

Neoliberalism and the nature of the Polavaram beast

Fascism of the beginning of the twenty first century is the articulation and translation of racism and ethnicity into politics. Political developments in the nineteen nineties and the first years of the twenty first century demonstrate the determination to control the peripheries and the 'third world'. The specific feature of the contemporary form of fascism is that it does not overthrow forms of parliamentary democracy. It finds a convenient place within global capitalism displaying old and new forms of fascist consciousness. The new form of fascism as a political movement is different from fascism in the twenties and thirties when its main adversary was the Comintern and left social democracy. Margit Köves, Social Scientist, Sept-Oct 2004

Ever since they learnt of plans for the Polavaram project, the Koya community has been aflutter with anxiety and consternation. It would not only submerge large number of Koya settlements, but parts of the Eastern Ghats forests on which many still depend. The Koya, like most Indian tribes are a reticent community, a numerically significant group transitioning to settled agriculture from hunting, subsistence from forest produce and *podu* (shifting) cultivation. Indignation slowly dawned from the unthinkable: “Projects that affect life and the future of our children and the tribe as a whole cannot be decided by anybody other than us”.

The Polavaram-Indirasagar project has been planned and pursued by successive A.P. state governments determined to harness the Godavari river waters, even at huge social and irreparable environmental cost. It is expected to cause more massive displacement of people, destruction of forests and loss of livelihoods, than any other project in independent India.

The GoAP has begun the process of awarding substantial contracts to firms spearheading construction of the dam and canal system. The tenders process has been annulled time and again amid charges of lack of transparency, arbitrariness and cronyism. Political parties and other lobbies, too, have jumped in support of the multi-purpose project ostensibly for the irrigation, hydro-power, projected water and development ‘needs’ of Eastern Andhra Pradesh. Shabbily conducted Environmental Impact Assessment reports (EIAs) have ignored many legalities and important parameters, their costing, in the haste to fulfill mandatory requirements. The unspoken strategy seems to be: ‘once the dam is built, permissions would anyway (have to) be duly granted, after all you cannot keep a state government in the dock for inadvertence’.

Key to understanding this conundrum, it is suggested, is the political economy context of democratic institutions and state interventions within which such development takes place. A slippery concept, development could be described as progressive change involving *economic growth, social welfare and citizenship* (Portes and Kincaid, 1989: 480). Straddling multiple disciplines, it subsumes the very social constituencies that are sought to be developed. The understanding of *development as accumulation* enables us to see it as a series of specific occurrences and transformations. Development practice everywhere has been essentially grounded in liberal economies which have grown (or shrunken) in tandem with a world economy of parallel pursuits. Development in its local manifestations invariably privileges a range of classes before it can trickle down to those in need. Arturo Escobar observed that “[w]ith the consolidation of capitalism, systemic pauperization became inevitable” (1995: 22). The logic of capital accumulation essentially subsidises gain and mandates dispossession and subjection of groups, denying or reducing compensation (by the state/welfare schemes). The demand for development is whitewashed as universal, while its particular transformations prove to be irreversible and unjust. As states focus on generation of GDP, they gloss over desirable practices of social justice and ‘sustainable development’. Wallerstein and Escobar have contributed toward loosening the middle-20th C hegemonic embrace of development. It becomes apposite to pose the questions Wallerstein set: development for whom, and the development of what? Both point to an empirical questions for sociology, while with the the latter, one can discern that this proliferation (and surfeit) of development works to transform environment (identifiable with *region*). That cases of environmental transformation, the cumulation of numerous specific depredations have contributed to dramatic changes in the earth’s environment, is now an evident truism. Transformations could simply be viewed as *physical transformations* involving natural resources and ecology, but also accompanied by *transformation in social relations* (the social structure).

In South Asia, institutions that “‘traditionally’ accommodated visions of community, frugality, and sufficiency’ (Escobar, op cit) worked to soften conditions of want, instituting a class-structure prefigured by dominant orders with cultural sanction. The ideology of development now requires dissemination that includes at least a broad section of this class-structure. Even populations that stand to benefit little see in it medicinal qualities that have provided this trickle, willy-nilly joining the

development chorus. The telos of development benefits classes with capital, and not only culminates in inequality but also tends to perpetuate it through naming and conferment of identities since appropriation of capital must necessarily be limited to few(er) hands in order for accumulation to be meaningful and exert coercive power over others. Such coercive power can be both an explicit end and consequence of market relations. I go on to argue that this teleological necessity assumes a historical momentum that can explain the progressive viciousness of capital, and anticipates the particular quality of neoliberalism in the Indian case. The state assumes two fundamentally contradictory roles: of protecting property relations and abetting accumulation, and on the other hand, of redressing inequalities or aberrations arising from the development process. It is not difficult to argue that the Indian state has begun to support the former function routinely, but discharges the latter merely as populist exception.

Development for all?

The concept of development today receives hegemonic status in policies, programmes and media, especially in developing societies. This has usually implied an acceptance and tacit reference to modernization theory; those implicitly espousing these theories and prognostications stipulated a certain degree of inevitable pain. Consider for instance, early UN policy:

“There is a sense in which rapid economic progress is impossible without painful adjustments. Ancient philosophies have to be scrapped; old social institutions have to disintegrate; bonds of caste, creed and race have to burst; and large numbers of persons who cannot keep up with progress have to have their expectations of a comfortable life frustrated. Very few communities are willing to pay the full price of economic progress”.

United Nations, Department of Social and Economic Affairs: Measures for the Economic Development of Underdeveloped Countries, 1951.

However, academics like Rostow and other economic theorists had held out the promise of gain, once a certain ‘stage of development’ was reached. The pronouncement that ‘Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace’ began to be increasingly heard, the key to which lay in the ‘vigorous application of modern scientific and technical knowledge’ (Harry Truman: speech of January 20, 1949).

