping implementation of Madhav Gadgil and Kasturirangan reports and set-up a broad based expert committee to arrive at a ‘comprehensive plan for protection of fragile ecosystems in the Western Ghats and people’s livelihoods’ through public hearings and wide consultations with stakeholders” (CPIM, 2014 Election Manifesto, p. 47).

The CPI leadership was also in the forefront in criticizing both WGEEP and HLWG Reports for their over-emphasis on techno-managerial approach for ESA demarcation. The state executive meeting of the party on November 16, 2013 passed a resolution to withdraw the notification based on HLWG recommendations. The state secretary of CPI, Panniyar Ravindran, accused the government of being unilateral and un-democratic in its decisions on the conservation of WGR. CPI members were active in various LDF protests and they also organized public meetings and programs of their own in several places like Kattapana, Thodupuzha, Nadapuram, Peerumedu, Muvattupuzha, and Adoor. In addition to INC, CPIM, and CPI, there were many regional political parties like the Kerala Congress (M), Janata Dal (Secular), and Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) who strongly resisted the execution of the recommendations of HLWG. Due to the fear about legislative repercussions in the upcoming national election in 2014, the United Democratic Front (UDF) was in a difficult situation to navigate through the politics of the conservation of WG. The next section elucidates how the religious and political mobilisation led to the formation of an assemblage against the securitization of WGs.

4.1.3. Extraordinary assemblage against extraordinary measures in the assemblage phase

One of the significant aspects of the resistance against the extraordinary measures include the formation of an assemblage that produced a counter-narrative which was manifested through bottom-up reactions of the audience with the help of various functional actors— for instance, the Catholic Church and Communist Parties in Kerala. This alliance between the two— Catholic Church and Communist Parties— is an interesting political process and an unprecedented assemblage that spear-headed the counter narratives against extraordinary measures. They jointly formed *Pashchimaghata Jana Samrakshana Samithi* (Western Ghats People Protection Committee [WGPPC]).

Existing issues were resolved by the CPIM and Catholic Church to fight jointly against the extraordinary recommendations of HLWG report. There was local level understanding among leaders of the left parties and concerned parish authorities of the churches in many locations— such as Bisonvalley, Kallarkutti, Kanchiyar, Karimpan, Maryland, Murikkassery, Nedumkandam, Panikkankudi, Rajakkad, Rajakumari, Thropramkudi, Udayagiri, and Vellathooval— as part of

⁵ A reference to Kashmir is due to high militarization of the area.

⁶ Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919 is an incident in India’s freedom movement where thousands of people were killed for protesting against Rowlett Act that allows indefinite detention and imprisonment without trial.



Fig. 8. Mar Remegiose Inchananiyil, the Bishop of Thamarassery diocese addressing gathering of Western Ghats People Protection Committee in-front of District Collectorate in Kozhikode in November 2013. (Source: Warrier, 2013)

the new WGPPC. Joint movements such as 48 h ‘living on the streets’ protest announced on November 17, 2013, brought the church and the left parties together calling for civil disobedience on the issue (Suchitra, 2013). The counter-securitization narrative from the audience occurred in two angles; first, the directly affected audience were religiously mobilized under the Catholic Church as majority of the people belong to Christianity; and secondly, the securitization of WGs was also opposed by the members of the opposition political parties such as the CPIM and the CPI, as the recommendations grossly neglected the socio-economic and cultural history of people’s life. This extraordinary assemblage induced a greater political impact in determining the trajectory of securitization of WGs. Thus, the integration and interdependence of religious, political and socio-economic dimensions substantially shaped the securitization and anti-securitization of WGs. This interdependence is not new as scholars like Jašina-Schäfer study the strong connection among securitization, institutions and culture in securitizing and desecuritizing the minorities (2023). Likewise, the case of Kerala reflects the significance of political and religious institutions in deciding the success or failure of securitization.

5. Success of counter securitization narratives by the audience

The idea of counter securitization narratives denotes challenging the securitization move and acts of institutionally assigned political authority who undertake and employ dramatic policy measures. Here, GoI endeavoured to securitize WGs by forming the twin committees as the reports of the committees recommended for some drastic measures to address the biodiversity loss. However, the political and religious mobilisation thwarted GoI’s strive for securitizing WG, especially with regard to the state of Kerala. The counter-securitization narrative can be considered successful from two fronts. Firstly, due to the growing intensity of the protest strikes by the assemblage of functional actors such as the Church and the opposition parties, the Government of Kerala constituted a separate committee— Dr. Oommen V Oommen Committee— to study the HLWG report towards the end of 2013. The crucial factor for the constitution of a separate committee is to redraw the ecological sensitive areas in Kerala by separating human settlement zones and further reducing the percentage of ESAs in WGs. The committee was asked to visit all areas proposed by members of the Kerala Legislative Assembly and Members of Parliament from the state and

interact with the audience (The Hindu, November 20, 2013). The committee found that the farmers and agriculture are inevitable parts of WGs as far the state of Kerala is concerned (Expert Committee Report on Western Ghats- HLWG, 2013, p. 16). The expert committee submitted its report to the government with a pro-farmer stand. Due to the series of political pressure from Kerala, the Union MoEFCC considers exceptions for demarcating ecologically sensitive areas in WGs of Kerala (Kumar, 2014). The Committee states that:

In many of the villages in Kerala identified by KR committee as ESA, there are many large educational institutions including Engineering Colleges and many hospitals also. Many villages are partially urbanised. Towns like Munnar, Kumili, Kattappana and Nedomkandam are examples for this. Many banks, hotels, bus stands, religious institutions, etc. are there in these busy towns. Living in this area according to the conditions and restrictions put forward by forest and environment Acts and Rules is impracticable and unjustifiable (Expert Committee Report on Western Ghats- HLWG, 2013, p. 20).

