

INDUSTRIALISATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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"The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little."

— *F D Roosevelt.*

Various provincial governments of India appear hell-bent on attracting private capital for developing new industries in their respective state. They are, understandably, in a competition bid to woo potential investors with all sorts of concessions at their command.

Private players are being offered land of any denomination and in any location of their choice, no matter - what purpose the acquired land is going to serve or how many villagers are going to be evicted. Agreement details are seldom made public.

In Singur, for example, the Tata group was accorded possession, for installing a small car factory, of about 1000 acres of fertile agricultural land right away, keeping the details of the deal a "trade secret". The Tatas had, it is learnt, nothing to pay for it. Embroiled with a debt of about Rs 150,000 crore though, the West Bengal government undertook the responsibility of paying, as the cost of land, around Rs 150 crore from its own exchequer. The Tatas received the land on a ninety nine years' lease without any down payment. Terms of repayment—ludicrously in favour of the recipient—makes the land almost a free gift. In addition, the government has, reportedly provided a loan of Rs 200 crore on an unbelievable rate of interest of one percent per annum. All this apart, the Tatas would be handed over, for the first ten years, the entire amount of VAT collected by the government on sale of the cars, on condition of repayment, again at a nominal one percent interest. To a rough estimate, the sale of 40,000 cars per annum, each costing Rupees one lakh, would fetch, over a span of ten years, Rs 500 crore for the Tatas on the VAT exemption account. In all, about Rs 850 crore is being doled out to the Tatas who, just a couple of months back, invested an equivalent of Rs 50,000 crore to take command of the Anglo-Dutch steel firm Corus.

It is not known—how many new job opportunities, direct or indirect, are going to be created. It is not known either—how many of the over ten thousand evicted agricultural firm workers and share croppers are going to be benefited out of this high tech, labour scarce industrial drive. But what the hapless villagers knew for sure was that they were to be dislodged from their age-old land which, besides being their shelter and livelihood provider, was their life-blood itself. Apprehension to part with it propelled them to resist the ploy at all cost.

Government resorted to coercive measures to get its mission through. Section 144 of the IPC was imposed to restrict mass gathering. Ms Medha Patkar and many others were arrested a number of times and were debarred from entering into the region. A few innocent lives were taken away. Tapasi Malik, a teenage-protester, was raped and burnt alive thereafter.

In Nandigram, the government had to withdraw their proposal of installing a chemical hub there by the Salim group of Indonesia under the SEZ project, but not before 14 people were killed and a few hundred injured by the armed force of the state and the CPI-M backed hooligans masquerading as policemen. Quite a few women were murdered and many more raped and tortured during this 14 March massacre. Nandigram people determined to oppose the acquisition of their land, come what may, were on vigil round the clock months ahead and faced, with outstanding courage, the brutal attack unarmed. Gopal Krishna Gandhi, the governor, expressed virtual condemnation of the incident by saying that the news filled him “with a sense of cold horror”. He rushed to the Tamluk District Hospital the following day and visited the victims there.

Party political organizations and civil rights bodies apart, a large scale protest came up all around from almost all sections of the society. A sizable number from the intellectual community, who otherwise prefer to remain indifferent or pro-establishment, raised their voice against the inhuman atrocities and many gave back government awards and/or dissociated themselves from government bodies as a token of disapproval.

Tribunals manned by apolitical persons were constituted to make an independent study of the happenings. One such tribunal—the International People’s Tribunal—formed with reputed personalities from India and abroad—concludes that the process of forced acquisition and eviction of peasants of Singur from their fertile land was totally in violation of the fundamental rights provided in the Indian constitution.

Prof Sumit Sarkar, the noted historian and a “life long Leftist”, termed the Nandigram carnage as more shocking than the Jallianwalabag’s. He and his historian wife Tanika Sarkar returned their Rabindra Puraskar and donated the award money received from the state government for the welfare of the victims. After visiting a few affected villages in the Singur area in a team, Prof Sarkar refused to accept the government version that the land in question was infertile and mono-cropped. It was just the other way round—quite fertile and multi-cropped. Further, the villagers in favour of the take-over were not at all in overwhelming majority, as claimed.

