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Uprooted in Home: The Dispossessed of the Land; Debating on Displacement and Rural

Lives in Indian Scenario in *Everybody Loves a Good Draught*

New methods of power Foucault observes, operate”... not by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control.” (The History of Sexuality 89)

An enquiry into the lives of the millions, who are the dispossessed of the land, provides you with immense stories of looting, plundering and greed of the ruling class. Displacement has been effectively normalized either through a well thought out agenda or by controlling the knowledge of the population. It is one or the other that most probably cause experiences of displacement during implementation of mega projects. Normalizing the experiences of the ruled is a tactic often used by those who wield power to authenticate tyrannical decisions. P Sainath in *Everybody Loves a Good Draught* highlights how the developmental projects and political interests always unfailingly normalize displacement of

the uneducated rural minority and tribes, taking what they own for granted, through clearly an act of exploitation. He observes how the life of the privileged is always at the cost of some who are forced to face the destiny of being uprooted or dispossessed.

The power games of the corporate backed by the ruling class begins with an aura of assertive ignorance on the existence of the 'others'. This is a pretended ignorance resulting not from the lack of knowledge, but from an attitude of laxity and disregard to what exists there. So the lives, resources and land are taken for granted simply from their inability to fight back. How the lives, livestock, and resources are crushed by the power play is what Sainath draws in the book. Travelling into the interiors of India provides a different perspective on the mega projects, be it, the construction of dams, rail or roads. The process also has a lot to tell of different levels of dispossession, displacement and the agonizing process of relocation. The booming structures and projects on the other side, whisper tales of woes, so far unheard or obliterated. Those who wield power have a funny way to maneuver even the system with ploys and schemes. This again accentuates the process of the deliberate marginalization of the rural rights.

Presenting statistical data he argues how the tribal life and situation are unmindfully utilized by the power centres for serving their own interests. As a journalist who had travelled to the poorest terrains in different states of India, he has direct understanding of people's lives. An example cited by the author is that of the distribution of cows to the villagers in Nuapada in Orissa in 1978, as part of the Samanwita project. The villagers were given genetically improved breed of cows to be tendered as well as an acre of land free as part of a government scheme. The 'Samanwita Project though promising for the villagers at the outset turned out to be a failure and it entirely destroyed the livelihood of the residents as the implementation process involved the castration of the Khadrair bull, the indigenously tendered cattle so as to ensure the purity of the genetically improved variety. The entire

process culminated in the complete extinction of the Kharier variety. In the end the tribes neither had cattle nor the land provided. The decline of the cattle wealth was a major setback which further spurred migration from the region.

A project due to lack of vision and thought turned out to be a disaster. The reckless political tricks in the power game wreck havoc for the entire population damaging their livelihood and source of income. Each society has its regime of truth. Foucault's argument is that social power is ultimately created through individuals who internalize discipline and this internalization is through knowledge. He also argued on the dangers of discourses that enslave mind. He says in "On the Genealogy of Ethics ; An Overview of Work in Progress",

My point is that not everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is exactly the same as a bad. If everything is dangerous, we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism. I think that the ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger. (Dryfus and Rainbow, 231-232)

The difficulty is to determine which is good and which is dangerous for the interests and well being of the intended population as the discourse of knowledge most often deceive the people's interests in favour of the those who wield power and can also be pose a threat to the very existence of people in the margins.

The author goes on to elaborate on the funds spent on the construction of roads under Korwa Development Project in Surguja, in M.P. The tribes constitute 55% of majority in Surguja, one of India's poorest districts and Korwas fall into the bottom of 5%, he notes. Substantial funding is allotted for tribal development but quoting an NGO, he says " It does not matter if they do not benefit them in the in the least and are completely useless. Out here, even if u put up a swimming pool or bungalow you do it in the name of tribal development."(23). This shows how lightly the systems of administration deal with the

disturbing issues of common man. Again it is the ignorance of the tribes about their rights tend to be exploited.

