

Of Deprivation and Democracy

Suguna Pathy

COMMUNICATION AND technological revolution of the late 20th century has accentuated the process of globalization resulting in rapid integration of cultures and markets on an unprecedented scale followed by barrierless trade and financial flows from across the globe. Under the prevailing global political economy, issues related to economic insecurity of the deprived are on rise questioning the basics and notion of development. This is more so in particular with the tribal communities notwithstanding the decades of ameliorative tribal development policies. At best these palliatives generated polarization within and among the tribal communities across India. For instance, the Khonds of Kashipur, Orissa stand as stark contrast to the advanced tribal communities like Choudharies of Gujarat. While at the same time others like the Halpatis (Gujarat) whose economic condition is not very different from the Khonds of Kashipur. Precisely these unequal relations question the fundamentals of democracy and development, the question of economic justice. In addition, the neo-liberal economic policies have further created sharp inequalities in the already existing rigid unequal levels of development. That's why since recently the socially excluded and thus deprived belonging to dalits, tribals, women and minority social groups are organizing to form resistance groups to assert their rights over their livelihoods and space and this is neither a sheer chance nor a coincidence, but the historical context of times.

In rural/tribal India like in the states of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh, the young family members migrate to cities in search of livelihoods leaving behind the old to fend their basic survival needs for themselves. Indeed the longing and haggard faces of the old Khond people trapped in hunger and destitution still haunts this author who is confused with regards to political strategies. For this issue is not only economic but also political question (Pathy, 2003). While on the other side the immigrant people in the urban milieu are deprived of their basic civic rights of housing, sanitation, access to public health care and education. Indeed this is a paradoxical situatedness juxtaposing IT industry and Sensex of "rising India" reflecting a collective failure of the state as well as civil society. Somewhere intellectuals are also accountable and therefore cannot put the entire blame on the state, as they have to reflect and review the policies which in turn demands to take a stand. Precisely here the NGOs and religious organizations/representatives of their specific communities fill the space vacated by the state. Because the state is preoccupied with the related issues of market economy of profit over people (SEZ?), of share market over strategic needs, of privatization of health care services and medical tourism over public health, PDS and the list is ad infinitum. The state is seemingly obsessed with facilitating GDP growth rate and thereby neglecting its role of welfare obligations. The plurality of religions, castes, communities and sects with respective variations in India further enhances the complexity and multiplicity of pluralism. It is from this backdrop it is necessary to address the popular conundrums of development. In this connection the recent

prominence of special catering to community(ies) needs to be examined in the overall context of political economy, nationalism and market. This essentially requires translating empowerment into resource access, policies and programmes comprising control over strategies and ideologies (patriarchal and fundamental) and restoration of democratic space.

Be that as it may inequality has always fascinated social theorists and philosophers alike since early times. Ancient and medieval thinkers more often than not justified inequality as a given or ascribed (natural) social order (Ferguson 1968; Aristotle 1959). Following this direction functionalism argues that stratification is natural to all societies and cultures and therefore is imperative to any social system (Parsons 1954; Davis and More 1965). Viewed this way inequality got legitimization to maintain social structure i.e., control of one class / group / community / caste / gender who have either poor or no access to economic resources and thus remain far from political power structure by the powerful economic and political class who are in minority. The debate of equality and inequality has been the central theme of discourse with hidden political overtones in social sciences particularly in sociology and anthropology as the growth of these disciplines are historically conditioned. (Diamond 1974; Pathy 1984). Several studies point out that social inequality is not a phenomenon *sui genesis* but a process of economic processes (Meillassoux 1973; Rose 1969; Rey 1999; Godelier 1977; Terray 1977; Pathy 1984). Currently inequality has adorned a different name and form-globalization denoting unlimited and unrestricted movement of capital, goods, people and ideas propelled by revolution in information technology, corporate capital and free market. Jointly this lethal combination internationalizes commodity culture, production and financial markets. World Bank report of 2004 holds that 80% of the world population earns only 20% of global income and this 80% live in the developing countries. The report further states that the gap between the rich and the poor is large. This all happens in the boardrooms where rich nations fix prices to the structural conditions of poor nations who bear the brunt eventually. One only wonders at the suicidal differential impact in the democratic space of people and nationalities at large. What is the effect of this social charming? Some argue that India is at the threshold of economic as well as military super power. Incidentally, this obsession has become a galvanic force pertaining to the vision of India by the political class.