HYPOCRISY

It is quite interesting to recollect how gravely the CPI-M, prime accused of the Singur-Nandigram brutalities, expressed its anguish when twelve persons were killed in Kalinga Nagar, Orissa, by the BJD-BJP government on January 2, 2006. It all happened during an agitation programme organised against eviction of the local people to make way for the private industrialists to extract abundant mineral wealth there. In an article “Slaughtering Tribals For Industrialisation” published in “People’s Democracy” (Jan. 15, 2006) - the CPI-M weekly organ, Mr Santosh Das, a CPI-M Seceretary member, writes:

“This unprecedented **genocide** (emphasis added; the CPI-M mandarins refused to accept the word for the Nandigram atrocities—author) took place in order to evict the tribal people forcibly from their homestead and agricultural land...

“The police, with clear instruction from above, launched a brutal attack on the protesters with lathis. It was quickly followed by firing of rubber bullets. And

without warning, they even started firing real bullets. More dastardly, the firing was directed above the waist, with an intention to kill.”

“The government”, writes Mr Das, “went defensive in the face of public protest. It’s instant announcement of Rs one lakh compensation to the next of the kin of the deceased was subsequently increased to Rs five lakh. The injured were promised to receive a compensation of Rs 50,000, the Collector and SP were transferred and declaration was made to set up a judicial inquiry commission chaired by a sitting High Court judge... The opposition political parties demanded the chief minister’s resignation taking moral responsibility of the brutal killing of tribals.”

Amazingly, the series of events executed by the Left Front government in West Bengal led by the CPI-M - the party Mr Das tries to uphold for their fight against the Orissa government - are far worse in Nandigram. Other unlawful cruelty being similar, police action in collusion with the party backed hoodlums, is much “more dastardly”. They did not use any rubber bullets, and went straight to the killing operation. In the recuperative action too, government appeared much less responsive and much more aggressive than in Orissa.

No action has been taken against any police official here, no compensation or judicial inquiry announced so far. On the contrary. Dr. Pradip Das of the Tamluk Hospital, who was taking all care of the injured victims, was prevented from attending the hospital. The patients went into hunger strike on April 3. Dr Das was threatened by party apparatchiks for not cooperating, like others, in hushing up records.

What is all the more startlingly appropriate a revelation for people, is in the concluding paragraph of the article of Mr Santosh Das:

“It may be recalled that in the year 261 BC, Emperor Ashok invaded Kalinga and won the Kalinga War. But the conqueror accepted the moral defeat, felt like the conquest and such feeling of him led to the eventful conversion with the emperor baptized to Buddhism and brought a real change in his character from Chandashok to Dharmashok. The rulers today after committing the sin of slaughtering 12 tribals at Kalinga Nagar refuse to repent and resort to measures of damage control only to overcome the unfavourable situation, but people in general and tribals in particular have declared their vow not to forgive this cruel government...” What about West Bengal, Mr Das?

DEVELOPMENT

With China adopting the SEZ scheme and their GDP growth rate going great guns for quite a few successive years, Indian planners felt inclined to emulate the model of development. The scheme offers relaxation in various tax and labour rules to attract foreign capital investment.

China, undeniably, has been able to achieve an enviable economic development during the last few decades. But the industrialists, needless to say, spared nothing to exploit the situation to maximise their profit margin. With labour rules kept at bay, workers have been deprived. Environment has been another casualty. Of the twenty most polluted cities of the world, sixteen are in China. With rapid economic growth based on coal fired power generation, resulting pollution is spreading outside the confines of China. In emission of Carbon dioxide—the major component of Green House Gases responsible for

global warming—China, a middle income group country, is advancing at a fast rate and by 2008, is likely to overtake the USA, the worst culprit so far (*Table- 1*). Water of half of its large rivers is not suitable even for industrial use. During 1992 to 2005, around 2 crore of peasants have been evicted from their land. (*Table 1*)

Social development, which calls for an assurance of good health, quality education and a decent standard of living for all, is measured mathematically by Human Development Index (HDI).

