

# **From Polanyi to Gramsci and Foucault: Looking at Polanyian Concepts through the Lenses of Neoliberal Cultural Politics of Development in India**

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## **From Polanyi to Gramsci and Foucault: Looking at Polanyian Concepts through the Lenses of Neoliberal Cultural Politics of Development in India**

### **Introduction:**

The cultural and economic force of neoliberalism has validated the hermeneutic corpus of Karl Polanyi who has asserted that ‘nineteenth century civilization has collapsed’ and this collapse has ushered in a ‘great transformation.’ His writing and understanding about the capitalism made him a powerful locus for any social scientists to understand the issues and phenomenon related to capitalism, market and economy. The triad (land, labour and capital) are the major components of the political economy of the neoliberal development. Here, we try to show how in contemporary society that is fuelled by the neoliberalism and market ideology have a deeper root in Indian democracy is also resisted and challenged by the counter forces that can be termed as a hegemonic battle. The goal of our article is twofold. First, we seek to problematize the neoliberal cultural politics of development and its paralysing consequences that include governmentality (Foucault) and hegemony (Gramsci) of market ideology. The discussion is devoted to the epistemological questions to offer a truth of knowledge related to neoliberal development and also offers a critique of the dominance of market. Here we reread Polanyi and argue that focusing on the state is necessary at the time of discussion of market dominated neoliberal development or top down development. State is the main sovereign actor among the other actors which legitimize and enforce the neoliberal rules at all level of society. But in a Polanyian perspective, focusing on the state rather than on the market is a mistake. Even though states are the major actors legitimating and enforcing neoliberal rules at the transnational level, private capital is not only the primary beneficiary of these rules and the driving interest behind them but also plays a direct role in their formulation and institutionalization. Yet, in the current global political economy, the power of private capital is vastly less vulnerable than the power of individual national regimes. Precisely because of the difficulty of challenging global capital and the structure of rules that it creates, mobilization is often directed at reducing state power rather than at reducing the power of capital. There, of course, good reasons to challenge the power of individual states. They are the political agents of capital. They repress movements that challenge capital and often oppose democratic contestation and movement building more generally. But, movements against repressive, anti-democratic state apparatuses, even if they employ transnational linkages and the technological tools associated with globalization, are not

necessarily “counter-hegemonic” in the sense of helping to unseat the hegemony of global capital.

The second half of the article combines the central themes of Gramsci, Polanyi and Foucault to make a better theoretical understanding of the field cases which is mainly related to the historicity of capitalism, and state will to improve the particular places, politics over establishment of hegemony and counter hegemony along with governmentality.

### **Adivasis Economy and its Embeddedness with Social System:**

Historically, the predominated tribal regions in India mainly come under resource rich territories. Adivasis in these regions have developed a distinct productive system in which their economic system was absorbed and embedded in social system and there was fully absence of self-regulating market society. In his book ‘The Livelihood of Man’ Polanyi (2001) has discussed the legendary work of Malinowski on Trobriand Islanders and mentioned that material subsistence non-market regulated society was determined through the institution of reciprocity and in case of non-capitalist societal formation, mutuality and reciprocity is the main governing principle of economic activities rather than to generate the economic gain. The economic gain that is popularly termed as surplus value can be understood from the circulation and formation of Money, Commodity and Money ( M-C-M) in conventional Marxist understanding of general formula of capital formation. The absence of M-C-M in traditional or alternative production system was a kind of cultural determinism of the economy. Surajit Sinha (1961:299) writing about the tribal cultures in peninsular India contends that “The local village community is nearly self-sufficient. Circulation of goods is based entirely on barter. There are, however, rudiments of interethnic cooperation in the circulation of goods within a limited area”. Polanyi argues that “The whole institution acted to minimize rivalry and conflict and maximize the joy of giving and receiving gifts” (1977:51). Padel, Dandekar and Unni (2013:24) assert that “Adivasi economics is based on exchange, i.e. patterns of reciprocity, between kin relations and with others, not least with ancestors and the world of nature and spirit. It is based in Adivasis’ rootedness to land and territory..”. But we extend the arguments of Padel, Dandekar and Unni who failed to show how adivasi political economy experienced state as a distinct character. Alpa shah (2010) in her seminal work on Munda tribe of Jharkhand shows that how the political economy of Adivasis is a kind of a sacral polity. Adivasis have developed a distinct mode of production and in which there is no separation of religion from politics. All the aspects of life-worlds of Adivasi is regulated and legitimated by the spirit. State is seen as alien and dangerous to the