Arturo Escobar begins his critique ‘Encountering Development’ by recognizing that development had, by the 1970s, “*achieved the status of a certainty in the social imaginary*” (1995; Arndt,). Since the post

WW-II period, he finds that 'many countries' internalized a particular perception of underdevelopment, and attempted to pull themselves up 'by the bootstraps' by 'subjecting their societies to increasingly systematic, detailed, and comprehensive interventions' (p.6).

Such transformation (development as change of state) not only deploys the popular communication of development-as-desirable as legitimation, but returns to create inequity as the logical outcome of an apparently democratic political process. The self-understandings of groups and the transformations of social relations (changes in the social structure, culture and 'way of life') then assumes an order of justice and normality. Development as individual gain is easily understood; in a subjective sense it is somehow closer to the self, while the public good is socially/demographically more amorphous and not as easily definable, hardly geographically uniform. Anything that holds out the promise of gain too can be painted as development, as tired souls and weary eyes perk up to its possibilities. Talk of development and gain pervades the national consciousness and most conversations across all classes and groups. Multiple classes and groups are thus co-opted into the demand for development, translating into different expectations. By the very virtue of political participation, political representatives are inveigled by the magical mantra of development and the stakes of capital, holding out hope and urging their constituencies to its benefits.

The intersection of these concerns: one, legitimation of accumulation as a universal human quest (through ideas of a fundamental human self-improvement and its unproblematic endorsement); two, the ethics/hypocrisy of transformation of social orders by the state (attempting to ensure equity, for instance); and three, the normality of ensuing social change (its consequent inequities), constitute the focus of the present enquiry. Particularly into the 21st century, capitalism is furthered by demographically constituted markets; these require an aggregation of demand catalysed through mass-communication/dissemination techniques, persuasion and manipulation by several agencies. Among these manipulations, the dissemination of development-as-ideology takes centre stage as the ideas and institutions begin to operate socially at various levels. Though the demand for development appears democratized when different classes clamour for it, development as accumulation benefits the owners of capital, or those with more capital than others. A process of polarization of its participants is set in motion requiring fundamental acceptance of private property and democratic rules for losers and gainers

alike. That is to say, the generalized demand for development operates democratically to privilege few and particular interests, while other groups and classes may experience loss, or at best no gain. Appropriation of capital must necessarily be limited to few(er) hands in order for accumulation to be meaningful and exert coercive power over others. Such coercive power need not be an explicit end, it is at least the consequence. I go on to argue that this teleological necessity assumes a historical momentum that can explain the progressive viciousness of capital, and anticipates the particular quality of neoliberalism in the Indian case.

Developmental practices and pursuits had been incidental to colonial concerns, but their unproblematic incorporation into postcolonial practice is still today premised on neoclassical economics, itself largely framed in terms of Eurocentric understandings. After independence, one could identify groups at varying levels of orientation to a normative development_ those that had emerged as clearly backward, others more ambiguously grouped, and yet others who could acquire capital by virtue of their historical orientation. While this recognition was readily translated into legislative action in favour of the upper classes, its execution and implementation for others was not as easily accomplished, due largely it was thought, to entrenched attitudes, dispositions and traditions. This presented itself as a transitional problem, with burgeoning culture change from modernization (the unstated assumption and panacea), and affirmative action (reservation) policies correcting an aberrant, inequalitarian social structure. In the national imaginary, a 'mosaic' or 'canvas' was to be found integrated in a cohesive pan-regional fabric (SC Dubey;). Nation-building was reinforced through national plans, policies, institutions and innumerable programmes directed to a putative autonomy. The idea of a national convergence of interests describing such a process overtook any symptoms indicative of divergence and dissent. A confident positivism seemed to colour both national and international efforts at 'reconstruction and development' in keeping with the post-war zeitgeist. In the 'developing' world, the fractured institutions of an oppressed people could be healed to wellness vide national development policy, whatever else might happen.

Amid such fervour, the less examined phenomenon has been a shifting social structure, as also the further diminution of mobility avenues of the underclass. Modern (western) education and access to its institutions, it was thought, would generate a necessary 'achievement-orientation' that would gradually displace ascriptive practices nationwide. However, development translated as prospective mobility was

forthcoming only in the cherished professions, the gains in education (especially higher education) being somewhat meagre. Professionalization however, led to very little modernization (measured by the social-psychological traits identified by Inkeles et al). The market could only reward if the economy increased its reach and capacity, which it was found, could be catalysed by a global liberalization (measurably embarked upon in India since the 1990s). This still left an educational class that had to content itself with underemployment, if at all; this could be evinced from the experience of cadres from the engineering, medicine, management, computer science and commerce, the legal professions, the humanities and social sciences, all constituting something of a ‘secondary rung’ rather than the ‘cream’. Modern education itself decreed that success be defined in terms of qualification determined by marks and percentiles. The same competitive principles that rewarded entrepreneurial effort also graded the respective disciplines for their capacity for income generation.

Exposed to the ideas/sensibilities directly received by the political class and bureaucracy, a certain colonial administrative rationality given by neoclassical economics and utilitarian philosophy has eventually cohered in current day state ideologies and practices. Development plans could acquire cardinal authority, disappointing expectations and overriding the counter claims of individuals/groups. The focus of this exploration lies at the intersection of development and the concerns of mass communications. Development obstacles become easier to eliminate especially when associated with particular identities, effectively clearing away essentially contested visions of development and delegitimising the search for alternatives. Alternatives at various levels of diffuseness and specificity are ejected by hegemonic objectives articulated through parliamentary means, appeals to public consciousness and interests.

