

Capital's Reach, Nature's Loss: Reading Plachimada as an Environmental Resistance

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Abstract

The struggle against the Coca-Cola plant in Plachimada, in the Palakkad district of Kerala, India, highlighted the livelihood challenges confronted by the residents, chiefly the marginalised sections, when the Coca-Cola plant extracted and depleted the aquifer and polluted the surface water in Plachimada during 2000 – 2005, challenging the people's right to water. The adoption of Neoliberal development strategy facilitated the operation of the plant. This paper critiques the neoliberal developmental strategy as synonymous with capital expansion. The data gathered from the ethnographic study done during 2018-19 is used to analyse the impact of the ecological destruction, the resultant economic, social and cultural effect on the Adivasis and Dalits, dependent on common property resources and the counter narratives generated by people's resistance. The study will be situated within the more extensive debate on development by the State and Corporations during Neoliberalism. The paper begins with a nuanced understanding of the neo-liberal model of development, the impact of the mass mobilisations by the affected communities and the environmental cost of the neoliberal development discourse. The paper explains how environmental loss created livelihood challenges leading to a mobilisation of the poor and dispossessed, thus, instantiating the significance of the environmentalism of the poor.

Keywords: Right to Water, Neoliberalism, Common Property Resources, Counter Narratives, Environmentalism of the Poor.

INTRODUCTION:

The Hindustan Coca Cola Beverage Private Limited (HCBPL) established a bottling unit in Plachimada in the Palakkad district of Kerala in 2000. Palakkad district shares borders with Malappuram in the north and Thrissur district in the southwest, in Kerala and with the state of Tamil Nādu in the east. The area between Vandithavalam and Meenakshipuram, two towns in the Palakkad district, with places like Moolathara and Kannimaari is generally referred to as the Plachimada region. Plachimada comprises of places like Nellimedu, Kannimaari, Vandithavalam and Meenakshipuram. The state highway (SH 27) from Palakkad to Coimbatore in Tamil Nādu passes through Plachimada. Buses ply every 15 minutes through Plachimada, connecting Palakkad and Coimbatore. It is 25 km away from Palakkad and 32 km from Coimbatore.

According to *The Cochin State Manual* (1911), the people in this region spoke Tamil and Malayalam and consisted of Hindus, Mohammadans, Christians and animists (Menon 1911, p.475). The demographic details of the 2001 census show that 20% of the total population of Perumatty panchayat belongs to Scheduled Caste (hereafter SC) and Scheduled Tribe (hereafter ST) communities (The Census of India, 2001, p.131). It remained the same in the 2011 census also. The demographic detail of the colonies given in the Table below shows that while Madhava Nair Pathy has the most robust Adivasi presence with 100%, the Kambalathara colony has the lowest with a 10% Adivasi population. While the total Adivasi population of Perumatty panchayat is 20%, all the colonies except Kambalathara have more Adivasi presence than the panchayat average.

Table 1: The Demographic Details of the Colonies

Colony	Adivasi	Dalit	others	Total
Plachimada	36%	7%	57%	100%
Vijayanagar	42%	8%	50%	100%
Rajeev Nagar	25%	10%	65%	100%

Madhavan Nair Pathy	100%	0	0	100%
Kambalathara	10%	20%	70%	100%

Source: *Jananeethi*, 2002 p.2

Decades after the independence of India and the formation of the state of Kerala, the condition of Adivasis did not improve substantially. By 1980s, the shift towards market-based economy had its beginning. India embraced a new development paradigm in the 1990s by adopting Liberalisation, Privatisation, and Globalisation (LPG). A gradual transition was noted from the 1980s onwards. which led to a new discourse of development premised upon capital expansion. The evolution of the policy is traced to the 1991 policy document. The policy states,

“The Industrial Policy Statement of 1980 focused on promoting competition in the domestic market, technological upgradation, and modernisation. The policy laid the foundation for an increasingly competitive, export-based, encouraging foreign investment in high-technology areas. (Government of India, 1991, p. 1)

The policy reformulation adopted in the late 1980s led to LPG in the 1990s. It has brought in a transition in the role of government and the methods adopted for development. The fundamental shifts are explained in the Industrial Policy of 1991,