tribal society because it is outside the sacral polity of the Tribe. The project that is implemented by state in the name of development is a kind of intervention in alien space that is governed space for the state but if its objectives fulfil the aspirations of adivasis then it is an opportunity but many time the neoliberal development failed to do so and then in result we can see the resistance and the politics over the meaning and the discourse of development.

### **The Case of Kalinga Nagar Industrial Complex:**

The feature of reciprocity and embedded economy within the societal institution is more and less applicable to Adivasi regions of India. In this section we attempt to demonstrate how neoliberal development that comes through ‘Governmentality’ and as a capitalist hegemonic project that materialized in the form of corporate industrialization in the field i.e. Kalinga Nagar results double movement in Polanyian perspective. We explain how neoliberal industrialization disembed the pre-capitalist mode of production that was embedded in the adivasis culture results double movement. We also try to extend the concept of ‘double movement’ with the help of Gramscian notion of counter-hegemony. Selecting Kalinga Nagar Industrial Complex where Ho adivasis predominates as a case we try to explain cultural politics of neoliberal development in India.

The adivasi of Kalinganagar constitutes mainly of Ho tribe who have been migrated from different districts of Chotanagpur in the last part of 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Studies have mentioned the causes of Ho migration from their place of origins to their place of destination. Lack of irrigation facilities and frequent drought in tribal areas of Chotanagpur region left no option for the tribals but to migrate to other places like tea gardens of Assam and Coal fields in the nearby area (Miri, 1993). Land alienation due to state developmental intervention in Chotanagpur in colonial and post-colonial period pushed the adivasis of the region to migrate to other areas (Prasad, 1988:77-99). These developmental activities forced the Hos as well as other adivasis of chotanagpur as commodified labour force. Sahu (2007) documented the other story of Adivasi immigration due to drought in Saraikala to Kalinganagar. Thereafter some adivasis also migrated to Kalinga Nagar area for searching of economic opportunities. Sharma (2006) confirms that in late 1860s in colonial times Kritibas Bhupati, the ruler of Sukinda brought adivasis mainly of Hos from Saraikala- Karsuan region of Chhotanagpur to clean the forests and make the land cultivable. Das Gupta observes:

In fact, the rulers of Mayurbhanj, along with those of the other feudatory states of northern Orissa (Sukinda, emphasis own), had invited the immigration of tribal groups along with Brahmins and service castes for both political and economic reasons as these were expected to promote agricultural, industrial and commercial development in the

state. The migrant Hos were considered to be better as settled cultivators in contrast to the Bhuiyas who chiefly practised shifting cultivation....Moreover, in contrast to the older settlers who paid a fixed sum as tribute, the immigrant groups had to pay higher tributes and also render compulsory labour service or beth begari (Bonded or indentured labour) (2011:75).

Mansingh Purty, an adivasis of a resettlement colony in Kalinga Nagar locality (age about 74) vehemently stated that:

‘We are strong and laborious people. Our forefathers came here as contractual labour by the colonial British ruler to construct the Rail road in Eastern Odisha in the last half of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since then we are living in this region. The then Sukinda king (Zamindar) permitted us to live here and we make land by cutting forests and are cultivating it. He gave some people patta (Land title) and we were giving Khajana (Tax) in the form of Gotti (bonded labour) to the king’ (Interview 15.12.2014).

In fact, it can be concluded that environmental factors and developmental intervention not only forced the adivasis to migrate to Kalinga Nagar/Sukinda but also economic opportunities pushed them to migrate to the area.

