Industrial Development & Displacement

The People of Korba

Vasudha Dhagamwar  •  Subrata De  •  Nikhil Verma
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List of Abbreviations

BALCO  Bharat Aluminium Company
BDO   Block Development Officer
BHEL  Bharat Heavy Electrical Limited
IBPCL  Indo-Burma Petrochemicals Limited
CIL   Coal India Limited
DGR   Decadal Growth Rate
DPR   Detailed Project Report
ESMP  Environmental and Social Mitigation Project
FCI   Fertilizer Corporation of India
HCL   Hindustan Copper Limited
ILO   International Labour Organization
ITI   Industrial Training Institute
KSTPS The Korba Super Thermal Power Station
MPEB  Madhya Pradesh Electricity Board
NBA   Narmada Bachao Andolan
NCDC  National Coal Development Corporatoin
NEERI  Nagpur Environment Engineering Research Institute
NTPC  National Thermal Power Corporation
PAP   Project-affected Person
PDP   Project-displaced Person
R&R   Rehabilitation and Resettlement
SADA  Special Area Development Agency
SAI L  Steel Authority of India Limited
SECL  South Eastern Coalfields Limited
SSD   Sardar Sarovar Dam
SSP   Sardar Sarovar Project
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<td>BALCO</td>
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<td>HCL</td>
<td>Hindustan Copper Limited</td>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
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<td>ITI</td>
<td>Industrial Training Institute</td>
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<td>KSTPS</td>
<td>The Korba Super Thermal Power Station</td>
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<tr>
<td>MPEB</td>
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<td>NTPC</td>
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<td>PAP</td>
<td>Project-affected Person</td>
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<td>PDP</td>
<td>Project-displaced Person</td>
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<td>R&amp;R</td>
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The history of Indian economic and industrial development is a never-ending story of displacement of peoples. Relocation of peoples disorients their past as well as fractures their future. And it ambushes their present variously by callous, and at times cruel, indifference of processes of resettlement and rehabilitation.

Developmental Reason, a menacing post-Enlightenment hybrid, produces belief in displacement, in all its manifold impact on human lives, as a necessary evil. But it also reaches dimensions of Radical Evil, where (as Hannah Ardent reminded us) we can neither wholly forgive nor punish the continual reproduction of human rightlessness.

Displacement names the social and human costs of development that some citizens have to bear as best as they can to promote the greater good of all. The evil (at least in the Benthamite sense as deliberative imposition of pain and suffering) is outweighed by the larger ‘good’ (welfare) arising from ‘development’ projects. Costs are simply inevitable; there is no development without displacement. All that developmental planning should do, we are constantly told, is to engage in cost-benefit analysis, especially factoring in social and human costs of displacement, and provide for measures of rehabilitation and compensation. Most Indian developmental projects, insofar as they affect the impoverished masses, ignore both these aspects.

In any event, governmental monopoly in defining public interest reigns supreme when discourse shifts away from the justification of developmental projects to issues of rehabilitation. Neither colonial jurisprudence (of the Land Acquisition Act) nor postcolonial jurisprudence (especially the judicial enunciation of new human rights, and the administrative law explosion created by activist justices) takes seriously the notion of participatory developmental planning. Bureaucrats, technocrats, and political actors assume that because they hold public offices, they also exhaust construction of public interest in planning development. ‘Development’ then offers final vocabularies for a ‘good’ state and society. Social and human rights activism necessarily contests this hegemony.

The conspicuous disregard for civil and democratic rights of the affected peoples in planning and implementation of developmental projects signifies carefully cultivated amnesia of the fact that they are co-citizens, deserving dignity and possessing human rights. They stand demoted to the mere status of subjects; they have only such ‘rights’ that relevant decision-makers think they may be given, for the time being. And what the power thus gives, it also takes away.