Secondly, the counter narratives were legitimized through electoral politics in the 2014 Indian Parliamentary election. In the election, the Congress party allowed all the sitting Member of Parliaments (MPs) to be candidates, except Mr P T Thomas, who had represented the Idukki Parliament constituency of WGs. The reason for excluding Thomas was that he was one of the very few politicians in Kerala who supported WGEEP and HLWG reports. The Left Democratic Front supported Adv. Joyce George— the candidate fielded by WGPPC. Hence Adv. Joyce George was the candidate and representative of the assemblage of audience who opposed WGEEP and HLWG reports, elected as the MP from Idukki parliament constituency during 2014 Indian Parliamentary election. The series of protest strikes by those affected by the extraordinary measures had enjoyed tremendous political support specifically through the functional actors’ organizational structure and resource, which continues despite natural hazards such as the 2018 Kerala floods. The assemblage can be identified as the soul of resistance against the extraordinary measures i.e. the demarcation of WGs as Ecological Sensitive Areas. Thus, the counter-narrative was the major hurdle for GoI in securitizing the biodiversity conservation in the state of Kerala.

The success of counter-securitization in challenging the securitization policies of the GoI offers a fresh insight to the theory of securitization. Unlike the passive and the insignificant role of the audience (the people) as argued by Floyd (2016) and Waever (2003), the Western Ghats case reflects that audience significantly shape the counter-securitization narrative.⁷ However, functional actors may influence the audience in rejecting or accepting securitization (Floyd, 2016). In the case of WGs, both audience and functional actors have common interests (to oppose the securitization of WGs) and the interplay between the two substantially reinforced the counter-securitization narrative. The functional actors formed assemblages subscribing the demands of the audience. Thus, the Global South case as analysed with reference to WGs reveals that securitization theory as an analytical framework is not universal in nature. The employment and success of securitization depends on the nature of a sector, role of various actors and the context of its application. In other words, political authorities need to be sensitive in executing securitization considering the nature of an issue, context of securitization and the interests of the audience and functional actors.

6. Conclusion

The GoI attempted to redefine and represent the nature of

⁷ According to Waever, audience do not mean the general public. However, he subsequently acknowledged that concept of audience is underdeveloped and can further be developed seeing the context of securitization (2011).

biodiversity in WGs by categorising the region in various zones through the reports. However, the classification of WGs as ecologically sensitive areas drove the central leadership to introduce some policy measures that undermine the interests of the local people. The GoI constituted Gadgil and Kasturirangan reports recommend that declaration of sensitive zones is essential to prevent the degradation of biodiversity, though the reports have different approaches in addressing the issue. However, the recommendations of the reports are extraordinary as it ignores the social, economic and cultural aspects of the people, especially WGs of Kerala. The declaration and demarcation of ecologically sensitive zones would prevent the local people from their socio-economic and cultural activities which they have been enjoying for decades. The extraordinary measures of preventing the local people to enter into the sensitive zones limits the economic and cultural choices of the people. This whole idea of introducing extraordinary measures—declaration and demarcation of sensitive zones and prohibiting the local people to access the zones—is analysed within the framework of securitization theory. In other words, GoI supported and permitted the execution of the recommendation of the reports, particularly KR reports, that securitized the biodiversity of WGs.

However, the securitized move of GoI is unacceptable to the local people. The state of Kerala utterly decried the securitization move of GoI and rejected the recommendation of the reports as biodiversity conservation was framed as a preeminent referent object without heeding the socio-economic and cultural facets of the people of the region. As result, a counter-narrative emerged, and became dominant that successfully thwarted the securitization of biodiversity in WGs. The counter-narrative received wider public and political support resulting into the formation of a powerful assemblage that embraced people from political parties (both ruling and opposition parties), religious institutions (such as Churches), political institutions (the legislative organ of the state of Kerala), and the common people. The assemblage vehemently opposed the securitization of biodiversity by developing a local narrative on the issue.

The securitization and counter-securitization discourses substantially shaped the debate around the issue of biodiversity. This debate and the case study reflects that this paper has two major contributions to the securitization literature. First, it is evident from the case study that state-driven securitization is not universal and supreme. There are multiple non-state actors (such as active audience and functional actors) who challenge the securitization move of a government. When one traces the process of securitization in the context of Global South, the process is more dynamic and unique due to the role of non-state actors carrying diverse interests (Murray, 2024; Sahu and Mohan, 2022). This case study of Kerala from the Global South may be a reference point in examining the securitization of other conventional and unconventional issues in the Global South as well as the Global North. Second, from the theoretical perspective, this paper finds that an understanding of a local or micro-level narrative is indispensable for the success or failure of a securitization theory, especially when the securitization process affects the local people. Instead of assuming securitization as a macro level process, the suggested theoretical framework that integrated securitization theory with TSM and NPF unravels the dynamics of securitization by surveying the role of stakeholders such as the audience and functional actors. We call this *Securitization Phases Framework* as it dissects the securitization process into different phases for more closer observation. Recognizing the *audience phase* and *assemblage phase* further opens avenues for comprehensively understanding securitization process at the grassroots. Thus, securitization of biodiversity or environmental sector is a complex process that demands a deeper engagement between the state and the society, especially in the Global South.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Justin Joseph: Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Conceptualization. **Anjan Kumar Sahu:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Conceptualization. **Juha Vuori:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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