

'ABANDONED : DEVELOPMENT & DISPLACEMENT'^{*}

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The book (under review) Of 196 pages divides into 11 chapters with 17 appendices, is an important contribution from an informal group of students and teachers of Delhi University under the name of “Perspectives” and is a must read by every educated Indian, especially the younger ones, who will understand what type of country and future they are going to inherit. This book informs, infuriates and inspires. Some decades ago this reviewer was thrilled and had a similar feeling as he has now, while reading the famous *Deshar Katha* by Sakharam Ganesh Deoskar which was proscribed and all copies of the book forfeited in 1910. The ban was lifted only after 1947. While the book was first published one hundred years ago. *Deshar Katha* (Hindi translation “Desh ki Baat”) was a simple innocent book of economic history of India compiled from published books and materials, mostly British, with size nearly the size of the present volume, was seized and all copies confiscated by the British government. The present book, will not have the fate of *Deshar Katha* because the days have changed. The authors of the different chapters of the book and the editor(s) have preferred to remain anonymous, possibly because they want to highlight the abandoned victims of development instead of highlighting themselves. The ‘Perspectives’ team that made this book, visited many development sites whence villagers and tribals had been evicted from their traditional habitats and sources of livelihood to allow dams and reservoirs, factories, mines, SEZs to come up for what the Indian ruling elites consider as “development”. This provocative book arouses many questions like development for whom and at whose cost? Are such developments sustainable? Can the economy afford to bear such fast depletion of India’s non-renewable natural resources like forests, land, water bodies, minerals, fossil fuels? Are not such developmental activities destroying India’s environment and widening the gaps between the rich and the poor, the town and the villages? While an IIMA graduate was recently offered nine crore rupees as the annual package, millions are to survive on just a few thousand rupees per annum.

The tenth chapter which begins, as quoted below, is quite thought-provoking. “The Economic Survey 2005-06 claimed that the performance of the Indian economy in recent times is an event which has rarely been seen in “recorded history”. This view is based on, amongst other things, the spectacular growth rate of the Gross Domestic Product(GDP). The annual growth rate of the GDP for 2003-04 was 8.45 percent and the next year it was 7.53 percent. India is poised to become an economic superpower(it is already a nuclear power) and join the elite club of developed nations.

But it will be the first super power, which has half of its children suffering from chronic malnutrition. It will be the first super power where more than a lakh farmers have committed suicide in the past eight years. The Human Development Index of the United Nations places India at 127 out of 177 nations. Growing unemployment is an inseparable companion of the growing GDP. The employed population is not in a better state....”

The book seeks to look deeply into the heart of the skewed Indian development which is neither sustainable nor egalitarian. The Indian Central and State Governments of all hues, from West Bengal to Gujarat, Orissa to Kerala, Madhya Pradesh to Assam, are vying with each other in coaxing and cajoling big Indian Capitalists like the Tatas, Jindals, Mittals, Reliance, Essar and foreign MNCs. The MNC's rush to the south is because of the rich natural resources of the 3rd world, their cheap labor and the easily manipulable weak government and administrative machinery and absence of a strong public opinion against environmental destruction and plunder of precious natural resources. The present book is a saga of the saddest tragedy on earth where Indian states are giving out on a platter to big capital the best of India's non-renewable land, forest, fresh water and richest mineral resources which Mother India accumulated and harbored in her bosom for centuries.

“The Legal Framework” (Chapter II) is revealing. The true character of the state which is essentially anti-people and always worked and will work for the interests of the upper affluent ruling classes and the big capital in particular, has been fairly well revealed through analyses of the constitutional provisions and enacted laws. General people are always kept under illusion and in an abiding faith in the judiciary and the Legal system, the Parliament and the Assembly and in the honesty and ability of the Administration, which are rare in reality. The dominance of the Indian ruling classes and their network of exploitation stand on pillars of the powerful modern state which also include the police and the military. Laws framed are mostly anti-people and undemocratic. The laws which apparently seek to protect the rights of the people and the environment are replete with loopholes or anomalies and subject to different interpretations at different times in different courts.