One could refer to the actual mechanics of development fundamentally, as a ‘mimetic’ process, “whereby the words or actions of another are imitated”; “the deliberate imitation of the behavior of one group of people by another as a factor in social change” (online OED). Adorno first emphasised mimesis as relating to social practice and interpersonal relations rather than simply ‘a rational process of making and producing’. This very broadly converges with the categories of social change delineated by Srinivas; whether models of westernization, modernization or sanskritization, these follow an essential process of mimesis, and a dovetailing with dominant orders. It can be applied to the post-colonial situation especially when engineering/technological feats, more than creative/aesthetic works are replicated.

Executed and implemented by state bureaucracies, such works and their underlying rationale reinforce both global and national conceptions of development and gain (both in economic theory and policy) even percolating down to popular understanding and action.

Utilitarian ideas could be seen as a foundational British precursor of modern, global capitalism having a seamless temporal congruency with current S. Asian practices. The politico-administrative rationality of recent history could be conveyed and transmitted through numerous rules, edicts, laws and acts of colonial bureaucracies; it was and is given by the dictum of departmental procedures, by set precedents of performance pervading (especially) and government and its institutions. Most 'departments' permeate subjects' lives, but revenue and forests have maximizing concerns that particularly set them off against other needs. Irrigation and power appeared to serve the public good and the several interests, even as displaced groups quietly compromised theirs. At the same time, Law and order, Forests and Excise departments began to serve as first line of offense in enclosure of resource rights and the maintenance of privileges of empire (the peace) (Richard Gott). This was possible through the District Magistracy, a 'stipendiary yeoman constabulary' exercising 'efficient' coercive repression through local collaboration, surveillance and intelligence machinery. Colonialism's encounter with the indigenous produced responses that sought to civilize the savage, the jungle (Skaria, 1992), particularly through domestication into *settled* agriculture; consequently they were metaphorically rendered nomadic from their own existence and culture.

Development legislation today additionally needs to stoke majoritarian collective conscience through private interests wielding the 'technologies of domination', ordinarily vested in the state. Development discourse has come to assume hegemonic proportions especially among developing societies; its hold on individuals and groups showing no signs of waning into the 21st century. Intuitively, individuals and groups perceive an interest in mobility and progress. With authority of the universalizing rationality of science, it then becomes possible to disseminate ideas of development and state munificence, reduced to a continuum of simplicity-sophistication. Older Eurocentric conceptions of development and progress could be turned into 'Grow or Die' immediacy in capitalist economics, for popular reception and internalization by a citizen constituency. Public reception then, largely precludes need for democratic debate on

environment-equity concerns (the issue could well be nuclear energy, or allocations for health and education) by a civil society or other publics ill-prepared to interrogate them, i.e., many issues go largely unquestioned, uncontested in this largest democracy. The Indian Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and its wings, the DAVP (DIPR in AP), the universities, numerous ministerial documents/publications and media inserts can be seen to play more than a benign role in such communication. The engineered consensus spans growing, educated middle classes largely benumbed by inveiglement of the market, its need for consumers. The socialization of this class (a variegated cadre of specialists/ professionals) is invariably channeled into preoccupations of career advancement and maximization of individual worth. The net effect is promotion of uncritical acceptance of imposed rules, legislation, and predictable responses to both market and governmental persuasions.

The writings of Habermas, Foucault and Harvey and are invoked to understand the state of affairs that 'neoliberalism' produces, and its extraordinary facility in the transformation of governments into callous entities, and the reproduction of society constituted of single minded, calculative individuals.

Habermas had coined the phrase "*steering media*" to imply that money and administrative power operate 'relatively autonomously' on the individual, thereby 'uncoupling' or effectively promoting a consciousness characterized by 'disconnectedness'. People increasingly identify themselves and their aspirations in abstract system terms. Their needs become rooted in roles defined by the system as they begin to assume the 'roles of consumer and client'. This disconnectedness represents a '*colonization of the lifeworld*' performed through dictates of the economic and politico-legal system. Such colonization promotes a rationality that is instrumental* in the pursuit of accumulation (see endnote); it pre-empts and 'dislodges the coherence of internal *communicative action* implicit in the idea of lifeworlds'. 'In place of their real needs, arises an external framework of language, understandings and values and norms'. Systemhood is imposed on the person who becomes a system in interaction with other systems and individuals (ignoring social, even spiritual needs). 'The system constrains behaviour into a 'self-referential' logic'. Under the influence of 'steering media', people tend to become characterized by alienation themselves. The theory of communicative action enables us to see

and “become conscious *of the difference between steering problems and problems of mutual understanding...*, ‘between systemic disequilibria and lifeworld pathologies’ (italics, Habermas’ original, p?).

Foucault had also studied the “microphysics of power” together with the “macropolitical question of the state” (Lemke, pdf 2003). Exercise of state power subsumes the individual and channels his/her “conduct” (the “conduct of conduct”) in the pursuit of desired particular/generalized ends. This personal sphere, the subjective knowledge and practices of citizens come to “only exist within a certain regime of rationality”, a context mediated by the state. The subject internalizes state knowledge and rationality, and can easily accept (for instance) that “*previously ‘uncapitalized’ aspects of nature and society become internal to capital*” as a matter of fact occurrence. *Mentalites* are shaped through memes of ‘development’ and the ‘national good’ via multifarious government organs, science, academia and media. Thus, (post)colonial politico-bureaucratic rationality assumes the form of ideology, to be disseminated by the state; such benign socialization eventuates in the political articulation of ‘majoritarian’ interests. Defined by the numerics of parliamentary democracy, they tend to delegitimize any questioning of domination and state rationality by the oppressed, dispossessed minority. Resistance of political tyranny and social oppression could now warrant home department interventions (surveillance, ‘surgical’ violence, drones/helicopters, whatever it takes...). The postcolonial state sustains the pressure of colonial violence during so many tribal protests and revolts in recent history. In the consciousness of media and its constituency, snuffing of subaltern lives comes to gain a scarce second take in the news (but too bad ‘the poor devils’).

