

## **The Terracotta management of ecology**

**Parth J Shah, Business Standard, 26 July 2005**

India needs to think afresh on how to balance economic growth with rapid consumption of ecological resources. The recent tiger crisis, the Scheduled Tribes Bill that gives them parts of the reserved land, the debate on the responsibility of India in the Kyoto Protocol, all have highlighted the urgency of rethinking the orthodox paradigm of environmental management.

The currently dominant Green approach has put all faith in the governments of the world. Only governments are seen as the true guardians of public interest, protectors of precious natural resources. We Indians know this mindset first-hand: the socialist approach that put the government in control of the commanding heights of the economy.

We know the results, too. The alternative approach is to put faith in people, as individuals, associations, communities, tribes. I call this approach the Terracotta approach. Terracotta traditionally symbolises wise use of natural resources.

Many activists interpret the Terracotta approach as an anarchist approach, removing government from ecological management. That is absurd. The market approach to the management of the economy does not mean elimination of government's role. The government has to provide a neutral framework, set the rules of the game, and then be an effective umpire to monitor the game.

The government must perform a similar function in setting the rules for the management of the ecology. And this function of the government is far more difficult. In the economic arena, we have had varied experiences. In the ecological arena, we have only recently begun to learn these lessons.

A few real-world experiments do teach us lessons about the relative effectiveness of the Green and Terracotta approaches. In Zimbabwe and South Africa, communities primarily manage forests and wildlife, while the governments play the role of advisors and supervisors. The forest cover has improved and elephant population has expanded. So has livelihood.

For fisheries, Japan's experience demonstrates the resilience of its traditional system of sea tenure. Several countries — Iceland, New Zealand, Australia — have tried the Individual Tradable Quota (ITQ) approach with great success.

For industrial air pollution, the new approach of "pollution permits" has been far more effective in balancing the needs of rapid economic growth with the demands for cleaner air. Which country do you think has largely abandoned the "command and control" approach in favour of "pollution permits"? China! India indeed needs to think afresh.