The absence of a legislative framework prescribing basic concrete duties of popular participation in developmental decisions and programmes for rehabilitation is an ineluctable aspect of this public culture. It is amazing but sadly true that ‘development’ projects invite no representational democratic enunciation, oversight and monitoring. ‘Developmental’ decisions remain, even after the much-vaunted 50 plus years of Indian Republic, the sovereign prerogative of the executive: a wholly imperious arena of administrative discretion and largess and of its own Government Orders (GO) labyrinthine ‘legality’, a chaotic administrative disorder that moves from project to project in ways that simply fail to take the evils of human displacement seriously. Developmental governance does not take people’s suffering seriously and, therefore, renders itself unable/disabled from taking people’s rights seriously. Policies systemically and unfortunately trump rights.
Foreword

I

The history of Indian economic and industrial development is a never-ending story of displacement of peoples. Relocation of peoples disorients their past as well as fractures their future. And it ambushes their present variously by callous, and at times cruel, indifference of processes of resettlement and rehabilitation.

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At the heart of activist protest and debate over displacement and rehabilitation lies not just the interlocution of a colonial mindset, which still regards peoples as subjects, but a deeper concern with the operative ideologies and practices of development that construct the Indian state not as a rechtsstaat (a rule of law state) but an unrechtsstaat (state without law).

Vasudha Dhagamwar, Subrata De and Nikhil Verma present, in the book in your hands, this larger picture. This is not, however, a book that seeks to engage in a meta-critique of developmentalism. Nor is it addressed to high-minded state theory, in which models of development are related to state formative aspects of Indian democracy. Its approach is the farthest from the chic genre, celebrated by the new activist glitterati, that with Arundhati Roy, equates all vikas (development) with vinash (destruction). It rather maintains, in a troublesome but glorious insight, that ‘[O]n its part, the anti-development lobby’ is ‘unable to get out of its glorification of the past, though in another forum they would also be the first to condemn the inequities of the old society’ (p. 255).

Indeed, the authors think that industrial development projects are necessary and desirable; they wish, however, to make their planning and implementation more transparent, participatory, and people-friendly in a fond belief that such things are indeed possible. They believe that already ‘the notion ... that the project has to be participatory in its dealing with affected peoples has ... gained legitimacy’ and ‘the idea has sunk in that one is talking of rights here and not of any largesse’ (p. 255). If so, this calls for celebration. Overall, this book makes the life of armchair cynical critics of development a more difficult enterprise.

II

The book desists from an Olympian vision; it rather looks at the developmental world through a ‘worm’s eye’. It deals not so much with the ideology of developmentalism but explores, in quasi-anthropological mode, the experience of development.

This work focuses on the lived experience of development and displacement at micro levels and in concrete social settings. On this register, then, a master category of ‘project-affected peoples’ simply does not suffice. In real life in Korba, such ‘peoples’ do not constitute an anonymous ‘mass’. In this book, named persons indeed speak with us. And their experiences vary, according to age, gender, family, caste and community, occupation and income. What adds value to this narrative is an account of how different persons and groups at times negotiate the ‘best’ way out of the developmental circumstance and situation not of their making, subjecting themselves in the process, to its complex and contradictory logics and languages.

In their spirited quest to make the theory and practice of Indian development more equitable and efficient, increasingly people-oriented and eco-friendly, the authors remain, in the best sense of that term, heroically pragmatic. Their stoic reticence in not speaking in terms of high political theory and critique of development is indeed remarkable, and demands both understanding and deference. There are many reasons for this authorial/textual reticence.

First, the category of project-affected peoples shelters diverse heterogeneous subject-positions; they may not, as already noted, be encapsulated in any one ‘master’ category. Different development projects produce different kinds of project-affected peoples and different orders (and forms of struggles against these) of rehabilitation and redress. Peoples emerge as individuals (especially women as bearing the brunt of the ‘costs’ of ‘development’) and families exercising their agency under difficult circumstances thrust upon them.

Not everyone in Korba (as suggested in particular by Chapter 11) has the same view on displacement and rehabilitation. Some bemoan the way developmental projects distribute costs and benefits; others regard the whole process as presenting new choices and avenues for mobility, contrary to what a generalized