The Ho tribes developed an agro-forestry based livelihood in the region. The economic system of the Ho tribes was non-monetized based on tilling the soil and mutual exchange. The Hos practised a system of mutual labour exchange while tilling the soil, seed plantations, harvesting and other agricultural activities. From the forest they collectively fetch forest products and share equally among the kin. The women almost perform similar role in all these productive activities. Therefore the status of women in tribal society is more or less similar to their men counterpart. The economic system was subsistence and was deeply embedded with the social structure. The economic system of the adivasis particularly the Ho revolved through Habitat, Land, water and forests and deeply embedded in these. The sense of embeddedness is also sacred that can be seen in their reciprocity and economic behaviour. In this way the principles of embeddedness, reciprocity and mutual exchange without economic gain and non-concentration of wealth were the features of tribal society in India. The social relationship via culture that includes kinship, lineage relation has integrated in non-economic institutions that take care of the economic system of society. Polanyi argues that:

The result of all these characteristics of primitive societies is the impossibility of organizing the economy, even in thought, as an entity distinct from the social relations in which its elements are embedded. There is, however, no need to organize it either, since the social relationships integrated in the noneconomic institutions of society automatically take care of the economic system. In tribal society the economic process is embedded in the kinship relations that formalize the situations out of which organized economic activities spring (1977:55).

The onset of Neoliberalism and capitalist restructuring in 1980s led significant changes in the embedded economic system of the adivasis in Kalinga Nagar. Being a resource rich area in 1980s, the area was planned as Kalinga Nagar Industrial Complex (the future Steel Hub of India). The project was planned to attract corporate industries to make investment in the state to exploit the natural resource richness of the territory. The manifest agenda of the state is poverty reduction and employment generation. The latent purpose of the state includes investments, mineral extraction and employment generation for a growing middle class that seems to be a false promise in the case of employment generation for the local communities. Before the initiation, the project gave a lot of promises to the adivasis in the area. The state 'manufactured consent' (Herman and Chomsky, 2010) through its media and political society and mobilized a particular class who will be the future beneficiaries of the project is also a kind of fraudulent hegemony. Enzensberger and Roloff (1974) coined the term 'consciousness industry' to describe the corporate media which produces a kind of consciousness in the audience that benefits the class that controls the media and industry in general. In neoliberalism media manufactures hegemonic ideology that favours the establishment of industry. The state also gives a label to a particular space to construct it as a neoliberal projects. The state labelled Kalinga Nagar as economically backward where significant section of population constitutes poor tribals. When the neoliberal developmentalism comes in a particular area it generates a lot on negative consequences.

In Kalinga Nagar the development projects that came as a by-product of neoliberalization commodified the adivasis' land, forests, water bodies, and the local ecology. It caused massive displacement of adivasis from their land and territories. The project forced the adivasis to migrate to cities, forest in search of livelihoods where they further forcefully integrated in a social system of inequality. The development projects that came in Kalinga Nagar disembedded the pre-capitalist non-monetised economic system that was previously embedded in the social structure. This process manufactured a 'double movement'. The movement is not spontaneous as Polanyi predicted. Ronaldo Munch criticised the way "Polanyi conceptualises the counter-movement as a semi-automatic process arising spontaneously in reaction to the depredations of the free market" (Dale, 2012:10). The counter-movements that neoliberal development generates cannot be understood purely in class terms, as heterogeneous interests coexist and interact. Here Gramsci becomes important to understand how counter-movements are organised. Polanyi also perceptively recognized that a counter-movement not simply a response to economic changes, but to the social dislocations they create (Levien, 2007:124). Adivasis resisted the neoliberal move of the state

to commodify their land, labour, forest and the common space formed a political society having multiple interests of various actors in 2005 popularly known as Bisthapan Birodhi Jan Manch (BBJM). BBJM formed an organizational core committee consisting of 8 local adivasis. One elder adivasi from the local Gobarghati GP (Gram Panchayat) named Chakradhar Haibru was elected as its president. Rabindra Jarika, a post graduate from Utkal University in Odisha and he was a local adivasi youth of *Chandia* village (one of the affected village) was elected as its secretary. People of more than 50 affected villages and two Gram Panchayats (GP) namely *Gobarghati* and *Chandia* which was listed for acquisition by Tata Steel were its activists. Two GPs were the centre of resistance. It made ad hoc alliance and solidarity with various movement organizations and political societies who supported their cause like Lok Shakti Abhijan, a people's organisation fighting against globalisation and for the right to livelihood, Odisha unit, Kashipur Andolankari, Lower Suktel Ekta Manch, Sambalpur Chashi Sanghathan, Posco Pratirodh Sangram Samiti (PPSS), CPI (ML) New Democracy, CPI (ML) Liberation, CPI (M) and CPI (Maoist), CPI (Janshakti). They performed villages and core committee meetings and discussed the developmental cost on adivasis. Adivasis resisting the project have a common interest of '*Ame Jamin Chadibu Nahin*' (We won't let our land for acquisition. Adivasis had cognized sense of place.). They declared in the movement repertoire that the life-world of adivasis is revolved around *Vitamati* (Habitat), Jal (water), Jamin (land), and Jangal (forest), hence they will not let them for appropriation. However, the political societies who formed ad hoc alliance had different interest.

