

## Upward Movement vs. Outward Movement: Resource, Development and Indigenous People

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### Abstract

*The economic policies over last six decades have brought certain fundamental changes in social, economic and political life of the people of the country. The entire process has generated conflicts at various levels leading to shaping and reshaping of social, political and spatial relationships. The contradictions have sharpened to the extent that Special Economic Zones (SEZs), a flourishing meadows, and combat zones (contested for control) are perceived as a threat to very existence of the nation-state itself. The affluence is visible across the emerging urban and industrial spaces and so is the plight of peasants, landless labourers, adivasis and so on. Economic liberalization has integrated rural resources with urban corporate and global market, which produced new power structure based on minerals, forests, water and land.*

*The new differentiation of rural classes and tribal deprivation require a fresh analysis by academicians and policy makers. Development is said to bring opportunities to the people and new possibilities that were not available before the humanity. It is seen and defined in terms of technological advancements, increased mobility both horizontal and vertical, enhanced skills and means of communication and so on. It is now accepted that single Eurocentric definition of development does not address the aspiration of all because more than one meaning of development exists amongst societies across globe. Consequently, people have different expectations and aspirations depending upon their exposure to the larger world and known level of technological advancements.*

*It is in this context that the present paper attempts to analyse the contestations, conflicts and discourses of upward movement of individual and communities based on resources. The paper also tries to put a critique of the existing essentialist paradigm of 'development-displacement-disparity'.*

**Key words:** *Mobility, Development, Resources, Disparity, Indigenous People*

### Background

Development is said to bring opportunities to the people and new possibilities that were not available earlier. It is seen and defined in terms of technological advancements, increased mobility both horizontal and vertical, enhanced skills, means of communication and so on. It

is now accepted that single Eurocentric definition of development does not address the aspiration of all because more than one meaning of development exists amongst societies across globe. Therefore people now have different expectations and aspirations depending upon their exposure to the larger world and known level of technological

advancements. However one thing remains common that is everyone expects and tries to be better compared to the past. The notion of betterment is not in contrast with the most basic and widespread propagated notion of development. When this idea is framed into a concept then this refers to 'upward mobility'. In other words, the notion of development promises upward mobility to each and every member of all societies across the globe. But even the truth quotient of this very notion of an all encompassing concept of development is not unchallengeable and if it is questioned then how this basic assurance of developmentalism is fallible and is majorly unanswered. The question does not end with this doubt. In fact it has multiple dimensions and inherent contradiction that arises out of the existing development paradigm, such as if in a given situation everyone is not assured of upward mobility then does it naturally imply failure of the concept of development? If so, then why does even at this age leading economist and developmentalists argue for the sake of development knowing that its implied benefits are not reaching to the masses? Does this notion of development harbour something else other than upward mobility?

These are both critical and difficult questions which often may be termed as absurd on the face of such primary arguments such as development has brought many things to many regions and continue to bring latest comforts, the new technological superiority and the modern thrills of adventures and pleasure. One cannot deny this reality; however this reality does not necessarily nullify the critical question that

is if development does not incorporate mass upward mobility should it be rightfully labelled as development? The gap between the propagated notion and the lived reality often gets manifested as violent conflicts, at times it remains suppressed like a boil and burst with pain and anger. The question gets further complex as one tires to gorge into the role of the propagators of the aforesaid development propaganda. Suppose if they are made aware of these contestation and conflicts then what alternative development model is available to ensure upward movement of all people at all times. Answering these questions is not an easy task, and probably not known to mankind at this synchronic point of civilization. As of now it is a futuristic question best left to time and society to answer its own will through struggles, movements and discontents, as has been always in human history.

It is in this context that the present paper attempts to analyse the contestations, conflicts and discourses of upward movement of individual and communities based on resources. The paper also tries to put a critique of the existing essentialist paradigm of 'development-displacement-disparity'. For this political ecology perspective would be adopted. Political ecology approach on one hand is a critique of 'order of existing things' but remains largely rooted in political economy. Together this encompasses the constantly shifting dialectic between society and land-based resources and also within classes and groups within society itself that shape the structure of society, the extent of subtractibility and exclusion within and between community.

## **Changing Conception and the Changing Resource: Putting Political Ecology in Perspective**

Resources refer to all kind of endowments that form the basis of human survival and can also be appropriated by dominant section of society at any given point of time. Resources refer to stock and flow of natural endowments. Fixity of resources is supposed to be a boon for people since the dawn of civilization; throughout different ages in history it has attracted human agglomeration and civilization in recent words. Owing to such appropriation of resources and its fixity, there has been periodical conflict and consequent displacement of certain communities' even societies at large as witnessed at particular point in history (Ota 1996, 2010). Fixity of resource has also been questioned in context of power and knowledge since ages; yet localisation and fixity of resources and differentiation of spatial characteristics has been central to the explanation of concentrated development (Choudhary 2009). Such existing explanations make relationship between developmental process and geographical space a universal factor ever since the conceptualisation of development and actual as well as expected upward movement of communities in the modern sense.