Colonialism notoriously bequeathed us the gift of ‘*eminent domain*’, but even J.S Mill, whose views on utilitarianism influenced colonial policy, had felt the need to introduce a system of “constitutional checks” to constrain “the nature and limits of the power which [could] be legitimately exercised by society over the individual”. It seems even the architect of those ‘temples’ of modernity later regretted them as (costly) exercises in ‘giganticism’.

Adam Smith’s writing too, hardly counts as a timeless, universal wisdom, “it represents the opinion of a political economist writing in context of the land enclosures taking place in Europe”. “As peasants and lower classes were driven out into towns and cities to work”, it

became necessary to enlist their participation in a rational ideology that could *increase the wealth of the nation*.

Globally, the displacement of indigenous people now assumes the nature of a successful business mantra of enclosure and exclusion, their lands appropriated for someone else's development. The uprooting of adivasi and rural groups in the recent 20th century has been taking place unstinted in India. Bondla and Misra (2007) find estimates of people displaced (since independence) by different development projects to be between "2,13,00,000 (citing Fernandes and Chaterji, 1995) to 5,00,00,000 (citing Saxena, 1999)". They claim that "there is agreement that *dams are the single largest cause of displacement*". Behura & Mishra (1988) had described the situation arising from the Upper Indravati Dam as 'cultural genocide' (Bondla and Misra, op cit; cf. Fenelon (1998) *Culturicide*). Citing an IIPA study confirming the 50 million estimate above, Arundhati Roy wrote: "*I feel like someone who's stumbled on a mass grave*" (quoted in Rao and Stewart, 2006: 36). It is difficult to understand the global targeting of indigenous people as 'accidental' (because indigenous lands happened to be located amidst newly discovered resources); persistent exclusionary, racist attitudes have also been at bottom, warranting explanation both at global and state levels.

In Polavaram, according to conservative government estimates, 1.76 lakh persons stand to be displaced (comprising 4.7 percent of the total 5,939 villages in the designated 'scheduled areas' of the country). Studies have put this figure at more than twice the number (V. Rukmini Rao; Richard Mohapatra). It does not appear a coincidence that mining and steel processing in post-Independence India began in areas with tribal populations, providing managerial solutions to production and the reproduction of (docile) labour.

One would have expected that the sobering salience of irreversible ecological harm and large scale violation of human rights, would have forced us to rethink hackneyed notions of progress and universal good, such as drive large dam plans.

Governments eyeing economic expansion intervene in productivity armed with technoeconomic fixes, astutely incorporating current critiques of state rationality through the complicity of the subjects themselves. Increasingly, from behind the fig leaf of environmental 'sustainability'

(conservation efforts mandated by international conventions, norms and global critique), development now requires all manner of resources to be garnered *volens nolens*. The disconnect between (governmental) ‘theory’ and practice (Foucault, 1978, 1979) parallels the rift between a constitutionalism vs. (whimsical) pursuit of development.

The neoliberal state directs the benefits of enclosure onto select interest groups, not necessarily restricted in size. Using utilitarian arguments ('those actions of the state are good that promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number'), a demographic majority is defended as *the society* against a weak, dispossessed minority. An obvious import of this process is relegation to proletarianhood of the weak¹, the destruction of proletarian autonomy, freedom and culture (a *deterritorialization*). Those who do own property are then conferred freedom of ‘enjoyment’, absolved from responsibility of being anyone’s ‘keeper’.

Thus, "Utilitarianism adds an economic, legislative and *political* dimension to an ethical concept, that of happiness and well-being". Zubairi further added:

“But in fact any form of property has to be seen in terms of its capacity to generate economic growth”, or else it would be indefensible or ‘lack popular support’. But what perpetuates property and reinforces the entrenchment of classes? Zubairi cited Bernard Williams: "What keeps stable hierarchies together is the idea of necessity, that it is somehow fore ordained that there should be these orders" (an extra-rational/economic derivation ensuring the subjection and re-creation of generational classes). Appropriation of privilege has always required such ordering and its perpetuation through a mix of ideology and repression.

¹ In an anticipation of tribal proletarianisation, Nirad Chaudhuri (cited in Haimendorf, 1982) captures this predicament:

“In an industrialized India the destruction of the aboriginal's life is as inevitable as the submergence of the Egyptian temples caused by the dams of the Nile. . . . As things are going there can be no grandeur in the primitive's end. It will not be even simple extinction, which is not the worst of human destinies. It is to be feared that the aboriginal's last act will be squalid, instead of being tragic. What will be seen with most regret will be, not his disappearance, but his enslavement and degradation”.

_ Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *The Continent of Circe*, 1965. See also: von Fürer-Haimendorf, Christoph. *Tribes of India: The Struggle for Survival*. Berkeley: University of California Press, c1982.
<http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft8r29p2r8/>

Proletarianization too, is hardly a straightforward process, splitting people into multiple pauperized groups, that Lenin had identified in 1931_ peasant groups and impoverished workers, as distinct from better paid skilled workers or clerical cadres, the ‘comfortable artisans’. It could crudely be operationalised (read trivialized) in the authority of World Bank as the difference between living on less than a dollar a day to those on about two dollars/per day (semi-proletarians experience lifetime relegation and *longue duree* ‘karma’). Examining policy locutions of “development for ‘betterment of the population’”, we observe that this belies a social structure that must restrict access to goods/services to only limited groups and classes. The disturbing widespread complacency associated with deprivation and inequality, the claim that issues of inequity are only distributional (related merely to glitches in the economic system and income) also neglects other human freedoms and entitlements in fundamental ways (Sen & Dreze). Poverty and its reduction are frequently used in justification of the necessity for expansive economic growth and development. This quest turns into a virtual treadmill, lionizing entrepreneurial motivation/success, promoting necessary economic freedoms and reward structures particularly not favouring the poor, cornering a large proportion of GDP. Such growth provides returns to capital and property through accumulation cycles dependent on fossil and nuclear fuel use, and increasingly needs the appropriation of unprocessed natural resources. Large dam building is one such formula to harness and channel water into such cycles, contributing directly to inequity and compounding ecological damage, especially where sizeable forests are submerged. Our “colonial cousins” experiences of disastrous externalities in the Three Gorges, Aswan and other projects only seem to have fuelled an insatiable appetite for large dams and the harnessing of water. In Polavaram, projected benefits from the project have led to unabashed self regard and hardening of pro-dam interests amidst dubious claims of ‘benefits’. Dubious because claimed ‘command areas’ are not only exaggerated, but can only be further reduced with soil salinity, water logging, erratic and reduced inflows for power generation (apart from ecological externalities).

An evidently racist exclusion threatens the survival of indigenous groups and acquires their land in the interests of Foucauldian ‘governmentality’. Local experiences of ‘reasonable’ recompense in Andhra Pradesh, too (as in other parts of India) have been worth little. While courts in other parts of the world (Australia, North America, both racist in their own right) have even recently

awarded sizeable compensation to indigenous communities, the Indian state/s in the quest to remain competitive, tend to pat down any ‘just’ reparation to a ridiculous minimum.

It is rarely recognized that displacement from sacred, nurturing lands and forests virtually destroys humans at critical junctures of cultural frailty. The consequent ‘alienation from long accepted life-worlds’ by those destined to ‘suffer in the national interest’ is registered as necessary by the population at large. Though repression is unquestionably the hard underbelly of neoliberalism, alienation, social disorganization, mental illness, dramatically reduced life-expectancy and food insecurity are the immediate dangers from culture loss and severed access to common property resources. Only, these casualties appear unremarkable as statistics go unreported by a media overly focused on the ‘mainstream’, the sensational. The media does not convey (in any meaningful sense) or study alienation as a historical and structural problem since this is not amenable to quick surveys in psychological or other social science. What cannot be measured then, cannot be said to exist.

To quote Sen & Dreze, “A more comprehensive approach is needed, which must also incorporate *other ways* of giving environmental problems the attention they deserve”. This is prescient recognition that “*community activities call both for a different outlook on environmental issues (for which appropriate social values can be quite crucial) and the formation of specific community based organizations (requiring additional institutional structures)*” (2002:227). We would be so much the poorer for not engaging with indigenous values and alternatives, modes of social organization. This view, many critics and ethno-historians point out, could succumb to romantic conceptions of the environment, and forest dwellers as its natural votaries. But an optimism founded on ‘resilience’ immanent in the eco-system/biosphere, ‘belief in the robustness of nature’ are presuppositions of ancient vintage ingrained in the quest for more: accumulation, resources, production, consumption, spending and growth_ development. Charges of ‘romanticism’ come conspicuously from certain quarters (intellectuals, corporate think-tanks, and media) made to stymie opposition to such development.

Commodification feeds on subsistence that is free in nature; any ‘common property resources’ are cordoned and monopolized for profit. The ‘killing’ that bottled water companies make with water needs only purification process, packaging and logistics/marketing costs (perhaps more

importantly, ‘taking care’ of politicians and bureaucrats); the larger corporations can easily ‘give back’ some profits to ‘corporate ethical responsibility’ funds, reaping additional publicity, ‘goodwill’. To prize accumulation for its own sake, for development, constricts its flow to limited conduits, furthering a ‘development of underdevelopment’; a large part of returns to FDI flowing to ‘core’ regions of the globe. The Global cross-linking of benefit sees only happy ‘win-win’ situations arising from development.

Colonially founded bureaucracies like the Indian Forest Service however have recently begun to take an interest in ‘social forestry’ and the synergies to be realized from indigenous practices in ‘joint forest management’ (perhaps more out of compliance with bureaucratic directives than from nuancing meanings associated with living with nature). While such directives take note of global critique, practice usually lapses into corruption, quotidian vulgarization and short hand interpretation of rules/procedures by bureaucratic functionaries, all tending to defeat ostensible ends of legislative enactment. We may never understand indigenous communitarian (living) cultures and their practices, post decimation. The least that policies could do is not accelerate/precipitate culture and forest loss, especially through development projects.

While the Forest Rights Act, (FRA) 2006 seeks to accord recognition of land in use by forest dwelling communities (usufruct rights), the antiquated Land Acquisition Act, 1894, (in all its amendments) is invoked to supersede the former (the FRA apparently remains a paper claim of constitutional ‘provisions’ and enactments). The state thus tends to minimize/reduce any rights in forests, mountains and river basins/deltas, but grotesquely smiles with flowers between clenched teeth at FDIs. Dangerously large development projects not only trample upon human rights, but almost as importantly, on the environmental commons too.

