

WITHOUT JUSTICE AND SECURITY, DEVELOPMENT IS A LIE

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Abstract

People's food, water and livelihood/work security is rapidly being undermined by accelerating takeovers of land, as well as dismantling of laws that protected workers' rights, and a mass informalisation of labour. Against this trend, employment in security firms and security forces may be rising, but whose security do these protect? Abuses by security forces are rarely punished, and perpetrators re-offend with impunity. Massed security forces are not only attacking Maoists, but are used to force through 'development projects' that do not have local people's consent, enforcing their dispossession with violence, and devastating the ecosystems. The communities have lived in basic symbiosis with for generations.

Many so-called 'development projects' are destroying much more than any benefits they bring, marshaling natural resources into short-term profits for a small elite, while devastating ecosystems that future generations depend on. What would real development look like? What is equality before the law for rich and poor? How could one learn to share the earth's resources fairly? How could one learn the skills of Non-Violent Communication to prevent conflicts, instead of gobbling up these depleting resources in escalating wars? To develop to a stage of 'democratic civilisation' we will have to search radically new structures of power and authority, and an economic system in harmony with our ecological realities.

The principle of local control over resources does not just empower communities; it is also a safeguard for future generations. Can we learn to share rather than to hoard and compete, learn indigenous processes of law as reconciliation; learn self-entertainment, rather than passive forms of being entertained by 'stars'? This paper engages with some of these critical aspects.

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Whose Development?

Officially, poverty has decreased in India. In practice, this decrease depends on manipulated statistics and terminologies, compounded by blindness to the anguish of fellow humans. Most evidence, in line with the hard realities that anyone involved in grassroots India knows too well, suggests not only that the gap between rich and poor has hugely increased, but that poverty has increased, and is increasing vastly *per se*. If this is so, then the whole basis of what has been called ‘development’ is a lie. In particular, the ideology promoting colossal loans from the World Bank and other institutions is a lie in as much as it has failed, and is failing, to raise the standard of living for at least fifty percent of India’s population (Sharma 2009; 2011).

Among many other sections of society, approximately 20 million tribal people – a quarter of India’s Scheduled Tribe (ST) population – have been displaced in the name of development since Independence (Padel and Das 2011). Most of these people’s standard of living has fallen drastically. The main culprits are big dams and mining/metal projects that dispossess tribal lands, flooding them or turning them into wastelands, and converting skilled cultivators into ‘unskilled labour’. The massed police deployed to force through ‘development projects’ regularly commit violence against people whose land is being taken. Local people’s protests meet a wide range of violent tactics to suppress and undermine their movements – abuses that are perpetrated with impunity, by a police force who are supposed to be serving the people, not aiding the entities dispossessing them.

The Mapithel dam in Manipur is one example unfolding right now, among many new dams being promoted on tributaries of the Brahmaputra, that are meeting people’s resistance movements in North East India. Several tribal villages are being directly displaced by the Mapithel dam; many more are losing their lands, and the forest areas vital to their livelihoods; protests are being suppressed with violence; while the media is largely silent on abuses (Anaya 2010; Vasundhara 2011; *Land is for Life* 2015, Longjam 2015 and Yumnan 2015). People in the rest of India wonder at the violence reported from Manipur without seeing the connection between tribal fury at the new legislation, which makes land grabs of tribal territory easier, and the forced construction of this dam.

Real development would mean security in food, water and work conditions. Rapidly expanding security forces throughout tribal areas guarantee security only for mining/construction companies and other exploiters. The insecurity they perpetrate for ordinary (poor) people unfolds through thousands of false cases, fake encounters, and atrocities committed with impunity, for which Adivasis and Dalits rarely receive justice in the courts, or equality before the law. A recent exception was the life sentence passed in

November 2014 on several soldiers for staging a fake encounter in Kashmir (BBC 2014).

Real development will start when Justice is ensured, in the form of equality before the law, even when perpetrators are men in uniform or senior officials in powerful companies. Until then, most ‘development’ projects are actually destroying indigenous processes of development, since tribal societies are highly developed in their symbiosis with nature, and this symbiosis is being obliterated by displacing projects. Some people from the left parties question whether this idea is an example of ‘ecological romanticism’. It is true that at present under attack from parties ranging from left, right to centre, tribal people sometimes turn against the forest out of anger with forest guards or tiger-loving conservationists whose policies throw them out of the core forest areas where they have always lived. In a sense, the whole concept of ‘tribal development’ itself is based on a lie lingering on from the colonial era – the view of indigenous societies as ‘primitive’, ‘backward’ or ‘underdeveloped’, that is actually an expression of extreme cultural racism.