It is also essential to describe some strategies that organised the counter-movement. On 9<sup>th</sup> May 2005 Maharashtra Seamless Steel Limited was performing its *Bhoomi Pooja* (Worship of Land) near Gadpur and Bandargadia Village to establish its steel plant. The local tribals violently resisted the event declaring to stop the project. The police resorted to *lathi-charge* (Caning) and women were obstructed on the ground. People broke the police van. The *bhoomi pooja* was abandoned. On 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2005 Tata Steel performed *Bhoomi Pooja* with the presence of the then District Collector and Superintendent of Police (SP). Around 3000 adavasis and dalits protested and police lodged cases against the leaders of BBJM. The *Bhoomi Pooja* was postponed. But Tata Steel went ahead with the project with assurance from authorities in spite of the violent protests. On 27<sup>th</sup> July a notice was served to the people of the area by the state administration to attend a public hearing in Jajpur Road. On 7<sup>th</sup> October 2005 adivasis resisted against the performance of *Bhoomi Pooja* again on the same land by the Tata officials even if accompanied by police force and district administration

officials. A constable was reportedly beaten up by the protestors and according to police, protestors snatched away his gun. On 25<sup>th</sup> October 2005 Rabindra Jarika, the secretary was arrested by the Jajpur police while he was returning from attending a tribal conference in Bhubaneswar, the state capital. On his arrest, various organisations including PUCL (People's Union for Civil Liberty) protested against the government on its attempt to suppress the movement of the people. On October 27, 2005, BBJM and its alliances gheraoed Kalinga Nagar police station protesting against the arrest. The police reported by trying to arrest the other local leaders of that organization. On 17<sup>th</sup> November 2005 in the face of strong resistance by BBJM, the Maharashtra Seamless Steel Limited had suspended its construction work and later its project was abandoned from Kalinga Nagar. On 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2006 Tata Steel started the levelling of land early in the morning in the area with the help of state administrative officials like District Collector, SP (Superintendent of Police), and 12 platoons of police force. About 300-400 tribals with traditional weapons like bows and arrows, axes gathered in the area sent a delegate of four members for a dialogue with the officials. The state acted through physical force to counter the adivasis resistance. Police fired the adivasis resisting the project killing 12 adivasis and wounding 41 on the spot. Foucault had argued that the rise of industrial capitalism was made possible via a new form of power that either through ideational distortion or physical violence positively shapes and produces its objects through discourses of truth (Cheah, 2010:184). In Kalinga Nagar there are many cases of physical violence. There are more than 60 police cases pending on each of the frontline leaders of BBJM. All the leaders of BBJM faced death threats from the corporate goons. There were many cases of beating and torture by the police to the displaced people. In Kalinga Nagar one leading activist was murdered and another was killed in the POSCO area. Amin Banara was gunned down on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2008 by goons who approached him near the Tata Plant site. A month before this incidence, another activist, Jogendra Jamuda, was shot in the back while driving his mother and wife on a motorbike near the Kalinga Nagar police station. These cases show how neoliberal market grows with blood and violence. Besides the ideational distortion or physical violence state also fragment the political society to split the counter movement. In Kalinga Nagar a pro-project political society called Bisthapita Kshatigrasta Parishad (BKP- a Forum of Affected People) emerged from the root BBJM in 2008. It resisted all tactics and strategy of BBJM and indulged in open fight with its leaders. Gradually the movement fragmented and assimilated in the new emerging structure. Gramsci argued that capitalist state is being made up of two interrelated phenomenon: one is political society and the other is civil society. Political society works through force have a character

of *Dominio* (or coercion) and *Direzione* (or consensus). Both civil society and political society have a feature of coercion and consensus. In civil society consensus is given more prioritized whereas 'political society' (which in Gramsci's sense means not only 'official' politics, but organizing and coordinating functions throughout the social formation) of the bourgeois state have used it to facilitate class project. Gramsci also acknowledges Marx and argued that in bourgeois society the 'state' in a concrete institutional function is embodied in political society. In Gramsci's term it is institutional mechanism to organize politics through civil society and consensus can be termed as speculative translation of the bourgeois class's project.