He examines how the Dhuruas were totally distraught with their caste title mistakenly recorded as ‘Dharuas’ and how the rights duly deserving were denied for years stuck in the bureaucratic knots. The bureaucracy in India has always known for embracing the system turning an indifferent face to the public and here it is this error that was robbing the people of their benefits but nobody could suggest a way out of it. The entire system appears ridiculous having been stuck within it and not being able to offer any help.

He draws realistically the Indian situation commenting “Every third human being in the world without safe and adequate water supply is an Indian. Every fourth child on the globe who dies of diarrhea is an Indian” (37) and correctly points out the official expenditure on nutrition is less than one percent of GNP. He denotes how only 20% of the hospital beds are in rural areas where 80% of people and how in many interior centers the primary health centers and dispensaries work only on paper. He was referring and connecting it, to the ‘trickle down theory’ i.e., taking away from the poor and giving it to the rich. Curiously he says what was trickled up was money and what trickled down was Malaria, referring to the wide spread of communicable diseases that caused havoc in many Indian states as a result of the diminished focus on health sector in the rural side.

The recent infant deaths in Muzaffarpur in June 2019 in Bihar due to Acute Encephalitis Syndrome stand relevant pointing fingers at the maladministration and lack of care in rural public health sector. The AIIMS team who visited the medical college observes how the lack of expertise of doctors culminated in a calamity that took the lives of many children. The New India Today reports what triggered the situation thus:

Untrained doctors who don’t have the skill to handle critical equipment in intensive care unit and the lack of awareness drive because of the Lok Sabha elections in April –

May could be behind the sudden spike in the deaths of children due to suspected Encephalitis syndrome in this district.(June 20, 2019).

The news about what happened in one of the villages in the present day India shows how the issues investigated by the author is still persistent. Media reports show that part of India houses highest number of malnourished children and how the schemes to improve the situation miserably fails. This emphasizes the truth that the rural Indian life is highly taken for granted and their life is stunted by the indifference of the administrators. In the case of inefficient doctors being appointed and awareness campaigns undone, the situation facing now is not surprising! This either exposes the corrupted authorities or their negligence towards the rural lives.

The author was also referring to the presence of quacks, (any experienced or inexperienced compounder could be a doctor or even a surgeon), which again points at the need of more number of doctors in rural side. The rural localities are completely crippled with facilities which are basically deficient. Having been disadvantaged with lack of the expertise of doctors, people resort to the service of the quacks. That people go to quacks in large number itself is a testimony to confirm the inadequacy of the public health system. In Palamau in Bihar ,the PHCs in interior regions are found totally dysfunctional. The doctors come at the time of an inspection from the center or if they think the media is about to cover the story. This is how the author assesses the ineffectual situation. “ But we have built a health system for doctors and not patients. For contractors and pharmacists, not for public. So we still have some lowest health standards in the country, despite innumerable complaints and campaigns” (45) The comment is an eye opener to understand how the public health system works in remote villages like this.

Dissaris render services to the Bonda tribes and they are even termed as Bonda doctors. The curing process resembles witchcraft but here it is a mixture of witchcraft and

modern medicine. What is exploited is the inadequate health care system for the Bondas as well as their superstitious believes. The government officials themselves train the Dissaris and send them to the Bonda huts but the relevant question here is about the kind of training they receive. Who trains them and how well they are trained? It is found that none of them have any professional training.

The author presents the life of the Koya tribe who literally are resource dispossessed people who endure displacement without being evicted. They were cut off from Bamboo by law. They draw their name from bamboo but the private companies have taken control over bamboo forests the Koya grew and tended. They have lost access to it and the loss results in great misery. He points his fingers at the different levels of displacement such as the peasants losing their property to money lenders and people losing houses in the wake of the emerging new urban colonies etc. The official books term it as quite a natural process, rather the price of development. "You want to make progress. You have to sacrifice (89). The pertinent questions that he airs reflect the undercurrents of these developmental projects. Questions such as who sacrifices and why do the least privileged pay such huge share of the 'price' reveal agenda behind the exploitation people in the margins. Though tribals make up just 8 % of the population more than 40% of the displaced in all the projects happen to be them with an equal number of Dalits and the landless among the displaced. How can that happen? If checked the beneficiaries of these projects again happen to be the privileged class. As for example many of the hydroelectric projects though located in tribal landscape, the tribal landscape still are not assured of irrigation, he finds. Roughly one in every ten Indian tribals is a displaced person.