Bhagaban Majhi, a leader of the Kashipur movement in Odisha against the Utkal Alumina project (a subsidiary of Birla) expresses in these words: *‘We are not against development. Give us schools. Give us hospitals. But take away the company. We do not need it ... What kind of development is it to mine millions of years old mountains for the sake of profit for a few officials for a few years? ... We want permanent development...’* (Das and Das 2005). In a debate with Nehru Jaipal Singh Munda said in 1946: *‘You cannot give democracy to tribal people; you have to learn democratic ways from them. They are the most democratic people on earth’* (Barla 2015: 10-11). It is the same Munda who gave us the word ‘Adibasi’. It may be correct to call India the world’s largest democracy, but India possesses indigenous models that are far more democratic than the present corrupt model of political parties locked in senseless competition, heavily funded by corporate entities, deciding key policies behind closed doors.

Security

Food and water security are increasingly recognised as essential needs and rights. At least 50 million people have been displaced from their land and homes in the name of ‘development’ since India’s independence of which at least 40 percent are tribals. Figures for how many of all these have regained or improved their standard of living through resettlement – which is what is supposed to happen according to India’s Rehabilitation and Resettlement legislation and World Bank standards – are impossible to gauge, but agreed to be very low indeed. The vast majority have experienced a catastrophic drop in their living standards, and a betrayal of almost every promise they were made. Often the old people die off

within weeks of removal, from grief at the vastness of their loss as well as hunger and disease (Sahu 2009; Padel and Das 2011; Padel 2012).

When tribal people and other small-scale cultivators are thrown off their land, this is often justified by economic reasoning: they are ‘only doing subsistence farming’, which is ‘uneconomic’. But Adivasi¹ economics is based on ecological principles (Padel, Dandekar and Unni 2013). Mainstream economists understand hardly anything about this, or about the ecosystems on which life on earth depends. ‘Development projects’ that generate profits for construction and mining companies are eroding the resource base that human life depends on, including future generations. Yet ‘money talks’, and short-term financial and political incentives trump real sustainability. Most of the people being displaced in the name of development are among humanity’s best examples of real, long-term sustainability.

Water security is diminishing everywhere. Dams are diverting rivers, blocking their flow, creating bodies of stagnant water, unsafe for drinking, reducing the rivers that thousands of villages have always depended on for drinking, bathing, watering animals and crops. The steel, aluminium and many other factories that are consuming a major share of the electricity created by dams and coal-fired power plants, are also guzzling water. Producing one tonne of steel consumes over 40 tonnes of water; one tonne of aluminium consumes over 1,000 tonnes of water. India is the world’s fourth largest steel producer. What is the cost the farmers and its citizens’ future pay for this? Groundwater levels are dropping drastically due to ‘water mining’. ‘Green revolution’ agriculture depends on pumping water from ever-lower levels. In Punjab, where this was centred, water levels have dropped from 97 percent of the state having water within ten metres of the surface, to 6 percent, with huge pollution by fertilizers and pesticides, and widespread lack of clean drinking water giving rise to a high level of diseases (Dutt 2010).

As for food security, cash crops such as cotton and commercial rice strains increase incomes for a while, but they bring in un-repayable debt burdens, and reduce the kinds and quantities of crops grown in the much more mixed traditional cropping patterns that were practiced over hundreds of years. Tribal communities that used to rely on the forest to supplement food supply even in times of drought, can no longer access this, since forests and their biodiversity are either disappearing or being fenced off to exclude the communities that used to live in symbiosis with their natural environment.

¹ The Scheduled Tribes in India are commonly known as Adivasi or Adibasi.

Livelihood and job security are closely inter-connected. When new projects offer employment on a massive scale, nothing is as it seems. The POSCO² steel plant project in Odisha claimed to offer vast numbers of jobs. But very few of these would have been permanent, while indigenous livelihoods, based on fishing as well as betel vine cultivation, which Jagatsingpur villagers had developed over many years to ensure a good income, were completely discounted in official calculations (Mining Zone People's Solidarity Group 2010). Many vines were cruelly destroyed shortly before POSCO started the process of withdrawal. Everywhere, livelihoods that people have developed sustainably over generations are being swept aside. One obvious result is the huge increase in migrant labour that we witness now. Some projects, such as POSCO, offer 'attractive packages' of one job per family – a reality hardly ever properly realised in practice. Once a project is up and running, who checks independently that these promises have been implemented correctly? Which projects have been shut down for not implementing them honestly?