### **Connecting Polanyi, Gramsci and Foucault to understand Neoliberal state Developmentalism:**

In the last 25 years, there has been a remarkable turn in political economy of development throughout the world in general and India in particular. The situation is quite different after the neoliberalism. Neoliberalism as a political theory of development and economic practices proposed that human society can be best advanced within the institutional framework of free market. This economic model and practices have swept and restructured the society through institutional reform and discursive adjustment. In neoliberalism the role of the state is very important because state facilitates and preserves the institutional framework that works for the interest of the self-regulated market. The self-regulated market in neoliberalism is one of the features of advanced capitalism and it came in announced way through state policies and acts unlike the genealogy of 'capitalism that arrived unannounced' (Polanyi, 1957: 89). In this section we discuss how these theorists' work is essential to understand the state role in top-down development (neoliberal development). Neoliberal development projects or top-down development is central locus of discussion because these three theorists' conceptual corpus including embeddedness, state's roles in creating hegemony through governmentality is discussed to the speciality of Indian experiences. The state role became so vital in this advanced capitalist time and Polanyi did not give much emphasis at the time of historicizing capitalism. Polanyi's study aims at historicizing capitalism with the help of Frankfurt theorist Lukacs who has offered ad hoc and weak reasons on crisis of capitalism and role of state power. Polanyi examines the evolution of market, its genesis, its way of re/production and its decline. Polanyi's work mainly deals with the economic history of pre-industrial and industrialization process in England that is lesser applicable to rest of the society. His concept of embeddedness is more important to understand the political economy of economic system

that is embedded in the life-world of the pre-capitalist society. His work presents a soft view of capitalism whereas Gramsci historicize capitalism by the help of Lenin's understanding of capitalism. So here, Gramsci is more specific for the understanding of capitalism.

Polanyi argues that the embedded market is closely related to pre-capitalist society. Thus, during the earlier periods of human history the "economic system was absorbed in the social system" and the "self-regulating market was unknown" (1957:71). On the other hand, 19th century capitalism was informed by "assumptions" of separateness or self-regulation. This self-regulation and separateness should be understood through the way a sovereign State (new nation state) that interacts to create a hegemonic space for market through Foucauldian 'governmentality'. Developmental project or the political economy of development is a kind of neoliberal governmentality that was also opposed by the other productive force who has no desire to develop as capitalist State wants. Their opposition can be understood through the concepts of 'double movement' (Polanyi, 2001) and counter hegemony (Gramsci). Here it is essential to understand the power of state that is also a technology of rule, a kind of governmentality that demands Foucault's presence so inevitable in this discussion. Talking about power that was not so discussed at micro and macro level by Polanyi, but Gramscian corpus historically theorise the limit and possibilities of social changes. His concept of passive revolution and counter hegemony always present as an opportunity for the class formation and class struggle that is a prerequisite condition for the social change. Gramsci's work also covers the degree of force to analysis the social situation at the time of double movement. He said that hegemon (State in our discussion) has a balance of forces and this force is based on the relation of social force and military force. The relation in social force emerged from the economic structure facilitated by state nexus with market whereas state in strict technical sense also has a military power for domination or regulation. This social and military power represents the political forces and its relations. This balance of power works for creating a degree of homogeneity among the several classes and how it facilitates the space for hegemony and serves the interest of hegemon. Gramsci also postulated the alternative hegemony popularly known as counter hegemony that is based on the experiences and interest of the proleterian. Ranjit Guha's (1997) seminal work on peasant of Bengal has extended the conceptual corpus of Gramsci's hegemony. He has deepened the concept of Gramsci when he has given the concept of hegemony without domination. In our view, State itself is always in mask and therefore the domination is routinized because governmentality (Foucault) and the state biopolitics produces a discursive discourse and arena from where