“Good intentions of the state always seem to get restricted to policies, which cannot be legally enforced and court orders, which are never implemented. They are seldom in the form of government rules, which are enforced, or legislation whose non-implementation can be challenged in court. Policies, rules and orders have a dual advantage —those that are in the interests of the state can be implemented religiously (at whatever cost to the people), while the more progressive ones can be ignored conveniently (at the same time, their progressive nature also lends the state a “human face”). Moreover, many legislations have ambiguous provisions, which can be interpreted according to the will of the executive and the judiciary.”

It is a sad reality that there exists a permanent conflict of interest between the people and the State notwithstanding whatever is written in the constitution or in books. The concept of “eminent domain” means that the state has ultimate sovereignty over all land and natural resources and can take any private property for “public purposes” by virtue of the superior dominion of the sovereign power over lands within its jurisdiction. The Land Acquisition Act of 1894 is the most infamous example of state misusing this power, a practice that has been continuing since the colonial era, which the West Bengal Marxist government is now using ruthlessly. Under this Act, by now well known in West Bengal, government can take over any land under individual or community ownership in the name of “public purpose”. Once the government notifies any land acquisition under this Act, the acquisition itself or its purpose cannot be challenged in court. Projects like dams, SEZs, even private industries, mining can be interpreted as public purposes and the Supreme Court has endorsed (1994) such interpretation of that Act, including asserting that “the Sovereign State can always acquire the property of a citizen for public

good, without the owner's consent..." This chapter with its analyses are of help to peoples' movements.

The Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act of 1996 (PESA) came into effect in December 1996. Its hollowness has been revealed. Forest and mineral rich areas in India mostly lie in tribal areas and despite PESA with its avowed intention of tribal and forest protection, vast areas of Orissa, Jharkhand, Chhattishgarh, Andhra Pradesh are given out to domestic and foreign companies at the cost of the lives and livelihoods of the tribals whose numbers in India are about eight crores.

Through the Indian Forest Act 1927, the Forest Conservation Act of 1980, the Wildlife Protection Act 1972 and the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act 2002 and of 2006, the government has assumed absolute control over the forests and the tribals who are always harassed and further marginalized.

The 3rd Chapter on Forests and Mining discusses the plight of the tribals who lived for centuries close to and in harmony with nature. The number of people who directly or indirectly derive their sustenance from forests is some ten crores according to Planning Commission Sources. The present book does not include the Notified Criminal Tribes in British India Act of 1871, whereby persecution on tribals, the original inhabitants of India, accelerated.

With the policies of Liberalization Privatization and Globalization there is a move to privatize even the forests. Foreign investments are welcomed in the management of all natural resources including forests, water bodies, rivers and even hillocks. "In Bastar district of Chhattish-garh, World Bank sponsored projects are replacing natural forests with exotic pines for paper and pulp wood. Now Reliance, UK based DI Oil, British Petroleum and others have forests for their particular captive plantations or for "Carbon Trading". In Karnataka the Birlas have started eucalyptus cultivation. Many other examples can be found in the book. It is easy to see that forest ecosystems are being destroyed with immense harm to genetic diversity and wild life. About 15 crores of people who live in the vicinities of forests are affected in many ways.

The section under the subtitle *Mineral Rush* describes how the public enterprises are being sold off to the private companies and India's mineral resources are opened to the foreigners who are indiscriminately plundering her mineral resources. Chinese businessmen are taking away iron ores from the Bellary - Hospet area of Karnataka. The South Korean Steel giant Pohang Iron and Steel Company (POSCO) investing twelve billion US dollars (largest foreign investment) for steel plants in Orissa, Jharkhand and Chhattish-garh. The South African diamond MNC, De Boers, acquired rights to large tracts of land in Orrissa, Andhra and Chattishgarh for diamond prospecting and Ace Rio Tinto has diamond and gold interests in MP and diamond rights in Chhattishgarh.