“Several policy and procedural changes were introduced in 1985 and 1986 under the leadership of Shri. Rajiv Gandhi aimed to increase productivity, reduce costs, and improve quality. The accent was on opening the domestic market to increased competition and readying our industry to stand independently in the face of international competition. The public sector was freed from several constraints and given more autonomy. Industry's technological and managerial modernisation was pursued as the key instrument for increasing productivity and improving our global competitiveness. The net result of all these changes was that Indian industry grew by an impressive average annual growth rate of 8.5% in the Seventh Plan period.” (Government of India, 1991, p. 1)

The Nehruvian development model, which India adopted post-independence, was state-centric with curbs to control monopolies and strict governmental controls as licensing for all ventures. As the state-financed the projects, the stress was on providing service than making a profit. The state followed a welfare model. The new policies differed drastically from their predecessors in terms of the reduced role of the state and the freedom given to private capital for profit-making. The post- development critic Escobar traces the origin of the new developmental strategy to the Truman doctrine to provide a “fair deal” to poor nations. Its mission was to develop underdeveloped regions through

“... high levels of industrialisation and urbanisation, technicalisation of agriculture, the rapid growth of material production and living standards, and the widespread adoption of modern education and cultural values. In Truman’s vision, capital, science, and technology were the main ingredients to make this massive revolution possible.” (Escobar, 2012, p.4)

The neoliberal discourse of development followed in India also emphasised the use of capital, science, and technology. Following the adoption of neoliberal policies by the central governments, the state governments also reformulated their development concept in line with that of the central government. A discourse of development with more power than the other in a specific historical period is called the dominant discourse. Immediately after independence in India, a state-centric, regulated economic model was the dominant discourse. Nevertheless, state and international financial agencies have advanced a market- centric development model since liberalisation. Over some time, it gained legitimacy through various means and became the dominant discourse. The expression of the Dominant Discourse of Development is used interchangeably with the Neoliberal Discourse of Development in the study context. It evolved globally in the post-World War context and the post-economic liberalisation period in India. In the post-world war period, the USA, along with international agencies and fraternities like WB, IMF, ADB, and UN, advanced a mode of development to be followed in third-world nations. This discourse replaced the existing development models in various regions, thus becoming the dominant/hegemonic discourse. Poverty in third-world countries was used as a cover to advance this discourse. However, as Sanyal notes, the advancement of this discourse was not an egalitarian act but more of a safety measure.

“This is an unconcealed, overt admission that the concern about the development of the third world

stemmed not so much from an altruistic, humanitarian concern as from the urgency to launch a battle against communism and establish political control over the newly decolonised countries.” (Sanyal, 2019, p. 129)

This replica of development was premised upon increasing productivity, income, and profit through the conscious intervention of the state as a facilitator. The state creates conditions where the accumulated capital from different parts of the world invests in profitable ventures. This increases productivity and, in turn, enhances the GDP of the respective nations. This development strategy has less governmental intervention, promotion of capital, and slackening of bureaucratic hurdles. This is discernibly a capitalist project. Since the 1980s, when neoliberalism gained currency, this mode also became the professed model of development for emerging economies. While the Neoliberal model gained currency in India, Kerala was debating a development strategy called Kerala Model of Development. While the nation adopted Neoliberal prescriptions, Kerala was debating the significance of the much-acclaimed Kerala Model of development.

Kerala had evolved a unique strategy of development, popularly known as the Kerala Model, ever since Travancore, Cochin, and the parts of Madras presidency called Malabar were clubbed together to form a new state in 1957. Kerala had encouraged a welfare model focusing on developing human resources and strengthening the service sector. Consequent to the importance given to human resources, Kerala achieved full literacy in 1990. Similarly, the health infrastructure built with Primary Health Centres (PHC) at the bottom and Government Medical colleges at the top was crucial in enhancing the health-related indicators at par with European standards. The state had attained remarkable progress in literacy, education, health, and social security indicators. Richard W. Franke and Barbara H. Chasin described the Kerala Model of development as,