domination and hegemony can be pursued without obstacle. Gramsci's counter hegemony can offer an alternative moral and intellectual order against the hegemony but the reductionalist role of state and the intervention of State in micro level have produced a little space for conformism. Conformism involved as a struggle between two conformism for hegemony that can be termed as a crisis of civil society and political society. Polanyi's conceptual works enlighten us from the transformation of society. Polanyi's works reflect the active society of England whereas Gramsci's theory reflect the Italian experiences but it extended the works of Gramsci from state to civil society via hegemony and counter hegemony. Polanyi was not so sure about the ignominious consequences of market superiority on society whereas Gramsci can be useful to extending Polanyi who has not captured the capitalist hegemony at any level. Gramsci did it but he did not explore the ploys and tactics of State to create a linear line of domination through the discourse of development. Foucault here became a supplement to understand the hegemonic system of class, the politics of development, state intention or the 'will to improve' through his conceptual corpus. The supplement of Foucault helps to understand the constitution of society, state intention and mediation. The cultural canvass of capitalism via neoliberal ideology has captured the intellectual and moral leadership of rural bloc. This bloc has a positive connotation in Gramscian scheme for societal transformation whereas Polanyi thinks that in capitalism, battle between the society and market is a battle between the good and evil. In mineral rich areas Gramscian corpus deals that state domination is based on the institution and it's inter connection and people's resistance can be understood by giving emphasis on interdependence of culture and politics. Gramsci shows that symbolic struggle and the cultural meaning embedded in resource are the constitutive force that is necessary to understand the causes of resistance against the state developmental project. State developmental projects remind us about the hegemonic practice that is the process through state dominants the lived experiences and the consciousness of pre-capitalist societal communities. This is to serve the market domination. Here we discuss how the whole discourse that has benefitted the corporate can be briefly understood through the Foucault's understanding of power knowledge and authority.

By using the Foucault's concept of discursive discourse, Escobar shows that how development is not universal in nature. Development is a kind of discourse and in which neoliberal development is the dominant one because it is backed and fuelled by the neoliberal ideology of the state. Development was and continues to be for the most part a top-down ethnocentric, and technocratic approach, which treat people and cultures as abstract concepts,

statistical figures to be moved up and down in the charts of “progress”. Development was conceived not as a cultural process (culture was a residual variable, to disappear with the advance of modernization) but instead a system of more or less universally applicable technical interventions intended to deliver some “badly needed” goods to a “target” population. It comes to no surprise that development became a force so destructive to Third World cultures, ironically in the name of people’s interests. (Escobar, 1995:44)

State developmental approach and practices is a kind of neoliberalism that can be examined as a set of economic tenets. This economic tenets act through the form of the government and the power is dispersed into all the institution of the state to serve the interest of the state. The dispersion of power into the institution of state through the political rationality that helps the market can be traced through the work of Foucault. It helps to understand how for creating the space for neoliberal development state has used its political rationality to establish the monopoly of self regulated market through industrialization.

### **Conclusion:**

In his book ‘The Great Transformation’ Polanyi shows how in capitalism there is shift from embedded market relation to disembedded ones. This is done due to the Juggernaut of market that has fixed value to the land, labour and resources for immediate uses. It has disastrous consequences in societal formation. The embedded relations in culture and social system have come under the domination of market rationality. Polanyi was so right that when he said that cultural consequences of the monetary valuation (commodification of land and labour power) were more serious than the economic ones (Polanyi, 1957). His prediction was so right when we observe the ecological destruction and cultural genocide in the name of capitalist centric growth that automatically translated into political economy of neoliberal development. It has been noted that to understand the development politics and state role to promote the free regulated market, we extended the corpus and insight of Polanyi to understand the post developmental politics and practices by linking with the works of Gramsci, Foucault that can be adequate to deal with the issues of development and at the same time it also helps social scientists and developmental professionals to understand what is the global and national linkage of the capital formation, why and how bourgeoisie state produces a discursive discourse through governmentality and political rationality that determine who will be benefited and how embeddness of society has been degraded for the utilitarian market logic that is synonymous to modern development.

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