This infatuation is visible from the 'feel good' factors of share market and rising consumer index of the growing middle class, while on the other the underprivileged are deprived of their basic rights and pushed towards periphery becoming destitutes, as the agriculture has come to a near that. Farmers' suicides of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka are not taking place in social vacuum. People are deprived of their meagre resource comprising land, water and forest resources for SEZs and IT parks. Isn't it stamping on democratic space? This land grabbing by the state as institution sets fire in Singurs, Nandigrams, Kalinga-nagars and what next? The happenings in Chhattisgarh, Orissa, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh are the consequences of the long denial of social justice of vast masses and needs to be reexamined. The people no longer

accept the state sponsored development schemes under rehabilitation like earlier times in Gujarat, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh.

In this context displacement development de facto reflects the development of MNCs and their agents. As a matter of fact the history of displacement centred development data back the history of industrial revolution commemorating the first anniversary of Kalinganagar events the huge gathering at Bisthapan Birodhi Sankalp Sambet observed that the development-displacements are leading to land alienation, job insecurity, environmental destruction and above all cultural fragmentation speak volumes of deprivation of people's rights, space and cultures and in turn its onslaught on democratic space encroachment, (cited in EPW, March 10-16, 2007). Any move that goes against the majority of the people needs to be though roughly reviewed and if need be abandoned. As it stands the present state of industrialization seems more detrimental than progress particularly with regard to environment. This is evident from the rise of pro-democracy social movements against the shoot of transnational global injustice specially during 1990s.

Today people are caught in the cross-currents of changing climates, converging pandemics, the latest brands and ever new technologies compounded by corporate exploitation, civil myopia and mediocrity, all under the patronage of globalism. For, these technological strategies not only alter ecosystems and human health but also pose threat to human security and to the very notion of democracy (ex. high-tech weaponry) "Ironically notwithstanding giant technological advancements and increase in global wealth, global poverty and inequality have increased manifold, as over a billion people live in extreme poverty and the majority do not have access to health care (Coronel and Dixit 2006). The wealth of top 200 corporations rose to as much as 362% between 1983-1999 (Cavanagh and Anderson 2000). According to the UN's World Food Programme, there are more hungry people today in India than twenty years ago, as many as staggering 350 million! India is one of the leading producers of fruits, vegetables and milk in the world. Yet millions go to bed half-fed or starved. This is further exasperated by the withdrawal of subsidies to the farmers and lack of state's support in rural infrastructure as well as natural calamities resulting in farmer's suicides in the country. Where is democratic space for these teeming millions? This is a downright contrast to the emergence of neo-rich urban middle class in outsourcing cities of Bangalore and many such others which seems to 'convince' the powerful effect of neo-liberal economic vision and foreign investment bringing prosperity. Even the academics are not spared as everyone is also brought under the spell and charm of market. For one thing this socio-political shrinking becomes vulnerable and fragile base for all kinds of fundamentalism (religious, patriarchal and sectarian)—culminating in pockets of social grievances rooted in social injustice.

Thus as mentioned earlier it is a small wonder to note the rise of resistance movements specially in the past three decades to counter domination and subjugation of people, repressive state apparatus, repression of human rights in general and women's rights in particular, induced development policies and restrictions on freedom and cultural liberty (Bidwai 208) Several indigenous knowledge systems, art forms and cultures and above all democracy are at the

risk of dilution. Democracy is not holding five yearly mega exercise (Circus?), it is much beyond. The social as well as legal rights like access to health services, education, housing, livelihoods, cultural practices are not only imperative but also integral to democracy which are unfortunately shrinking. In this context it is shocking to note that above 900 million people i.e., one in seven persons in the world face discrimination due to their identity and as a consequence are excluded culturally, economically and politically (UNDP Human Development Report, 2004). It is a fact that discrimination and poverty are the twin causes of deprivation, which varies economically, socially, and politically among different religious groups, castes, communities and minorities. It is therefore necessary to reassure the most disadvantaged and deprived developmental quick fixes. Precisely, the abrasion of democracy is so pervasive as it gets entangled with several advertent as well as inadvertent exclusion policies based on casteism, communalism, religion and gender. Development cannot be reduced to goal prescriptions in straight-jacketed modules and standardized principles. Accordingly development cannot be equated to GDP growth rate and market but to distributive justice and listening to other voices. □□□

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