These unscientific indiscriminate mining operations are destroying forest ecosystems, soil, water and uprooting tribals and villagers. The 'Perspectives' team visited coal mining areas in Asansol, witnessed what havoc two centuries of coal mining have wrecked in the region. The villagers are now fighting a grim losing battle to save their homes and fields.

The next chapter IV on 'Dams and Displacement' describes very briefly how building of big dams have caused deterioration of river health, enhanced ferocity of floods and

loss of forests and human habitations, mostly tribal, because most dams are built in remote valleys. Dams benefit some plains, people and big industries. That dams generate hydel power, control floods, provide irrigation water in dry seasons where water is unavailable, have been proved as myths, at best over exaggeration, but are regularly taught in schools and colleges. The developed countries of Europe and North America are now backing out from these Big Dam Foolishness. There is actually a book of this name by Elmer Peterson (1954) and more can be found from "Silenced Rivers : The Ecology and Politics of Large Dams", by Patrick Me Cully, (Orient Longman, 1998). The picture is opposite in most third world countries. China is a big dam nation. India too. India has now over 3,600 large dams with more than 700 under construction. The present book finds that during the period 1947-2000, about four crores of people have been displaced due to dams and reservoirs. Most of them have not been compensated or rehabilitated.

25 Years after the building of the prestigious Bhakra-Nangal project, only 730 of the 2,108 families displaced in the early 1950s from the Bilaspur and Una district of HP had been resettled. A majority of those displaced by projects like the Hirakud dam in Orissa or the Rihand dam in UP or the Pong dam in HP have never been resettled.

It is not without interest to note the attitudes of Indian leaders from the remarks they made when India's first major river valley project the Hirakud Dam of Orissa was being built (1948 - 1957).

"It you have to suffer, you should do so in the interest of the country" —Jawharlal Nehru.

"We will request you to move from your houses after the dams come up. If you move it will be good. Otherwise we shall release the waters and drown you all" - Morariji Desai

"You expect us to provide for you when you die. Next you will even expect us to be responsible for more of you when you breed." - An official of NHPC to the displaced demanding place to cremate a deceased family member, in Harsud Town, MP.

Chapter V deals with Special Economic Zones or SEZs. This Act, a Central Act, has suddenly taken the country by storm and this is perhaps the most blatant example of the Indian state catering to the interests of private and imperialist capital to the detriment of people, workers and the economy. The SEZ idea mooted first during the NDA regime (2000), now being pursued with great vigor by UPA government. SEZs would actually encroach on the already shrinking farm land. Food scarcities, even famines are not ruled out. The creation of islands within the country, which are 'deemed foreign territories' (a GOI phrase), is nothing but recolonization through the back door. A passage from a book (Globalization : The Human Consequences by Zygmunt Bauman, Polity, 1998) is quotable :

"In the cabaret of Globalization, the state goes through a strip - tease and by the end of the performance it is left with the bare necessities only : its power of repression. With its material basis destroyed, its sovereignty and independence annulled, its political class effaced, the Nation - State becomes a simple security service for the mega - companies....

The new masters of the world have no need to govern directly. National governments are charged with the task of administering affairs on their behalf."

That creation of SEZs may not necessarily lead even to economic growth everywhere can be seen from a front page news item in the *Statesman* of 20th June, 2007.

“The industrial zone of Falta (South 24 Parganas, W.B.) lies in a shambles with only half the units in production. Large areas deserted and in disrepair. Of the 186 units more than half have, either been closed or are laying off staff, leaving many workers destitute.

It is claimed a large tract of land acquired for the unit is still not being used despite the project first being mooted - initially as an Export Processing Zone - more than two decades ago. In addition, there are still farmers whose land was acquired for the SEZ, who are waiting to receive the price of their land after 23 years.” The West Bengal CPM government cannot revive nearly 56,000 closed industries, but still can promise industrialization and acquire productive land in villages in Singur, Nandigram and other areas, and for that they can launch barbarous attacks.