Making labour more 'productive' means basically increasing the exploitation of workers, often quite drastically, by undermining people's job security and compensation rights, while increasing working hours and the proportion of short-term contracts – a casualisation, informalisation, or 'rationalisation' of labour that is portrayed as business friendly, but is certainly not people-friendly. In other words, in neoliberalising India, job security is increasingly under threat; and India's highly developed legislation protecting security of work conditions is getting eroded for the sake of 'a good environment for doing business'. A high GDP does not mean a high rate of employment, let alone satisfactory working conditions (Bhaduri 2009).

One area where there is certainly more employment is in security firms and security forces. But whose security is being protected? It is certainly not the security of the poor people. Gated enclaves, industrial security forces, a huge increase in security forces in tribal areas – these are not just there to keep out thieves and fight the Maoists. Their primary purpose is very often to ensure smooth takeovers of public space and resources, and to force through projects that do not have local people's consent, cowing down dissent and protests. In recent years we have seen this on a mega-scale at Kalinganagar, Maikanch and many place is Odisha, on behalf of Tata Steel, Jindal, Bhushan, Mittal and other steel companies, Utkal and Vedanta aluminium companies, the Lower Suktel and other dams, among many others; and for similar projects in Andhra, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, West Bengal – every state probably; also to force through the Kudankulam and Jaitapur nuclear power plants; and many dam projects in addition to the Mapithel dam in Manipur.

² POSCO is a South Korean multinational steel making company. Formerly it was known as Pohang Iron and Steel Company. It is the fourth largest steelmaker by measure and the largest steel manufacturing company by market value in the world.

Abuses by security forces are rarely punished. Perpetrators, even of rape, therefore re-offend with impunity (Iqbal 2010; Padel 2013). As emphasised by Ragavanshi, Parveen and Khan (2015), every atrocity leaves a scar – assault by lathi, tear gas, or firing, false cases, torture, and false encounter killings. Thousands of people are crippled by false cases, in or out of jail (Fereira 2014; Sethi 2014). Without justice, healing is very hard. It's not only victims who need to bear testimony. If truth is suppressed it harms all of us.

How can human rights activists be dismissed as Maoist or terrorist sympathisers in Chhattisgarh, Kashmir, Manipur and other states? How can the courts justify hundreds of false cases slapped against Adivasi protestors against Tata Steel's proposed steel plant at Lohandiguda in Bastar? How come the police are being used again and again against the citizens they are supposed to serve, on behalf of such companies, blatantly manipulating 'consent' at the Lohandiguda and many other Public Hearings?

It is good that the principle of Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) is recognised in the new Land Acquisition Act (LARR 2013), and in guidelines for international banks financing many projects. But thirteen major Acts are excluded from its remit; and in dozens of Public Hearings held in India for displacing projects since Public Hearings became mandatory under the Environmental Protection Act in 1997, people have not been given proper information prior to demands for their land; consultation has been misrepresented as consent in official documents and the press, even when nearly everyone at a Public Hearing has spoken strongly against a project; and these Hearings have been held in an atmosphere that is anything but *free*. At Lohandiguda and other Public Hearings, people have been forced to sign documents under gross intimidation.

As George (2015) argues its genocide is taking place in many, perhaps most tribal areas. Use of the term 'genocide' is controversial by definition, but if we see what happened in the classic case of genocide that was perpetrated on the indigenous inhabitants of America, there were two levels: direct genocide, meaning complete extermination, which was done to many tribes; and removal to 'reservations', including forced placing of children in mission-run schools (the 'stolen generations') and outlawing of customs, removal from national parks – what many call Cultural Genocide. This is the process unfolding in India now. It's an extremely violent process; yet everything is couched in terms of 'bringing them forward', 'giving them the benefits of development/civilisation'. Police firings are the most visible, publicly reported symbol of genocide. Those at Kalinganagar (January 2006), Maikanch (December 2000) and elsewhere become symbols of this far wider, slow-motion, multi-level violence, which involves

an agonisingly slow soul-death for thousands of families who are being dispossessed of everything they valued.

Justice

In this context, Justice is a prerequisite for development. Human rights organisations carry on a valiant battle, and Adivasis who choose to speak out, such as Soni Sori or Sodi Sambo in Chhattisgarh, or Dayamani Barla and Gladson Dungdung (2015) in Jharkhand, among many other Adivasi activists, stand at the forefront of real development.