Developmental history as defined in the mainstream, started since humans learnt about accumulation and this traces back to the beginning of agriculture when it became possible to store the output and use it thereafter. The sense of space, initially as a physical entity and later as cultural landscape remained attached to the process of development. Initiation of industrialisation and its reliance on fund

resources made the case for space more distinctive and dogmatic theorization about the space paved its way. Such development also led to world-wide dislocation and relocation of human population as space got transformed. For example forests and grasslands were converted into agricultural fields and since eighteenth century areas of natural and human resources got transformed into urban-industrial landscape. This resulted in rearrangement of human population at various stages. Human civilization began as communities transformed themselves from nomadic communities to sedentary population living in different types of settlement. Alongside Industrial Revolution reshaped the economic map of the globe. Areas with mineral and power resources like North-west Britain, central India Great lake regions etc. flourished as key location for urban industrial development. This also caused relocation of people at large scale. The process more often than not resulted in alienation, marginalisation and exclusion of communities, groups and individuals of various region and origin. One set of major and minor conflicts at different levels in society have been due to this differential treatment.

There has been critiques of concentrated development and the also about the nightmare of developmentalism that often results in the 'anti-politics machine' or lead to violence side by side of excessive prosperity at one place (Escobar 1994). Partha Chatterjee (2006) talks of unscrupulous invitations and Jean-Philippe Platteau ( ) has drawn our attention to generalized and limited moralities.

However, these great economists miss the intricate relationship of ecology,

resource and the processes that results in differentiated development over space. Each region of the globe has different resources, and their utility in each geographical setting for ages has been different hence given rise to different spaces in other word different cultures. But more important is the nature of control on these resources. The ongoing process of generalization has also lead to uniformity in ways of using resources and hence discomfort to many and in due course making majority work and inherent knowledge irrelevant. It is here the political ecologist argue that noting on the planet is irrelevant and definitely the skills that have fed millions for years and has ensured their survival amongst all odds cannot be irrelevant in whatever age we live in. Political ecology approach on one hand is a critique of 'order of existing things' but remains largely rooted in political economy.

### **Nature of Development in India**

India like other developing countries has encountered with the colonial model of development wherein resource-rich peripheries and market rich cores is still in existence after 60 years of independence. It started since their independence regional development as a strategy to reduce accentuated regional disparity, but situation under structural adjustment programme has worsen rather than improving in last decade. Since 1990 there is growth-oriented development and it has resulted in marginalisation of various kinds like economic marginalisation, social and political marginalisation and so on. All kinds of marginalisation can be broadly put into two categories: spatial marginalization and non-spatial marginalization. There are

several ways to understand development and spatial dimension has been the one more commonly known as regional development. The various paradigms of development depend upon the researcher's own theoretical position and the locale that they represent. One of the common concerns in the arena of developmental debate remained the analysis of existing economic structure and different spatial expression of such structure. Structuralist interpretations of the economy are often put under the purview of neo-Marxism as the concerns in this paradigm have been on the analysis of the impact of capital on labour. The dominant literature on regional development have generally been put under two broader categories: one that analyses spatial division of labour depending upon the product cycle model and the second that is concerned with profit cycle model (Rees, 1992). Regional development remains a widely debated and loosely implemented concept in the developmental discourse across the world with India not being an exception. Several reasons are cited for this state of affair. The weakness of the implementing agencies, bureaucratic character of the executive organ/s of the state, lack of active participation of the people and so on, have been the dominant reasons for not fulfilling the aspirations of the people of the poor regions. The backwardness or relative underdevelopment of the forested region, tribal region border regions, hilly terrain and desert region is well known fact. Further, with the concentrated development glaring examples of various kinds of disparities at international, interstate and interregional levels continue to emerge. Even in the most developed countries like USA the same

scenario have been observed a few decades ago (Ullman, 1958),

... notable is the disparity within United States, where, in the northeast, about 7 % of the U.S. area has about 70 % of the nation's industrial employment; the rest of the country fights for the remainder in a manner not unlike dogs fighting over a dry bone.