There are primarily two actors in the SEZs - the developers and the entrepreneurs. Developer is the company that develops infrastructure and other facilities on the land earmarked for the SEZ. The developer then invites the entrepreneurs (one company or a group of companies) to set up Units on the land taking advantage of the various tax waivers and other incentives. Indonesia's notorious Salim group has proposed to set up two SEZs in East Midnapur, (a really developed region on many counts, as can be judged from the UN's Human Development Report on West Bengal, 2004), the results of which will be total destruction of a vast fertile region with chemical pollution which are inevitable consequences of petrochemical industries. West Bengal should concentrate on other industries, particularly agro-industries, leaving such petrochemicals to more suitable locations elsewhere.

Urban displacement is dealt with in Chapter VI. India has a slum population of nearly 17 crores. Rural unemployment and large scale migration to urban areas continue unabated mostly in all developing countries of the 3rd world. Slums, squalor, poverty, congestion in cities is annoying to the urban affluent elites who cherish a hostile attitude to the unfortunate poor constrained to exist under abysmal conditions. But nevertheless, they cannot do without the services of these slum dwellers as house maids, vegetable vendors, watch and ward staff, rickshaw pullers. Most of the urban elites welcome government moves in demolishing slums, throwing them out to make the cities clean, green and beautiful with widened roads, flyovers, shopping malls, multiplexes. But for whom?

It is a sad truism that few people, even educated well meaning persons seldom care to think or ask why people from villages under what desperate conditions become compelled to leave their ancestral homes and familiar habitat and migrate to cities. Rural areas have been spoilt through neglect : earning a livelihood is very difficult in rural areas; there is hardly any safe water for drinking; no provisions for education, health care facilities and above all nowadays anti-social and criminal elements rampage the country side unhindered.

Some “other Projects” have been dealt with in Chapter VII and it includes a summary of the Singur happenings. Nandigram, including the 14th March, 2007 genocide is also included. Mining and quarrying and tree felling in Uttarakhand, their consequences has also been included. Bangalore - Mysore Infrastructure Corridor Project with its 111 km expressway and seven townships and their effects on the region is also touched upon.

Of the pipeline projects Goa-Hyderabad pipeline (660 km, 18 inches diameter) for transporting hydrocarbon products, Essar's pipeline (267 km) between Bailadila mines and Vishakhapatnam for transporting iron ore in slurry form is also mentioned. Construction of the Golden Quadrilateral which connects the major metropolitan Indian cities and other highways covering a total length of 33 lakh kilometers (second longest in the world) have consumed huge fertile land and has much adverse environmental effects for automobile transport at the cost of more environment friendly water and rail transport.

Chapter IX describes Resistance and Repression. People protest against eviction from their homes, their traditional habitat and the loss of agricultural fields and forests. They demand greater compensation, adequate rehabilitation. Some movements reject such development models entirely. The resistance of people spans across the country. So too does the repression. Success rates against the formidable state power equipped with police, paramilitary, military, prisons are relatively few. Chipko movements in UP, Silent Valley Project in Kerala, Arvery watershed management project are inspiring examples. Reports on peoples' resistance movements come almost daily in the press.

On 2nd January 2006 people protested against the construction of a boundary wall of Tata Steel in Kalinganagar in Orissa and 13 people were killed in police firing. To pay homage to those 13 people killed in police firing on the same day of 2007, 10,000 tribals and members of organizations from Orissa, Jharkhand, Chhattishgarh, West Bengal, Bihar, UP, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra attended the meeting. Today one sees similar things happening in Nandigram, Singur, Kharagpur, Purushottampur and other places in West Bengal. Peoples' protests, their determinations and sacrifices are faithfully reported in the 'Dainik Statesman' and some other dailies of Kolkata. The intellectuals, artists, students also have joined the protests and a new consciousness is dawning in WB.