Protection of indigenous ways of life by the state is not only a necessary intervention which the Indian state has constitutionally committed itself to, but also because the alternative knowledges that indigenous ways of life represent, are threatened when most needed by the unthinking and unsustainable accretion of ‘development’. Studies in indigenous micro-economies, sharing and pooling, altruistic reciprocity and gift giving, earth-nature practices, indigenous medical practices and communitarian orientations can inform latter day approaches to utilitarian development and individualist profit. Cutting ecological corners, especially for individual gain is

anathema to most adivasis (an imperative as nature is the sole source of sustenance, and often elevated to divinity). But such corner cutting becomes a necessary formula for success under capitalism resulting in numerous unacceptable disasters impacting the environment adversely, and importantly restricting the range of productive potential and biological regeneration

Post colonial governments have asserted that Indian tribal societies/economies did not represent arrested levels of development and as such, should not be seen as frozen ‘museum exhibits’, seeking the tribes’ active participation in modernity. To postcoloniality, proletarianization (‘work liberates’) has appeared a better prospect than a disdainful foraging subsistence. It was as though admission of such fraternal intent itself constituted a ‘successful homogenization’ of tribals. Such benevolent intent was considered enough to incorporate adivasis into a fraternity of national development; they could be implored to part with lands over which they anyway held only ambiguous claim. While laws only ostensibly decreed that this did not give non-tribals a right to the lands tribals were farming, they did however, leave the state clear arrogatory rights and powers to do so.

In post-independence India, the policy of social development has been couched in an essential telos of meliorist betterment of the ‘historically disadvantaged’ (Dalits and Adivasis). The recognition that Dalits and adivasis formed a kind of datum of historical dis-privilege has also set in motion a rising ‘tide of expectations’, relying on the naming of groups by the state in its vision of a national social structure; dissonant practice has seen the diversion of (minuscule) quotas, budgets. Imaginary expenditures work against any ‘protective discrimination’. The contending groups demands could not all be conceded by the state which did not remain the unalloyed moulder of social structure. Quickly abandoning this function to the market, it has given rise to articulation of a politics from which tribals had previously remained ‘largely silent and insulated’ (Hardiman, Review of Skaria: EPW). This now ushers people into divisions of claim over resources, distribution and into a competitive alterity (as many social scientists and ethnohistorians have shown). In this wreckage, the dividends from nationalist political socialization, proselytization and deployment of alterity are considered worthy of investment. Less understood is (human) adivasi agency, adapting cultural belief to proletarian relegation and

life changing/ shattering circumstances; beliefs conferring at least an iota of self-respect for the dispossessed.

It appears the Polavaram project of 1940s vintage (Srirampadasagar plans) should have been adequate notice for tribals to clear the area for a little understood ‘scientific’ development. But they would do well to clear out, having seen the face of a superior alien god.

When the state intervenes to create/open up markets, when rights of the weak are eroded and overridden, perceptions of gain and state largesse are legitimated/tolerated by media, the public and law, we are chillingly reminded of living in the midst of a *neoliberalist dispensation*.

_ For Harvey (2005), Neoliberalism is “a theory of political economic practices” rather than a “complete” political ideology; it is ‘a continuity of liberal doctrine’: “a theory of political economic practices...that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills” which are guaranteed by state enforcement of an “institutional framework of strong private property rights, free markets and free trade”. Capital and the requisite technologies instrumental in its further accumulation represent these entrepreneurial freedoms and skills, buttressed by a state defined legality. This ‘human freedom’ is elevated to a moral plane worthy of pursuit in and of itself, the state aiding not only market creation but overseeing the award of favours and distribution of concessions to groups proximate to it. This stresses any concerns of ‘transparency’, making corruption (especially in developing societies) a routine activity and an endemic occurrence. Neoliberalism assumes a totalizing specialist-technicist objectivity that drives conceptions of ‘mutual’ development and individualist gain, even as its corollary, myopic self regard renders impervious the loss and pain of the Other.

Wittgenstein famously used the example of pain to show that ‘privileged access to one’s own mind’ cannot comprehend the experience of pain of the ‘other mind’, concluding that it only makes sense to accept the other’s claim of pain on his/her word. While routinising practices related to minimisation of pain (a Mill-ian motivation, widely understood in the care-giving professions), the allegory of pain from abrupt severance of economic practices and cultural

dislocation has produced infinite, undocumented adversity on indigenous people for no fault of theirs.

For an understanding of liberalism, we may rely on Gray's (1986/1998, 2nd edn., Indian reprint) abstraction of liberal thought, his identification of its 'elements': *individualism* (the 'moral primacy of [the] person'), *egalitarianism* (conferring 'the same moral...worth on all men', *universalism* ('affirming the moral unity of the human species and according a secondary importance to specific historic associations and cultural forms' and finally, '*meliorist* in its affirmation of the corrigibility and improvability of all social institutions and political arrangements'.

From this vantage, it becomes possible to identify contradictions and jarring discontinuities in its assumption of modern neoliberal forms, essentializing the role of the state. The egalitarian element is easily transformed into racism, in administering the state's many populations. It is easily recognised that state meliorism becomes highly diluted with (apparently) autonomous market forces. The 'element' of universalism similarly runs into problems with instances of historical uniqueness and cultural specificity.

Ideas of a '*self-regulating market*' constitute the 'core' assumptions of both liberalism and neoliberalism (Munck, 2005; Harvey, 2005). In neoliberal practice, ideas of egalitarianism, meliorism are sanitised to virtual elimination, and contradictions of (an originally desirable) 'minimal state intervention' gain an overriding concern with state power, especially in creating and leveraging entry into markets. Neoliberalism for Harvey must "guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets" and their "creation" "by state action if necessary". Gray finds that it was JS Mill who "created a system of thought which legitimated the interventionist and statist tendencies which grew even stronger throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century in England" (1986/1998:30). Moreover, "The falsity of Mill's philosophy of history - in which modernization and Westernization are conflated...there is an unshakable expectation of cultural convergence on a universal liberal civilization – [this] has profoundly subversive consequences for all forms of liberalism" (Gray: 2000:139).