It is also true that in the poor countries or poor regions such disparities are larger and in the beginning of developmental process these inequalities are supposed to be larger (Myrdal, 1957). India is a country with wide natural variations that include lofty Himalayan Mountains, great Gangatic Plain, vast Thar Desert and deep black soil of the Deccan. These natural diversities often provide a shield for the state for not being able to eliminate existing or rather increasing regional disparities. It is most common to relate non-development to lack of resources. However, nature of resources is that they are not resources unless man's technology can use them. A gaze on noted historical developments tarnishes such notion. The example from China strengthens this point clearly. The current 'inaccessible regions' of China used to be the centre of economic activities till the 11<sup>th</sup> century and the current thriving regions of China used to be the areas where offenders were sent to exile. The change in the technology from land route trade (silk route) to trade via sea route changed the landscape of the country. The concentration of development in a few parts of the world or in a few part of the nation seems to be the law of economics at least for some point of time. The same law of economics also propose that there are no alternative to development and if a country

or a nation or a region aspire to be developed it has to go the way "developed regions" have ferried over time. In a way it implies that all parts of the world have to feel the negativity of development process in terms of inter-regional disparity and inter-personal disparity. The inevitability of deprivation of some is to be interpreted in this paper with special focus on those who lives on the margin as Subba Rao (1968) call in the area of relative isolation.

India started her economic development with a vision document of National Planning Commission chaired by Jawaharlal Nehru, who later became first prime minister of the country. In the independent India it started with Nehru on the Bhakhra Nangal dam declaring it as modern temple of India. It not only was an expression of secular statehood but also an indication of the coming future of India that would be dependent on large projects: large dams, big factories, heavy engineering and so on. The beginning continued unabated with many such new additions like Hirakund, Sardar Sarovar, Ukai and so on. Along with the irrigation cum power projects came new mineral based industrial complexes like IISCO spreading over Bernpur, Hirapur, Kulti; Raurkela, NALCO, Damodar Valley Corporation and many more. The projects of the first two to three decades infused high hopes amongst different communities across the country. People including the displaced thought that these projects will bring betterment to their lives in near or distant future. There was no story of failure or cheating in the nation state as it was in the process of becoming. However, with the passage of time the cruel truth of the development processes unfolded which gave rise to

protests following which a committee was constituted to look into the grievances of the displaced communities. The discontent amongst different section of displaced people and the voices of their incapability compared to those who displace them to deal with the larger and more powerful became louder by late 1980 especially when World Bank had withdrawn itself from Sardar Sarovar Project citing the unsettled rehabilitation claims. This can be taken as a blatant slap on the face of democratic socialist state that vows to ensure welfare to all its citizens. Moreover, this was not a sporadic incident; there has been systematic and continuous deprivation of the people who got displaced against their will from the land that goes to different development project (Fernandes 1994, 2004; Oommen 2006). With liberalization, globalisation and privatization (LPG Model) a new dimension was added to this when private entrepreneurs started setting mining and other projects purely for profit generation rather than the earlier held notion of national development. This also meant running out of patience for those were displaced and evaporation of whatever little hopes that they had from the nation-state. The outcome of this change in the perception and conception of people has been violent protest and brutal state response in many parts of the country like that of Kalingnagar of Orissa where 13 tribals were gunned down by the state agencies for protesting against the setting up of a plant (Meher 2009:466).

### **Outcomes**

The violent protest and brutal state responses are neither the only results nor the prime

outcomes; these are rather natural fallout of an unjust economic order that is being allowed to continue, operate and proliferate across mineral rich regions of the country despite two policy documents by the state agencies one in 1998 and other in 2004 (Fernandes 2007). The contemporary development literature seems to be depending on the slogan of 'large, more and quick'. The outfall of such slogan does not always bring fruits to all and for sure not the fruit that will have nourishment for all. Some does get wealthy with such endeavour at the cost of majority who gets marginalised economically, and consequently socially and politically. Resource is localised in India as any other part of the world and has been declared as national asset under the British Empire so that they can be exploited by the British Empire unhindered. Independent India continued with the same definition of the natural resources and used the resources for "national goals". This pattern though tried towards dispersal of industries during 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> plan remained concentrated within pockets of the so called backward state. After globalization, centrality of economic activities increased as all incentives for decentralized development seized to exist. These widening disparities and continuous marginalization often get manifested in violent conflicts. One such example is of civil unrest in different parts of the word owing to various reasons. I take example of Naxalism from India. Genesis of this problem is related to its course of development which is further intricately linked to its regional geography. Large areas that are affected by conflicts are noticeably backward regions of the country. In Myrdal's term "they are poor because they are poor".