If Dam projects alone had caused almost ten million tribes dispossessed, one can imagine the extend of destruction. This is the same case with the Dalits as well. Development schemes came largely in Dalit populated terrain causing again a huge level of displacement.

There are obviously less hurdles to grab the Dalit and the tribal rights since none seems bothered about it except the victimized community. Foucault observes and identifies how an individual is being marked out by society with an identity in the process of dominating his will. He says modern power operates not by ignoring individuals but by claiming to have arrived at the truth of the individual thereby limiting individuality to a set of very specific patterns.

This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him out by his own individuality, attaches him to his identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. ( Dryfus and Rainbow, *The Subject and Power* 212)

This is how the individual self and identity of the tribes and the dalits are predetermined by society in an attempt to limit them to a desired identity in brackets. Displacement and the consequent sufferings no longer affect the social psyche anymore.

Reality of these experiences speaks volume on unequal power relations. Displacement causes severe impoverishment, homelessness and unemployment above all loss of food security. This puts them in a position of not being able to use the networks and assets accessible for a community life since they are traumatized by the experience of being split apart. In tribes, he states “ the adivasi building a house can have his whole clan helping to construct . This free community labour is a huge financial saving for him but its lost when they are split apart and dispersed after displacement” (91). A lot of people enter the stage of forced displacement due to relocation in two sectors alone that is dam construction, urbanization and urban transportation. As the author says the development caused displacement “..have turned out to be much larger than all the world’s annual new refugee flows”( 91) , the ghastness of the situation becomes evident. The displacements from forests

and reserve parks, mining and thermal power plant displacements and other similar situation show how the lives are affected and still remain untold even after having gone through series of disheartening experiences. He draws a parallel between war victims and victims of displacement terming the latter as victims of the unseen war. As we see they”...stay largely invisible and rarely touch our consciousness” (92). He marks them as people whose lives untold, houses shattered, family split for no fault of their own. Though quite aware of the nuances of human rights, why do we keep a blind eye to the idea that any forced eviction clearly is a violation of human rights? Again the pertinent question here is how the ruling system had dealt with or is going to take on the issues of the ‘refugees’ of development. As Foucault says “There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.”( History of Sexuality , 27 ) Though Foucault was referring to the how the sexuality is repressed through discourse of silence, his observation on the discourse of silence is applicable here. The politics of power relies much on the discourse of silence for implementing its interests and here it is the voice of the refugees of development being silenced along with the voice of resistance and disagreement.

It is highly bewildering to find the way media cover the trauma of the tribes, maintaining perhaps another kind of silence over the issue. From the media reports it is evident that they knowingly or unknowingly maintain a dubious silence on this aspect. Instead the entire focus would be on the initiation and progress of the developmental project. Quoting an official the author says “animals and trees...their being affected will draw more global attention than displaced tribals”(103). The media as well as people create hue and cry for projects that they think would hamper animals and trees but when it comes to the case of the lives of the tribes or the poor folks, everybody including media sink into an unproblematic state of complacency.

Women, children and the aged are more at risk, the author notes in the new relocated environment. Exertion of women naturally goes up in the new environment for the fetching of water and firewood. The host communities in the new areas resent the arrival of a new group of people and the most vulnerable among them, women and the children are the easy targets of their anger. India has a gruesome story to give, that of the abominable fate of the girl Asifa as a telling example to this feeling of hostility towards the relocated nomads. The reason for the sexual attack towards the girl was found to have emerged from hostility towards the nomadic tribe who were replanted to the locality for a temporary stay. It was a calculated move used to threaten the nomads and to drive them away from the place. The plot was to sow the seeds of fear among the nomads by creating a feeling of insecurity among them. What one finds is the tactic deployed to send a strong signal of threat to the vulnerable population either by force or playing some dirty tricks to quash the sense of security in the newly located terrain.