And so, proletarianisation proceeds apace such that the proletarians are ‘inclusively’ still part of the ‘growth story’_ growth that integrates them in ‘colonies’! and slum housing, a couple of feet square. (At least they survive to make good when their education/ literacy and remunerable skill levels eventually (somehow) go up, and a ‘developed’ state benevolently disposed to accord their descendants some redress...). The needs of particular groups are lost sight of as universalizing/hegemonic conceptions of the good blind us to the adivasi experience of alienation.

Elinor Ostrom, recently awarded the Nobel prize in economics showed that ‘common pool property is an effective way of managing natural resources’; this is a legacy of rich potential. Her observations are based on the principle of usufruct rather than ownership_ an economy where pooling is mandated by the state/society. Testimony that a tragedy of the commons can be averted, her work in institutional economics studies the ‘design principles of successful institutions’. Institutional diversity and assortment of governance structures are to be welcomed instead of standard concepts in institutional design (that lead to both top-down policy and top heavy institutions determined by some elusive “optimality”). Ostrom’s proposals for institutional design are especially noteworthy for tribal welfare administration. This is hardly the ‘road to serfdom’ that liberals, quickened to defend rights to a possessive individualism, have disdainfully rejected (Ostrom was an avowed liberal). That ownership comes with social responsibility has been the less pronounced rider of neoliberal Indian capitalism, permitting endless hypocrisy and racist exclusion of its populations.

The irrigation bonanza accruing to the downstream command area (of a claimed 7.20 lakh Ha irrigated land) lies in the Godavari delta/basin of East and West Godavari, Krishna and Visakhapatnam districts; plans are afoot to irrigate regions in Prakasam and Rayalseema; water supply of about 23.5 TMC for a thirsting industrial Visakhapatnam and adjoining regions is being readied; generation of 960 MW hydro-electric Power are all claimed as necessary for ‘development’ and urbanization in this region.

The Bharat Nirman Program (National Water Development Board) of the Ministry of Water Resources has piloted an ambitious National Rivers Linking Project (NRLP) which would divert the surplus waters of rivers into deficient ones (in this case, 80 TMC of Godavari water would

flow into the Krishna). Unsurprisingly, the central Ministry too has an interest in proceeding with the Polavaram project since it would inaugurate the first rivers' link; additionally, the proposed Kovvada nuclear power plant in Northern coastal AP would be an extremely water intensive proposition. But amidst projected scenarios of water conflicts, rivers inter-linking would only generate more sobering uneven development from water surplus 'cores' and deficient hinterlands. The ministry for water and power acknowledges that "water withdrawals for domestic and industrial sectors will increase much faster than that for irrigation".

From conceptions of waters flowing 'waste', and 'benefits' from inter-linking, these Grandiose geo-hydrological engineering schemes (30 of these links spanning a total length of 12,500 km) are planned to be executed across the country! There have been directives from the Supreme Court to execute the NRLP_ that the SC should have given such a directive only underscores the need for serious/healthy public participation and political debate. The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) seems to have only served to ultimately ratify and clear 'development' projects (appearing to slow them with a range of 'conditionalities'), allocations to environment budgets simply slipping through their fingers. While we have a good idea where the water flows 'waste', less is known of the flow of public funds.

Rapid urbanization is to be expected in stretches with significantly high agricultural yields, especially along transport corridors and canal links (Nath, V., 1986, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol XXI, No 8, February 22). Consequent upon urbanization is the decrease in size of agricultural land-holding, consolidation of land by rich farmers, agribusiness and real estate, while irrigation needs are expected to become secondary, according to the Centre for Policy Research (<http://www.scribd.com/doc/59101116/The-Future-of-Urbanization>). According to this view, capital from agricultural accumulation would be reinvested in other commercial development along transport corridors and canal links. Navigation and recreational facilities, development of (a declining) fisheries (to benefit capitalist contractors), tourism (Centre for Policy Research paper, op cit.) – and other anticipated spinoffs - would further add to urbanization, canal and river pollution. Surface evaporation losses do not appear to matter; seepage serves to recharge groundwater in adjacent areas_ how desirable this 'ingenious' human

intervention worth thousands of crores, when investment in water harvesting might have achieved the same?

The legitimacy of development concerns must be evaluated in terms of alternatives and cost, both defined to include social justice and ecology. Calculation of costs too, has been characteristically hurried to obtain legal and Central clearances in this case (as with others). (And at time of writing, it seems the National Investments Bureau headed by the PM, can award clearances unilaterally)! The area under inundation would realistically be much, much higher than claimed by the AP Government. *Can there be sanguine consensus on a policy that encourages water intensive patterns of agrarian wealth extraction, forest shrinkage and wasteland increase?*

“Additional land acquisition for embankments, soil of usable quality for embankment construction, land for collecting several lakh cubic metres of muck and its disposal” haven’t been provided for. The project also threatens loss to livelihoods of river fishing communities as the river would stop flowing (at natural flows), blocking the migration of spawning fish; the livelihoods of Mala communities dependent on driftwood/fuelwood salvage would be severely affected (Uma Maheshwari, R: 2012). Much biodiversity depends on riverine and estuarine habitats. They attract migratory birds because they are so prolifically productive as in the nearby Kolleru lake (now shrinking from human settlement); Papikonda is a wildlife sanctuary only by pronouncement and demarcation, there are similar contiguous forests that would be submerged. The Godavari’s environmental vulnerability stems mainly from alteration of flow (dams). Rundowns prognosticating shrinkage of biodiversity are chillingly real, and the state will now host an international biodiversity conference amid heavy security (from marauding Maoist microbes?). Studies cite numerous endangered plant and animal species adversely affected through habitat inundation in the submergence zone (EPW, EPTRI).