The reason is mostly dry parts of the country with undulating terrain and low water-table. There is scarcity of fertile agricultural land. Forest resource was earlier excessively used in the name of local by corporate taking patta in some of the regions. Mining based industries do not consider the residents of the areas as skilled. There is hardly any effort to enhance the skill or improve the human resources of the region. Further, few parts of the country have grown too fast and now under the electronic media, the extravagant use of different kinds of resources by few is vividly visible. I think this is sufficient cause for conflict. The complexity of human-environment relationship of the region, the changes that were brought to the region, the failure or success of such interventions and the current possible relation needs to be studied to understand the complexities of the conflict in these regions. Further, the nature of political intervention in each of the affected areas has been different and has got different responses depending upon the level of political awareness of the people of those areas.

Further, since 1990, the country allowed private operators to mine the national wealth and accrue profit at unmatched level. This is contradictory to basic economic principals on two counts and beyond understanding for anyone knowing A B C of economics. First is that with increasing level of development the country, the nation, the region starts higher level of production and export more complex product and production technology is liable to be better. India after 60 years of independence and much cried “shining India campaign” started selling unprocessed minerals i.e. the raw material. Second is the definition of nation asset. How a private

firm or individual within the territorial boundary or a MNC is allowed to sell of the national wealth? And if this national wealth is to be sold in the open market how they continue to remain national asset for which indigenous community should continue to sacrifice their local interest? These two sets of question do not have ready answer because they are contradictory to the same economic principles that argue for initial disparity between persons and regions in the beginning of development.

These sets of economic premises are open to debate; nevertheless millions are displaced from their home and their environment everyday and contribute to the accumulation of wealth by the global billionaires. The process is aptly articulated as “accumulation by dispossession” by Swapna Banerjee-Guha (2010), though in a completely different context, while she was deliberating the global accumulation of wealth across city regions of the world. The process i.e. accumulation by the ‘haves’ based on dispossession of the ‘have nots’ and their complete marginalization and delegitimization (most react violently with no option remaining for peaceful airing of discontent) remains same in the dark jungles and in deep mines far from the glitters of global metropolis. The people who have been living in the forested areas of central India and elsewhere in similar areas have been categorised as areas of relative isolation by Rao (1968) and as backward inaccessible area needing special assistance by Planning Commission. The Constitution of India recognizing the special character of the region including that of the inhabitants have also put them under special category i.e. Schedule V. The contemporary pattern

of development in India has been such that majority of new economic activities are getting located in these areas as they house all the major minerals in the states of Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and the major source of hydroelectricity in the seven sister states of Northeast India. The outcome of the adopted lopsided elite focused development has been such that power is generated not for those whose water is used; minerals are extracted and exported by those who have nothing to do with the nation building. The statement is liable to be contested by the state loyal elitist development economists saying that it is from that taxation and levy that the major social welfare schemes like MGNREG, and Midday meal and others are running. There has been deconstruction of these myths at more than one place and here attempt would only be focused to analyse the outcome of these development in terms of displacement of millions in India

### **Forced Outward Mobility and Indigenous Community**

Development based on available resource and optimal utilization of resources by indigenous community is said to be the best remedy for the empowerment of people. However, in the contemporary dominant development paradigm this option remained confined to the pages of radical journals and books authored by critical scholars. The current paradigm of development is dependent on the model based on three words: more, more and more. The economy promote more consumption to battle the slow down, hence it is required to produce more to match the demand and consequently required more raw material and more power to match the level of consumption and

production. We do find international submits from Copenhagen to Rio rhetorically aiming at the earth sustainability; though often these places get invaded by the corporate who are concerned only with the sustainability of their firms (Hindu 24 June 2012).

In such a scenario, development induced displacement remained an unavoidable outcome that result in pauperization of masses especially the indigenous community due to none of their fault. Concentration of resource is said to be prime mover of development even in the not so people-friendly model of Export Substituted Industrialization. It is understood that export of resources would bring the required wealth and will lead to capital formation at regional level and will finally lead to economic and social development of the region. The reality of mineral rich region of India does not support this model. There has been different estimation about the magnitude of displaced people. Farnandes and Thukral (1989) estimated the total number of displace people between 1951 and 1990 as something between 11 million and 18.5 million; Farnandes (1994) in another study put the figure of displaced by different projects at 21.3 million. The latest estimate available on displacement places the total number displaced in India owing to different kinds of development projects as about 60 million (Mathur 2008).