When the actual and potential victims of state development projects organize protest movements, the state first tries to get rid of them with as little difficulty as possible, failing which the compensation amount is raised or other sops and incentives offered. When these do not work (or even simultaneously) the state launches its repressive machinery. The attitudes and methods are same everywhere, be it a Congress or BJP or CPM ruled state. The danger and difficulty is somewhat more and somewhat new in West Bengal because the CPM is a cadre-based organized party and it has assumed near complete control over the State Government's administrative machinery, even the judiciary, as was seen in earlier fascist states around the world. Some people see this as Left Fascism. "Fascism's principles are wafting in the air today, surreptitiously masquerading as something else, challenging everything we stand for." In this connection it is quite important to visit the website (<http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/artical4113.htm>)

The Indian state has been continually waging a war against its own people in order to serve the interests of the big capital, both domestic and foreign. And for this the police and military expenditure is being continuously increased. In the past 28 years India's armed forces remained the busiest 'peace time' army fighting internal wars. Nearly 50 percent of India's security forces had been deployed against its own people, claimed George Fernandes in 1998.

Development of the country? That is the caption of Chapter X. Development is an oft used and mostly misused term and opinions can be extremes on either side. Criteria of development is not the same for all. Some take economic growth as the criterion, others take quality of life. There is a fair consensus among development economists that GDP growth does not necessarily imply fair and equitable distribution of wealth resulting in all round development among all sections of the population. There can also be good improvement of the quality of human lives with per capita GNP far lower than those in the DCs as in Costa Rica, Sri Lanka, Kerala if the state management is good and efficient. Some idea about the secret behind India's "progress"(?) towards achieving economic super power status in spite of under or non-utilization of the labors, intelligence and creativities of its vast unemployed population, can be obtained through careful scrutiny of the book under discussion. This is partly due to selling out at throw away prices the rich natural resources of the country to big Capital. In this connection it is interesting to note that the famous American EXXON VALDEZ Company had to pay Alaska a sum of two hundred crores of dollars in 1990 for causing petroleum pollution. But this increased Alaska's that year's GNP by 5 percent, although Alaska suffered substantial damage to its environment. "Measurement of GDP alone should not be taken as an indicator of economic development and I have suggested a National Prosperity Index (NDP), for gauging the true strength of the economy", said the outgoing president APJ Abdul Kalam on 23rd June, 2007. Kalam suggested a PURA Project that is, Providing Urban Amenities to Rural Areas. This chapter, the present reviewer believes, could have been better if development histories of Germany, Switzerland, Japan, Israel could have been taken into consideration... The famous 1973 book "Small is Beautiful : A Study of Economics as if People Mattered" by E F Schumacher is useful, as also that of Kerala's M.P Parameswaran's "Another World is Possible. Thoughts About a Fourth World (2004)" which is downloadable from the Internet.

The last Chapter XI deals with the most crucial theme of "Alternative Model of Development". The Chapter seems incomplete and underdeveloped, possibly because it demands much thought, profound knowledge, understanding and vision which the perspectives team may do in future.

Production Units should be small as far as practicable, which are necessarily decentralized conducive to grassroots democracy. It is the nature of technology that determines the scale of production and better distribution of wealth. For democracy and people's participation to exist in the truest sense leading to real development, power must belong to the people and from them flow upwards to the top. Top priority should be given to education and health for all with particular emphasis to the village areas. Land must not go to the big capitalists for private mining and the SEZ policy must be totally reversed. The 1894 Land Acquisition Act should be repealed or appropriately amended.

For the revised and expanded second edition of this book inclusion of a chapter on effects of Globali-zation on 3rd World Countries like India, may be considered as also inclusion of a Subject Index and a bibliography of selected books for the general reader. That edition is expected to be translated into all major Indian languages which will help unleash a gigantic movement at national level all over India. □□□

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