“A set of high material quality of life indicators coinciding with low per capita incomes, both distributed across nearly the entire population of Kerala, a set of wealth and resource redistribution programs that have largely brought about the high material quality of life indicators, high levels of political participation and activism among ordinary people along with sustainable numbers of dedicated leaders at all levels.” (Franke and Chasin, 2000, p. 17)

However, the importance given to the service sector was not reflected in the production sector, as Kerala lagged in industrial establishments leading to a weak productive sphere. The density of the population and the lack of availability of land for industrial purposes were detrimental to the growth of industries in the state. As a result, the Kerala Model of Development lost its sheen overtime, as sustaining the service sector without supporting production and vibrant economic activity posed challenges. The problem was aggravated in the post-1990s with the neoliberal restructuring of the economy in India. This mandated a reformulation of the existing strategy of development along neoliberal lines. The critique of the Kerala Model of Development emerged during that period. Subrahmanian and Azeez (2000) have summarised the review of the Kerala Model through the following words:

“The critics of Kerala’s experience and “Kerala model” of development have highlighted that the poor growth performance of commodity-producing sectors like agriculture and industry has resulted in a slowdown in the rate of growth in employment and income generation within the state. It also has reduced the growth rate in government revenue, investment in economic sectors, and expenditure on welfare programs. All these have threatened the sustenance of the achievements already made in health, education, and other human development spheres and the further efforts to improve people’s quality of life and capability. Thus viewed, there is a development crisis in the state.” (pp. 4- 5)

The Kerala State Planning Board explained that such a pattern of development, defined by success in achieving a high quality of life without much success in economic growth, as shown in the CDS-UN (1975) study, “occupied an important place in the chain of intellectual events that culminated in a paradigm shift in development thinking” (pp. 1-2). The scarcity of financial resources led to the crisis sustaining the Kerala Model. This facilitated the transition to the policies of neoliberalism. The Congress-led UDF government of Kerala adopted the LPG policies of the INC-led central government in 1996. The industrial policy of the central government in 1991 clarified that.

“The government would continue to pursue a sound policy framework encompassing encouragement of entrepreneurship, development of indigenous technology through investment in research and development, new technology, the dismantling of the regulatory system, development of the capital

markets and increasing competitiveness for the benefit of the common people. The spread of industrialisation to backward areas of the country would be actively promoted through appropriate incentives, institutions, and infrastructure investments.” (Government of India, 1991, p. 10)

Despite its many lacks, the Kerala Model had raised the standards of living of its people for decades. Parayil says, “Kerala has achieved remarkable progress including alleviation of poverty... along with a reduction in both spatial and gender gaps” (Parayil, 2000, p. 2). Sen added that India can learn a lot from the development experience of Kerala. It excelled in domains like literacy, life expectancy and infant mortality. (Sen, 1997). The shift to neoliberalism was justified by the counter-narrative of the Sustainable Development Paradigm developed by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987). Parayil (2000) summarised their argument thus,

“In the annals of development theory, such a ‘model’ is counterintuitive and contrary to the nostrum preached by IMF/WB and other international developmental agencies that a state’s social development and material living condition can improve only after it has achieved economic growth.” (Parayil, 2000, p. 7)

Therefore, ensuring the pathway of the central government, the government of Kerala started reformulating the development strategy with the budget speech of the then finance minister in 1996. This policy framework was meticulously followed in 2001, 2007, and 2015 industrial policies. The reformulated approach emphasised the need for inviting capital investment in Kerala. Subsequently, the government of Kerala presented the state as a destination point before the potential investors. HCBPL invested in Kerala, taking advantage of this policy shift. It secured legitimacy for this new development method by manufacturing consent through pro-development narratives. The then prevalent climate of opposition to massive developmental projects necessitated building a pro-development narrative.

Kerala has witnessed sustained opposition against developmental projects requiring land acquisitions for airports, seaports, and industrial corridors. The Left parties had launched a scathing attack on the liberalisation policies of the Indian National Congress, INC-led governments. They described some of these projects as examples of exploitative and pro-capitalist development models. Since opposition to massive projects was seen as an easy method to galvanise the people, all political parties opposed such projects, often citing the difficulties posed to the commoner. Through sustained campaigns, an oppositional narrative was deeply entrenched in people's minds. This mandated the need for new strategies to legitimise the contemporary discourse of development. The paradox is that while the left governments were in power, they had implemented similar policies with far-reaching consequences in different locations like Nandigram, Singur, and Plachimada.