One can argue that these numbers are exaggerated, however, none can deny the fact that some people have been displaced and there is no official statistics or any effort to collect data on displaced beyond the individual and records. It is well known when displacement of entire settlement village or town or hamlet takes place it is

in all likelihood not possible not to displace those who do not pose land in their name; as there are more agricultural labourer than cultivators, more landless than land owning people and so on. Fernandes (2007) has put forward similar argument on the basis of more than about 10 studies he along with his team has conducted across different parts of India. This is an indication about the official sensitivity towards the displaced. In general it is understood that no one has moved voluntary from their own home leaving land and all asset. However, there is another argument that all of the 60 million or 21 million are not displaced using force. This is an interesting argument that I tried to establish when I was in the district of Keonjhar. It is true that in the initial phase the displacement was not voluntary but also not forced. They moved from their own abode with a hope in their eyes that there will be betterment in their economic condition over time. In recent time, it is noticed that all major or even minor project site has also been sites of protest. The reason for such protest is the past experience of the displaced in the surrounding that remained unsettled and uncompensated and in certain cases they even lost their mere existence. The rampant fear of repetition of past and ruthless brutal state response against any protest has left the indigenous community in fragile social, political and psychological condition. Different studies like Mandal (2009), Meher (2009), Mishra (2002) have also indicated towards the state responses and in certain cases like in Meher (2009) outlined the details of protests and the loss of life of indigenous community during that. They are losing land, CPRs, home, water source, in all simply their means of

livelihood and also are subjected to various traumatic experiences including physical torturer in majority of cases.

Before I get back to the questions on development model it is pertinent to briefly discuss about the state response, policy document, legal and constitutional safeguards. The large area facing displacement especially mining induced displacement and recent hydrological projects of North-eastern India are covered under the schedule V of Indian constitution. Further, three fourth of the land belong to the state in these regions are either as a forested land diverted for mining as in the districts of Sundargarh, Keonjhar, Kalahandi, Koraput (all in Orissa) or converted compensatory forest land. This compensatory forest land is another means of dispossession for the tribals in the state of Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and others. These land were under cultivation by the tribals without having individual patta in their names, when the forest land got allocated to mining purpose; under environmental protection act the same chunk of land were ought to be brought under forest. In this process the land under cultivation including land under shifting cultivation got diverted to compensatory forest land, depriving the tribals of their means of livelihood.

In the wake of large scale displacement and internationalisation of the issue in 1993 by the World Bank in case of Sardar Sarovar Project; the state under the aegis of Ministry of Rural Development came up with a policy paper in 1994 and again in 1998. The Policy was intended to apply to projects displacing about 500 or more families in plains and 250 or more families in hills. This limitation of

number is manipulated everyday in more than one way especially in plain areas where road and other linear infrastructure projects are sanctioned in sub-units to avoid the total number of displaced crossing 500 families. The fit case is of Mumbai-Pune Expressway, where project authorities continue to deny the compensation to the displaced till the High Court intervened and order for the disbursement of compensation. The irony of the situation is that the corporate developers are not ready to pay even minimum under the law; though law is not encompassing and for sure not for the poor at least in 1994 at the time of the project implementation. It is said because National Advisory Council itself has modified the 1998 draft in 2003 published in 2004 for rehabilitation of the displaced, place in parliament in 2007 as National Policy for Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill. The provisions of the bill would be a matter of separate discussion on each of the point and scholars have studies and analysed the same elsewhere (Madumdar 2010). The most important aspect of the bill that I would discuss here is that of 'defining public purpose' and 'informed prior consent' for any land acquisition. There is acceptance that no democratic society can accept a decision without the participation of affected persons. Still, the bill itself has come into existence without participation of those who are ought to be affected. Further, the proposal of the project and the sanction of the project do not include consultation with those who would be displaced by that. It is after the finalisation of the project their view on land would be asked. The question remained that if it can be said as informed consent or a participatory

decision making process. The other aspect that is public purpose is more problematic. The question is who is public and what is public purpose; here the statement of Crush (1995) is relevant when he says it depend on 'who defines for whom'. The definition of public purpose is always guided by the time we live in the power we are ruled by. If the world is ruled by corporate power, the profit extraction by the corporate is only public purpose. Moreover, the question remains that what would the development theorist suggest to those who are displaced and what premise the elites who displace them would provide as justification for such forced displacement of millions belonging to indigenous community and others. The theory of development starts with the basic premise that everyone is to be better compared to pre development era; here most tirbals are not at all better off not even same as the pre project period. The best of the resettlement and rehabilitation options only argue for a condition for all displaced to that of pre project scenario.

### **Is there a Way Forward?**

Resource is one of the prime sources on which development is based at least after Industrial Development at international as well as local level. Pattern of conflict, discontent and consequent marginalization over space is as varied as that of pattern of development and concentration of a particular kind of resource. When we take broader perspective of resource, everything around us including physical and social environment constitute part of resource.

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