In India, a low income group country, more than one crore of children in the age group of 6-14 were out of school in 2005. Quality of education in public schools is awfully poor. One third of the population does not have access to proper sanitation and 14 percent to clean water. This kills over four lakh lives per year while air pollution claims 5.2 lakh. In the count of malnourished children, India is the world topper. In rural health centres, medical service is practically non-existent. Public spending on Health is a pittance. Nevertheless, that on the military head, India is a front-liner. (*Table-2*). Benefit of social welfare schemes hardly reaches the target population. Administration is plagued with callous indifference and boundless corruption. (*Table 2*)

Neo-liberalised economy discourages investment in public sector industries and makes people increasingly believe that industrial activity is a monopoly of the private sector. Government's responsibility is to provide land and other necessary infrastructure of quality to them. Private operators, foreign and domestic, are given a free hand in the planning.

Benefit of 'development' through industrialisation based on modern technology goes mostly to the affluent section of the society. Their craze for a western model of ostentatious life style adds more and more to the depletion of natural resources and degradation of natural environment. Little trickles down to the lowest rung, who, in terms of pollution however, suffer the most.

In China, the Gini Index which is a measure of inequality in the distribution of wealth, has gone up from 35 in 1990 to 45 in 2003 and 50 in 2006. But HDI has increased only marginally. Protest rallies from the evicted farmers, laid-off factory workers and other adversely affected persons are on the rise. There were 74,000 such incidents during 2004 - a seven-fold increase in ten years' time.

For India, a late starter, fate of the SEZ-based development strategy cannot be much different. People should strive for an acceptable standard of living 'for those who have too little'. To that end, encouragement of innovative agricultural and small scale industrial activities planned collectively through village cooperatives appears to be in order. Such a movement has already taken off and is gaining momentum in rural China.□

Table 1 :

ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Country	Share of World Populn (%)	Electricity consumption per capita (KWH)		Carbon-dioxide-Emission per capita (m tons)		Share of World Total (%)	
		1980	2003	1980	2003	2000	2003
		2003	1980	2003	1980	2003	2003
USA	4.6	10,336	14,057	20.1	19.8	24.4	23.0
China	20.6	307	1,440	1.5	3.2	12.1	16.5
India	16.9	173	594	0.5	1.2	4.7	5.1

High							
Income Gr.	15.1	6,559	10,331	12.2	13.1	47.8	49.7
Middle							
Income Gr.	43.5	615	1,593	2.1	3.1	42.9	42.7
Low							
Income Gr.	41.4	174	414	0.5	0.8	7.3	7.6

Source : UNDP Development Report 2005, 2006

Table 2 :

PUBLIC SPENDING

HDI Rank	Country Name	Health 2003-04	Education		Military	
			1991	2002-04	1990	2004
1	Norway	8.6	7.1	7.7	2.9	2.0
6	Canada	6.9	6.5	5.2	2.0	1.1
7	Japan	6.4		3.7	0.9	1.0
8	USA	6.8	5.1	5.9	5.3	4.0
16	France	7.7	5.6	6.0	3.4	2.6
18	UK	6.9	4.8	5.5	3.9	2.8
36	Argentina	4.3	3.3	3.5	1.2	1.1
53	Mexico	2.9	3.8	5.8	0.4	0.4
69	Brazil	3.4		4.1	2.5	1.5
81	China	2.0	2.2		2.7	2.4
87	Tunisia	2.5	6.0	8.1	2.0	1.5
112	Nicaragua	3.7	3.4	3.1	10.6	0.7
126	India	1.2	3.7	3.3	3.0	3.2
134	Pakistan	0.7	2.6	2.0	5.8	3.4
137	Bangladesh	1.1	1.5	2.2	1.0	1.2
145	Uganda	2.2	1.5	5.2	3.1	2.3

Source: UNDP Human Development Report - 2006.