The company’s actions, like digging innumerable tube wells in a small locality and depositing industrial waste in dried tube wells, polluted an entire locality. As some of the tube wells ran dry within one year, people pointed out that the Cola company used the dried tube wells to dispose of the wastewater. Though they claimed Effluent Treatment Plant (ETP) in the application for the license, they had not set it up in the beginning. This would have polluted the groundwater and was not expected from a multinational company with much-hyped global standards, ethical protocols and upgraded water technology. The drinking water within a 2 km radius of the company was contaminated. A man from Madhavan Nair Pathy, who worked in the paddy field for more than a decade, expressed his suspicion thus,

“In the early days of the agitation, the water in the well behaved unpredictably. Some days, when I looked into the well, the water level would have gone up by one pampeeri (ring, about one foot); on other days, it was suddenly down by one and a half feet. This was for the first time I had seen a thing like this. So, I began my day by looking into the well.” (Murukesan, interviewed on 16 November 2018)

They also witnessed water in some wells increasing and receding unprecedentedly, with some becoming oily and muddy. In the well in the Plachimada colony, water levels increased considerably in the initial phase. A 61-year-old daily wage in the coconut plantations, who lived in the Plachimada colony and whose house was adjacent to the panchayat well, said about the erratic nature of water in the well,

“Every morning, water levels differed when I looked into the well. In the morning, it will be up by four to five pampeeris. (ring) But by evening, it will go back to the earlier state. In the morning, the water had a muddy colour. We never used to see this, even during monsoon. By evening everything will be settled. People also stopped drawing water early in the morning.” (Veluchami, interviewed on 16 November 2018)

The Adivasis suspected the company of the erratic behaviour of water in the wells, as it had not happened

in Plachimada in their memory. They suspected that the erratic behaviour of water in their wells was due to the dumping of wastewater in the unused and dried-up tube wells. Though the company claims to have dug only six tube wells inside its premises, Adivasis claimed to have witnessed the company drilling 40- 45 tube wells.

The people of the locality then petitioned the panchayat and district administration about unethical practices like disposing of wastewater in the open spaces inside the company premises, which included paddy fields and continuing water pumping even after the water table had declined. However, the authorities neither visited the village nor looked into the complaint. While the officers needed to be more mindful of the issues, members of civil society like C.R Bijoy, a researcher and social activist, who had visited the village, undertook simple water tests in a private laboratory. The test confirmed that the water had been hardened. The initial water test done in Sargam Laboratory in Chennai by C.R Bijoy confirmed the Adivasi complaints of the hardness of water and the change in the smell and colour of it. A detailed analysis of the water regarding the electrical conductivity, hardness, Total Dissolved Solids (TDS), and chlorides was done in Sargam Laboratories. Dr Mark Shernaik, a scientist associated with Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide (ELWS) who helps citizens effectively use scientific information to defend the environment, interpreted the lab report and observed that the water could not be used for either drinking or bathing. The sudden change in water quality was explained as the increased pace of underground water movement, causing limestone or clay to mix with water due to its massive extraction. The studies by INTAC (2001), Jananeethi (2002), Yuvarajnavedi (2003), Vikas Adhyaan Kendra (2003) and the Civil Engineering Department of NSS Engineering College Palakkad (2004) testified that the water quality had deteriorated. These initial studies focussed on how the company's actions polluted the water and how the company had created water scarcity in the region. The studies pointed out in unambiguous terms that massive water extraction caused pollution and a water shortage. In addition, unethical practices like waste dumping in the dried tube wells and paddy fields as sludge aggravated the problem. In a detailed examination by Integrated Rural Technology Centre (IRTC) in 2002, Table 5.1 showed that the Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) had risen double the permissible limits. Magnesium and Calcium's hardness and water's total hardness were above the allowable levels. These findings in 2002 confirmed the observations and the allegations of Adivasis.