The author has made a striking observation on the compensation given and how that somehow turns out to be less beneficial. Compensation given in both cash and land happens to be outside the control of women. This in turn indirectly affects the faring of children who tend to fare better when the mother decides on the spending part. The existing system of society as well as the administrative frame work does not recognise the rights of women to such resources.

The issue of eviction and the resultant displacement should be analysed though a multilayered spectacle so as to include violation of human rights also, a matter of contention. This is an issue that affects people's day to day life, livelihood and many a times follows a discriminatory system of law.

The author goes deep into the problem and finds that the problem lies in the fact that land was taken without their consent. Compensation will be based on the patta showing

ownership of the land. A further inquiry into their predicament exposes the complication behind it. In tribal communities with tradition of common ownership, people held large tracts of land without pattas for thousands of years. That they own the land is not in dispute but they get no compensation when the land is attached because the validation is based on patta, he finds.(93)

He also points his fingers at the agony of the displaced since land is only one of the many losses that they face and others include grazing grounds, fodder, herbs, forest produce and community labour. He quotes from the draft rehabilitation policy that says ..”with the advent of the New economic policy..these will generate an enhanced demand for land...further, the ‘m land for projects ‘majority of our mineral resources, including coal, iron ore and manganese reserves are located in the remote and backward regions mostly inhabited by tribals.”(93)

It agrees that taking over land for projects brings in its wake hardships to the persons whose lands contribute to the process of growth.’ Curiously he finds how the document’s emphasis is not on the agony of the displaced but on how to smoothen the process of the compulsory eviction. Those committees and documents say one thing unanimously that displacement is inevitable. He also hints at the gruesome situation the tribes may face in future when , perhaps the next time itself, no one is going to consult with the tribals what it is going to be taken away. He again finds that that the laws that govern acquisition of land are unquestionable and allows no challenge. Acquisition of land by the government is made on national interests and that places them beyond question. Nobody can question this practice as it is done in the name of national interests. Posing a another situation he highlights ridiculousity of the situation saying what would have happened if the Bombay’s elite Malabar hills were chosen for the same purpose for national interests and says it probably would bring the government down. As exemplified by Foucault, it is the knowledge of the unequal

power relations that enforce unequal treatment to different classes of people. It is the knowledge of 'who' gets affected determines 'where or how' and what projects and businesses should come. 'Truth' is created through the discourse of knowledge which itself is power.

Knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of 'the truth' but has the power to make itself true. All knowledge, once applied in the real world, has effects, and in that sense at least, 'becomes true.' Knowledge, once used to regulate the conduct of others, entails constraint, regulation and the disciplining of practice. Thus, 'there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations (Discipline and Punishment 27).

As he expounds, the pertinent question here is who constitute the nation? Only the elites? And do the hundreds of millions of poor in India also make up the nation? Are their interests can also be with national interests? Or is there more than one nation? These are questions that he poses that deconstruct the whole idea of nationalism as well. These thoughts and queries stand relevant to the lives of the poorest in different parts of India.. “ Areas where extremely poor people go into destitution making way for firing ranges, jet fighters, plants, coal mines, power projects, dams, sanctuaries, prawn and shrimp and even poultry farms. If the costs they bear are the price of development then the rest of the nation is having one free lunch”(94) Going deep into the struggles of the tribes consequent on development based displacement fetch a different picture ; one we have cared to see so far. If we continue to be complacent with the stories government or other authorities narrate about the tribal life and troubles of displacement as the author suggested, the rest of the nation will be having a free lunch at their cost!!!

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