There seems to be little consolation that the Chattisgarh and Odisha governments have filed petitions with the Supreme Court against the Polavaram project, up for hearing by a special forest bench (ToI, Jul 29, 2012), since the latter has also attempted to award illegal mining rights to corporations, flattening whole forested mountains, creating toxic slurry ponds in the

wilderness (Niyamgiri) and training guns² on protesting locals/tribals (Kalinganagar, Kottaguda, Sarkeguda)! But it seems Constitutional restraints, Supreme Court interventions and permissions of the different ministries have only left a record of facilitating capitalist development and ‘the national interest’, rather than interpret it to include the rights of evictees and environmental concerns. (The National Commission for SCs and STs are another agency to clear this project). In Odisha, 13 settlements in eight revenue villages and five hamlets in Podia block of Malkangiri district would be submerged; this does not include the 2,120 hectares in Chhatisgarh. The A.P government’s proposed idea of an embankment that would protect these states is merely an afterthought_ how this would be executed and paid for has not been planned, simply euphemistically announced. Thus, adivasis and other groups are confronted with their very survival by a state in the throes of a vicious neo-liberal capitalism concerned with anticipated development and speculation rather than human welfare. Greed not need (a nice meme, if reversed...) obviously drives the stridency of ‘grow or die’ economics. More realistically, agricultural productivity and surplus generation through trade and industry would be curtailed by drastic environmental degradation (P. Balakrishnan, The Hindu, Aug. 25, 2012, lead article).

Ironically, areas scheduled for submergence fall largely in the semi-arid Telangana region, uprooting a sizeable percentage of already marginalised groups. On the other hand, the command area represents a relatively developed coastal region irrigated by the Dhowleswaram and Krishna barrages (Rammohan, EPW; this is now said to require de-siltation); the fertile Godavari delta and adjoining areas receive a higher-than-state average rainfall. The fortuitous record of rainfall is sought to be supplemented by the security of surface water irrigation, as the state continues to hedge its bets on ‘the strong’, the rich farmers and capitalists for more *inauspicious accumulation!*

Among the technical alternatives suggested by irrigation Engineers like Dharma Rao, Hanumantha Rao and Sriramkrishniah have been those involving multiple and lower barrages, tunneling of waters from the Sabari and Sileru rivers_ these have not seriously been examined

² The monthly Olympus reported in 1981 after the tribal massacre at Indervelli, AP:

“Tribals are fighting a grim battle for survival. The depredation of forest contractors has upset their economic life. And now their lands are sought to be snatched away by the new "voortrekkers." The plainsmen with the power of the modern state behind them are moving in”.

(the AP CM, a good man personally, doesn't want/need to look at them, only to go ahead with the Polavaram spending?). Flood levels over a 100 year period have not been taken into account; possible dam-break scenarios have not been allowed for (Prof Sivaji Rao); endangered are some 42 lakh persons downstream. Hanumatha Rao's designs also preclude the necessity for desiltation, as silt could be auctioned to agriculturists when barrages dry out in summers. Recently, the state came in for severe 'scolding' (by the Ministry of Environment and Forests) of irregular 'spillway' design and the expensive placatory measures of 'embankments' for Chhatisgarh and Orissa inundation. (Will the scolding even turn into real spanking, and keep the state government in the dock?).

Even the technical alternatives minimizing submergence and displacement, claiming half the irrigation costs/per hectare in the command area, secondary benefits and enhanced safety are all paradoxically not worth considering by the state of A.P, which claims to know all there is to know about arcane development projects. But these alternatives still go with utilitarian, neoliberalist flows of 'harnessing benefits', but only attempt to minimize damage/displacement. Is it necessary to make a cake that some Indians will eat and others cannot have (but yet pay dearly for)??!! The Polavaram-Indirasagar Project is clearly a call for alternatives and experiments with a credible 'altruism' that invests in this part of the planet. This *must* proceed through fundamental review of development policy, democratic critique and debate, and certainly not through arrogant assertions claiming to 'know what's best'.

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* In this scenario, engineers and technocrats thus become the local 'development cowboys', mustering financial backing and corporate support with ease. Politico-bureaucratic rationality is faithful to the telos of development, upholding a world view that appreciates production of value out of elements that are either free (unvalued), or which develop value out of a lower value. Science and technology are similarly manipulated by this end_ ordering a hierarchy of 'knowledges' valued in terms of their

potential for surplus extraction. Under capitalism, this scientific valuation continuously (historically) becomes distilled, such that only those knowledge structures survive that have the edge and potential for maximal surplus extraction. Not only does this epistemic 'survival of the fittest' eliminate on the predication of gain, but importantly they have an evolutionary role in their own reproduction. Science then develops in terms of potential for 'fruitful' application. Thus capitalism can be seen not only as structure, but as having motive forms of production and its reproduction. Neoliberalism, as the 'burnout' phase of capitalism seeks to renew itself with the forces of 'economic stabilization', by appearing to incorporate meliorist-humanist ideologies (translated by 'not-for-profit' managements and social-work interventions).

This form of 'instrumental rationality' conditions the normality of life and even 'culture', being thus animated by a restlessness that must seek endless accumulation. In this process, it becomes vital to establish supremacy of 'the capitalist civilizational project', which requires the elimination of alternatives_ the elimination of cultures of altruism' (Anouar Abdel Malik), those tempering accumulation with oppositional (alternative) social and religious practices (going against the grain of the capitalist civilizational project, finding themselves consigned to 'the wrong side of history'). Thus, capitalism must assume epistemic dimensions in its quest for innovation, thereby fetishising 'intellectual property' and rewarding it.