The Adivasi colonies around the plant had two bore wells and one open well. In the Vijayanagar colony of 53 households, there was an open well and a borewell. The 49 families in the Rajeev Nagar colony depended on two bore wells and one open well for drinking water. When I spoke to the present leader of the struggle about the availability of water in Plachimada colony, she said,

"Only the Gounder family had their well in the locality. We used to take water from the well in the colony. Even in Meenam, (peak of summer) we had enough water." (Kanniyamma, interviewed on 15 June 2018)

There needed to be more access to drinking water in Plachimada. Adivasis depended on wells and tube wells in the area. The well-off sections had wells in their land plots and plantations at a distance. Moreover, they had the money to purchase tanker water. This disparity in the availability of drinking water made the Adivasis vulnerable in the face of acute water shortage. Earlier, the well-off sections with private wells, which allowed the Adivasis to take water from it, later restricted their access. Hence, the Adivasis had to carry water from Kochikkad or were forced to use the polluted water, affecting them in many ways.

There are conflicting reports about the depletion of water levels in Plachimada. Plachimada received an average rainfall of 1413 mm between 1994- 2004. The average annual rainfall of Kerala for the same period was 3107mm. Even after conducting a pilot study, establishing a water-intensive bottling unit in a rain shadow area remains a mystery. Groundwater availability could be the reason for choosing a place like this. The Adivasis of Plachimada used canal water to meet household requirements such as bathing and washing. But only some Adivasis depended on canal water for cooking and drinking. Only other backward classes and forward castes had wells and ponds in this area. According to the CWRDM report (2004), ponds, wells and tanks were the conventional water sources in Plachimada. The water reservoirs - Meenara, Kambalathara, and Vengalakkayam, provide water for irrigation, and the Chittoor River runs about 2 km from the company border (CWRDM, 2004, p. 121). The domestic circumstances of the Adivasis declined gradually as they were affected by pollution and water depletion. The company's arrival is a prime factor in water depletion. The reasons cited by Nair et.al. in their study (2008) for water

insecurity in the region are given in Table 5.4. The study has shown that the water extraction by HCBPL undoubtedly aggravated the water insecurity in the area, along with other reasons.

The critique from the lived reality of the Adivasis of Plachimada differs from the available critiques of the dominant discourse of development. As explained in the previous chapter, implementing the dominant discourse had impoverished the Adivasis, made them perennially ill, and destroyed their culture, economy and ecology. It resulted in the commodification of water in Plachimada. The critique highlighted sustainability issues, denial of rights and deprivation of a large chunk of the population. The exploitation of the common pool resources with profit motive had widened the gap between the rich and the poor.

Non-Adivasi counter-narratives had shown that water rights became a contested issue when the corporates entered the field with rapid extraction of the resources, impacting Adivasi lives without considering the future generations. Making water a justifiable right would be the first step to end commodification and its perils. A justifiable right is one in which every individual will have a legal right to drinking water, and the state shall be responsible if it is denied. While discussing the concepts of 'right', 'need' and 'want' concerning water as a natural resource, Shree (2010) rightly pointed out that water should be made a right. But the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, under the influence of neoliberalism and structural adjustment programme (SAP), had accepted the 'Washington Consensus'⁴¹ that treated water as want to be made available in the market. Ownership of natural resources was a contested issue as there were many claimants. The prominent claimants were 'individual'; 'community on behalf of the people's state on behalf of both people and community'; and 'market as the most efficient institution' to effect worldwide implementation. The non-Adivasi counter-narratives argued that communities must own and manage water rather than corporations. This demand was strengthened by the persistent demand by people through mobilisations from below, including the Plachimada struggle.