But what about Sodi Sambo, and thousands of Adivasi and Dalit victims of state terror, who are being forgotten, who have disappeared? Sodi was shot and wounded in cold blood by police and Salwa Judum SPOs, who also killed six other people in an attack in her village, Gompad, Chhattisgarh on October 1, 2009. Her case became symbolic of Chhattisgarh's injustice several years ago. Who speaks of her now? And where is she? Has she been disappeared, like no small number of girls and women abducted from tribal villages and never heard of again? (Borpujari 2010; Siddharta 2010).

This is not just a problem in India. Indigenous people who are trying to stay put on their land are getting killed without justice right now in Indonesia, Brazil, Ethiopia, and other countries. The USA is a country based on the genocide of its indigenous population, and as the today's superpower, has not given the rest of the world a good example of sharing the earth's resources or resolving conflicts peacefully.

Gross abuses on prisoners – most of them innocent civilians – have been well documented in Bagram, Abu Ghraib and many other prisons in Afghanistan and Iraq; so has 'collateral damage' in the form of thousands of civilians killed in drone and other 'special operation' attacks in these and other countries; yet there has been no effective worldwide protest against US drone attacks that have already killed hundreds of people – a majority of them innocent civilians counted as 'collateral damage' - in contravention of international law (Scahill 2013) – all compounded by denial. These models of 'security forces' getting away with murder don't exactly set a good example to the rest of the world for peace, democracy and accountability. Implicitly, security forces of many, perhaps most countries, simply follow the leader, copycat style.

The International Court of war crimes pursues undoubted baddies from African countries, Yugoslavia and other parts. But what about war crimes committed by American, British or Israeli forces? Out of a miniscule number of cases that have come to trial within these countries, a tiny number of perpetrators

have been convicted. But overall, the double standards are obvious, and this injustice is a poison fuelling many conflicts around the world.

For survivors of atrocities, especially perhaps children whose parents have been tortured, maimed or killed, and who have been violently dispossessed from their homes, what process can begin to heal what they have gone through? What therapies and processes of bearing witness to see justice delivered? (Raghuvanshi, Parveen and Khan 2015) What processes of truth and reconciliation, here in India? This is a vastly neglected question, but needs serious planning, since this survival-of-atrocities is the situation for millions of people right now, throughout India's tribal areas, Kashmir, Punjab, the Northeast, just as for Syrians, Iraqis, Afghans, Yemenis, Ukrainians and so on the list goes.

Especially so, since it seems to be a law of human nature that abused people very often become abusers, unless they manage to heal their trauma. A victimhood identity turns toxic. A classic case is Jewish survivors of the holocaust, who have carved out their new state of Israel by ethnically cleansing the indigenous Palestinians, roughly half of whose population – about a million from 200 villages – were forced out of their homes in the war of 1948, with the rest suffering an escalating apartheid and dispossession ever since, through the daily humiliation and violence of settlements, check-points, firings, jailing and bombing campaigns (Pappe 2013).

Real Development

These questions force the most vital questions of all: what paths of development have we chosen and are we choosing? What is real development? For example, processes of displacement are often termed 'Development-Induced Displacement' – a term that adds insult to injury, since for people being displaced, as they often say very clearly, these projects do not mean development at all, but cut off their own process of development. In India popularly, from Nehru's time till now, people refer to the huge hardship through displacement of large numbers of people. They were removed to make way for a dam or other project as a *sacrifice* these people have to make 'for the sake of national development' - in other words, a modern form of human sacrifice.

But do these projects really represent development for the nation as a whole? The cost-benefits equations of big dams have been shown to be extremely doubtful time and again, even apart from devastation they cause to communities and ecosystems. Land brought under cultivation is often less than the cultivated land flooded, flood control backfires when sudden release of flood waters from dams causes worse floods than any that occurred before, siltation is much more rapid than planned, financial costs much higher, the

effective life of a dam much shorter – every benefit is doubtful apart from the short term profits to construction and power companies, and supply of low-priced water and power to corporate consumers. Who needs this much electricity? Water and power from the controversial Sardar Sarovar dam on Narmada went mainly to the new city of Gandhinagar and industries; only a small proportion of the villages that were meant to get water got it. In Singrauli, among the mega-power plants and coal mines, around Upper Indravati and other dam projects, villagers whose well-being has been sacrificed for the ‘common good’ remain without the electricity they were promised.

India’s steel and aluminium production has increased vastly. But is this really benefitting most people? How can economic pressures be squared with ecological priorities? (Padel and Das 2010; Padel, Dandekar and Unni 2013; Das and Rose 2015). Instead of seeing hundreds of people’s movements as ‘anti-development’ or ‘anti-national’ could it be that many major industrial projects, promoted with huge foreign investment, are actually *de*-developing highly developed livelihoods systems, cutting off paths of indigenous sustainable development that are safeguarding the country’s future? Could it be that movements against these destructive investment projects actually represent the cutting edge of real development?