A narrative legitimising the resistance of the affected parties gained currency as this model of development created only islands of development with high environmental costs. This counter-narrative underlined the need to mobilise the people to question the neoliberal idea of development brought from 'above'. Over time, the marginalised's resistance movements solidified, and they acquired the status of mobilisations from 'below'. Plachimada also proved that the strategy of making a profit at the cost of the livelihood of the poor and marginalised had to face stiff resistance from the people. The counter-narratives from the non-Adivasis pointed out,

"Privatisation and decollectivisation of water leaving untold misery to the hapless people. Harvey was right when he pointed out that capital expands by incorporating resources, peoples, activities and lands that hitherto were managed, organised and produced under social relations other than capitalist ones. The new policy results in privatisation which 'is legal theft resulting in dispossession. (Swyngedouw, 2005, p.325)

The counter-narratives argued that basic amenities like water could not be commodified because water is not merely a need but an inalienable right. As Barlow and Clarke said, "A human need can be satisfied in many ways, especially for those who have money. But no one can sell human rights. (Barlow and Clarke 2002: xii). The commodification of basic needs leads to the exclusion of marginalised communities. Rao has pointed out the question of exclusion.

"In the light of this systematic marginalisation and exclusion, the fundamental rights aimed at addressing their deprivation need to be questioned since it is clear that constitutional rights and the subsequent policies which followed have failed to end the process that has excluded them since the colonial era." (Rao, 2019, p. 2)

While the Adivasis have been denied the constitutional assurances, the Coca-Cola company pretends that it was granted usufructuary rights to deplete the groundwater. The commodification of CPR had resulted in the expropriation of the poor and marginalised, as suggested by the counter-narratives. Rao argues that these processes would lead to the complete exclusion of the Adivasis. Rao explains the reason for alienation and exclusion to the use of resources like land, forest and water by the forces of liberalisation in the name of development (Rao, 2019). Not only have the Adivasis been denied access to resources, but the prevailing development model has questioned the very existence of the Adivasi life. The attempt to homogenise the varying customs and practices and the destruction of the multiplicity of their existence was also an impact of this developmental paradigm. The counter-narratives indicated that this development model had destroyed the Adivasis's identity. The destruction of the plurality of Adivasi life destabilised the identity of the Adivasis. Ilina Sen also explained the impact of this developmental model,

especially on women arguing that the market economy and globalisation have substantially reduced women's role in society. She pointed out that these forces have kept women out of the decision-making processes in community and social life (Sen, 2019).

But the resistance put up by the masses has changed the course of the dominant discourse of development worldwide. In India, the land acquisition process had nearly stopped in the first decade of this century. Many SEZs and other capital-intensive programmes were hit hard by the farmers' agitations. Similarly, in Kerala, the Coca-Cola company faced stiff resistance from the Adivasis of Plachimada against the pollution and depletion of water. The neoliberal model of development was questioned by counter-narratives and grassroots-level mobilisations by the public.

Laurence Cox and Nilsen (2014) commented that "social movements from below have shaped the modern world" (Cox, Nilsen p. 56). As highlighted by the counter-narratives, the poor and marginalised conditions moved from bad to worse as they constantly moved from the peripheries to the margins. The most significant problem with this model was that it isolated the poor and marginalised sections of the world. It disempowered and impoverished the people and made them victims of development. As said by Levien,

"This development model has shown a voracious appetite for space for building infrastructure, urban expansion and resource extraction with no corresponding benefit for the masses. It promotes islands of development, and the dispossessed often outnumber the beneficiaries of developmental programmes like this. This naturally leads to resistance from those who are made to suffer the brunt of development." (Levien, 2018, p. 19)

Despite the constitutional guarantee that "adequate safeguards shall be provided for minorities, backward and tribal areas, and depressed and other backward classes" (Guha, 2019, p. 458), the condition of the Adivasis declined drastically. Ramachandra Guha rightly pointed out that the tribals of India were the unacknowledged victims of six decades of democratic development. They were exploited and dispossessed, and their deprivation is striking when compared to the disadvantage of others. The tribals continued to be invisible. (Guha, 2007). The counter-narratives established that Plachimada symbolises an environmental disaster impacting human life. Suresh Babu has rightly pointed out that,

"Environmental movements, over some time, have articulated the conceptual universes such as justice, equality, citizenship, and eco-sensitivity, not only to challenge the dominant paradigm of development but also to inform alternative strategies for sustainability. Once they become part of everyday practice, movements acquire new cultural identities among their participants. Similarly, their reflections and translations in different contexts connect the protestors locally to globally. Subsequently, participants in the movements can produce new discourses that may become reliable inputs for the movements' sustenance in the long run. In other words, movements sometimes internalise certain objective conditions by evoking conceptual universes as a reflexive process to negotiate with the state on the one side and reclaim citizenship rights on the other." (Babu, 2016, p. 7)

The Adivasi agitation and the subsequent narratives questioning this development template created a space for the marginalised to negotiate with powerful agencies like the state. The Faustian pact of neoliberalism with capital had not only ensured its failure to deliver the promises of inclusive growth but destroyed the planet's equilibrium. The unrolling of capital in the guise of development had created trepidations in Plachimada. The appropriation of CPR, like water for profiteering by MNCs, created misery for people experiencing poverty and destruction of the ecology. The Plachimada struggle occurred while neoliberalism was in its twilight in the first decade of the post-millennial era. There were questions about the feasibility and utility of the prevailing development model for the people. The search for an alternative, though in vain, was also happening simultaneously. The mobilisations

from 'below' happening around the world exposed the lack of inclusivity and the high ecological cost of this model, leading to fresh thinking about the feasibility of the model. The struggles of the dispossessed worldwide have demonstrated that the lives of the poor and the Adivasis were in danger in the face of this reckless development model. The lived experiences of the Adivasis of Plachimada and the counter-narratives testified to the cruel face of this development paradigm. A close analysis reveals that many things like the transformation of the landscape, the availability of resources, the access of people with low incomes to common pool resources and questions of the control of resources had changed in Plachimada. But the significant change in Plachimada was the nature of dispossession experienced by the Adivasis.

The Adivasis were not forcibly removed by buying/ acquiring their land. So, they continued to live in the

same place. A completely new form of dispossession was witnessed in Plachimada. The next chapter elaborates on the nature and features of this new form of dispossession, seen and experienced in Plachimada.

The Commodification of the Common and the Dispossession of the Adivasis have created environmental crisis in contemporary India.

According to Roy, “privatisation eventually results in the transfer of productive public assets from the state to private companies. The productive assets include earth, forest, water and air, and these are the ...assets the State holds in trust for the people it represents...To snatch these away and sell them as stock to private companies is a process of barbaric dispossession on a scale that has no parallel in history”(Roy,2001, p. 43). The Adivasi critique of Plachimada, citing how dispossession has affected life, necessitates the search for an alternative to the prevailing mode of development. As Harvey explained neo-liberals will never produce a harmonious state in which everyone is better off. It will produce even greater levels of inequality, as has been the global trend over the last thirty years of neo-liberalism (Harvey, 2007p. 144). Plachimada proves that market-driven developmental programmes will be counter-productive and obliterate the poor's lives. The unimaginable social and environmental cost associated with this kind of developmental effort raises questions about the sustainability of the model. The people of Plachimada were victimised by the state when it tried to implement structural adjustment in the name of development. Later, the government had to invest money to ensure water to the people, and they were made to pay for it. The activities of the company aimed to reduce the private cost, eventually placed the burden on society by increasing the social cost. This unsustainable model of development, as experienced in Plachimada, undermined the environment and created untold miseries to people and the ecology. Even though the expansion of capital negatively impacting the environment is not a new phenomenon, the pressure exerted by the neoliberal era is much more profound and systematic on the ecosystem. The transfer of the negative impacts and externalities from the private to the public domain makes this model unattractive and unsustainable. Eventually, the people have to bear the social and environmental costs of this model, as experienced in Plachimada.

The cycle of change that Plachimada witnessed proves that commodification of the commons eventually leads to dispossession stripping the basic rights of the citizens. Dispossession in Plachimada did not make any change in the property rights (Caceres, 2015). However, access to water was obliterated, and the people were robbed of their ecosystem services. The immobile dispossession leaves the victims in dark dungeons where their voices will be muted, and their rights will go unnoticed. Society will take time to understand the gravity of the problem; in the meantime, the capital will make huge profits and leave the place. The devastating experience of Birla's Gwalior Rayon factory at Mavoor, the pollution of the river Chaliyar and people's movement against it in the 1960s was overlooked when this shift towards a market-driven development model was accepted. Strengthening the mobilisation from below seems to be an urgent requirement to compel the states and corporations to rethink this model to retain the pluralistic fabric of the world.

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