For example, every bauxite-capped mountain in southern Odisha and northern Andhra now has several Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) signed by corporate entities and government representatives. If it was not for multiple movements, combining with the legal safeguards protecting environment and forest (often dismissed as ‘road-blocks to development!’), the destruction of these mountains, as sources of the water that make this whole region so fertile, could turn huge areas into a wasteland very quickly – a process that has already started. For example, around Nalco’s bauxite mine and Damanjodi refinery in Koraput district (Das and Das 2005; Padel and Das 2010: 81-89).

Therefore tribal societies need to be understood as already highly developed, and in danger of de-development. Are new government plans to fast-track the ‘development’ of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), by pouring money into road-building and education schemes for example (GoI 2015), aimed at undermining the exceptional resistance of some of these groups to imposed schemes, such as Dongria resistance to Vedanta’s mining plans, and Baiga resistance to forest takeovers?

Rather than making tribal communities learn mainstream models, do we in the mainstream need to learn from them, if we are to survive as a species, and achieve real development through democratic ways? As Jaipal Singh Munda said, can we learn to share rather than to hoard and compete, learn indigenous

processes of law as reconciliation; learn self-entertainment, rather than passive forms of being entertained by ‘stars’? In many ways, indigenous cultures’ emphasis on dancing is a radical expression of democracy in action, through which different communities come together in fun rather than in conflict.

The principle of local control over resources does not just empower communities; it is also a safeguard for future generations. Demand for decentralised decision-making in the Northeast was exemplified in the Agartala and Dimarpur declarations of local people’s rights over use of natural resources, in February and May 2013 (Hueiyen/Newmai News Feb 2013; Imphal Free Press 2013; Indynews May 2013). This is in the context of over 100 new mega-dams in India’s Northeast that are threatening to replicate the mega-dam model that has spread so much destruction in mainland India, wiping out numerous indigenous communities, and obliterate many ecosystems over a vast area, for the sake of selling hydropower, impelled by an ‘MoU virus’ of financial inducements or bribes paid to politicians as incentives (Chakravartty 2011; Padel, Dandekar and Unni 2013: 59-61).

India generated seminal practices of self-development over 2000 years ago, including the art of yoga, questioning of teachers and materialism (exemplified in the *Upanishads*), and confronting one’s illusions and ego through meditation. Calling India a ‘developing country’ insults a land that gave birth to such major discoveries in ancient times. It is clear that, whatever positive benefits the British brought to India, highly developed manufacturing industries and multi-culturalism were *de*-developed under British rule, under the guise of development. Just as British rule *de*-developed vital areas of India’s development – dumbing down and curtailing cloth and other industries, and playing divide-and-rule politics that raised Hindu-Muslim tensions – tribal areas’ indigenous processes of development are being *de*-developed right now in the name of investment-induced development!

So what about the next 2000 years? Is our present system of democracy – of political parties locked in ceaseless competition for electoral advantage – suited to people’s present well-being and long-term survival? Or is what we all really need ‘permanent development’, as called for by Bhagaban Majhi? Our political party system, like our corporate and financial system – in the USA and other ‘developed’ countries, just as in India – is locked into ruthless competition where ‘the real world’ is reduced to short-term financial profit, forgetting the much realer, material world of the ecosystems that support us on planet earth.

Why have not these ecological and community-based realities impacted ideas about how society should develop? The answer lies in uncritical acceptance of Western economic theories that put self-interest and

market forces as drivers for change, combined with corruption by foreign funds in a worldwide financial system based on debt, the arms industry and war; and a monolithic model of development based on the hideous cruelty of capitalist industrialisation and exploitation, which even many Marxists collude in accepting as if it is a ‘necessary stage’.

There are infinite possibilities. Just as thousands of natural species have evolved in different ways, there is no one way to develop, but infinite choices (Pattnayak 2000). Without justice and security, development is a lie. Real development would involve transition to a political and economic system that guarantees fair distribution of resources and prevents political corruption – a system that the jailed Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan calls a ‘democratic civilisation’ (Öcalan 2007; Padel October 2012). Are we humans still capable of evolving to such a stage? Can we learn to resolve conflicts peacefully instead of resorting to wars? Can we develop beyond the present crises presently engulfing every society, by bringing our political, corporate and financial chiefs under democratic control?

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