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**The Field Strikes Back : Decoding
Narratives of Development**

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The Field Strikes Back : Decoding Narratives of Development

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Abstract

Based on the author's intensive fieldwork in rural West Bengal and the adjoining state of Jharkhand in India, the paper seeks to reveal how the field, beyond its geographical connotation, becomes an animated space for negotiating mainstream development interventions by the ordinary people who are at the receiving end of such interventions as "target groups". The paper constructs two prime but contesting categories— the "sweet" narratives based on the highly optimistic proclamations of the policymakers, and the "sour" narratives emerging mostly from the frustrating experience of the ordinary people— to reveal how refractions take place in development interventions, which are often not taken into account by the powers that be. While the grassroots-level lived experience of development-in-practice constitutes the backbone of the paper, at the same time, not losing sight of the importance of praxis, it seeks to relate critically the "sour" narratives to the reigning methods in social science in general and Development Studies in particular.

INTRODUCTION : READING PRACTICE

Around the world, over the centuries, the process called development— with an astounding variety of interventions promising goods, service delivery and above all, good life— is being practised in the name of ordinary people. There is hardly any instance of the powers that be mentioning that 'development' partly serves their own interests— be it the desire to sustain and

exercise power with marginal consent or without any kind of consent of people, or to financially benefit from the 'leakages'¹ that are often associated with the implementation of the policies, programmes, schemes and projects of the development mega-enterprise. It is not difficult to understand why such attempts are made to hide such interests. When the sponsors of the dominant mode of development, cutting across ideological and political affiliations (marked respectively by the State-led path and the Market-guided way), associate 'development' mechanistically with the interests of the common people, such 'do-goodism' leaves little space and scope for raising a simple but vital question: how do those who are being served with the potpourri of development, the innumerable programmes and projects, perceive it themselves? The question, vital as though it is, is considered redundant in the "pretty story of development work"(Filander 2001) in which *development as social practice* is steamrolled by the urge to view and interpret it in technocratic terms.

It is no less interesting that insofar as the mainstream development processes and their managerial thrust are concerned, the ordinary people are faced with two situations: in the first, 'development' being self-evident, they are left in the dark about the impending policies and measures as the policymakers adopt a stance of "we know their needs better"; in the second, which is becoming more visible in the contemporary era, the people, now described as "beneficiaries", are 'consulted', albeit minimally, to keep on record that 'much-needed inputs' have been collected and 'popular participation' has been ensured. While the second option seems to be better and more attractive than the first, it is only apparently so. With the existing inequitable power relations remaining intact, neither of the two options leaves much scope for any kind of *organic* link between the policymakers-cum-designers of development and the felt needs of the 'target groups'. What is even more rare is the practice of periodic feedback from the people negotiating with an array of development activities in the field. Allan Kaplan (2002: xii-xiv) puts it forthrightly when he elaborates the inherent tendency of the mainstream development paradigm :

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The...paradigm...attempts to analyse indeterminate and unbounded social situations and reduce them to their simplest component part in order to render them indeterminate and bounded. Then inputs are planned which will target such parts to achieve a predictable and expected outcome. Change is seen as a one-off process which must be controlled and manipulated. We must have the end firmly in mind, try to minimize disturbances from other events which may impinge, and focus on the envisaged product— a new way of working, a new structure, a new policy or practice or strategy.

This tradition goes on despite the increasing circulation and publicity-blotz of concepts like capacity building, community building, enabling environment, advocacy, facilitation and so forth in development thinking and practice. Such concepts often come with the promise of the establishment of various grassroots-level organizations, such as village committees, community development societies and neighbourhood associations. Alongside, despite the introduction of various sophisticated techniques of people-centric development, popular participation tends to be reduced to tokenism. On the other hand, those scholars who produce radical post-development critiques of the mainstream mode of development argue (backed up by Wolfgang Sachs's oft-quoted remark (1997:1) that the "idea of development stands like a ruin in the intellectual landscape") that 'development' should be discarded lock, stock and barrel. However, such scholars being long on theoretical critiques and short on concrete alternatives, have little to say about the fate of the ordinary people in the field. The alternative formulations, as a couple of prime instances show (Escobar 1995; Rahnema and Bawtree 1997) are, in fact, not without their share of problems which have given rise to a number of critiques (Lehman 1997; Kiely 1999; Storey 2000). While the so-called autonomous agency of the people, and reflexive and scattered local instances of resistance are celebrated by the radical scholars, at the other end the people 'out there' facing devastation, dispossession, displacement, deprivation and discrimination of physical and psychological kinds have hardly any clue as to how intensely and for how long the mainstream development mode

can be countered. The observation holds true despite efforts by some post-development scholars like Arturo Escobar (2000) to give due regard to the critiques and initiate a sort of bridge-building exercise. Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2001:107) depicts the dilemma of the post-development scholars in a succinct way: "A commonsense reaction may be: your points are well taken, now what do we do?.... The general trend in several sources is to stop at critique." The dangers of reification of local interventions have been critiqued by scholars like Mohan and Stokke (2000) for hiding the very local inequalities in power relations, apart from underestimating the national and international power-play. We on our part may add that the very argument that people do not want 'development' smacks of as much arrogance. Visits to the field show that this may not necessarily be the case. This is because people tend to associate development with sustainable livelihood options and asset building. That might roughly be a reason why we witness more instances of "people's agency" in protests and resistances to the exclusionary and repressive manifestations of the mainstream development, rather than in forging sustainable alternatives.

It is precisely this void, generated in different ways by the mainstream and radical modes of development, which gives rise to various people-sourced narratives on development in the field. While it is not the author's intention to draw the reader into a long discussion on the conceptual evolution of the *field* in social science², the way the field is being viewed in this essay would remind us of Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualization (1985) of the same in terms of two specific points: first, in terms of multidimensional space of positions, composed of both symbols and substances; and second, as a site of struggle over the definition of legitimate principles, in our case, of development. For any researcher who cares to communicate with the ordinary people there can be numerous instances of the 'field striking back'— the field in our specific context being an *animated* space, quite political, beyond but not excluding its geographical connotations and limits, contesting the 'closure' in the imposed development policies, projects and programmes with locally-

sourced narratives. At the center-stage of such process lie the meanings, both personal and shared.

The field for the researcher has its own share of rewards and challenges, of personal, moral and intellectual kinds. The researcher has the unenviable task of transforming the challenges into rewards. Howsoever difficult the task is, there is no other option for her/him. The following excerpt explains why is it so: “The cardinal value of fieldwork lies in its ability to provide an intimate understanding of the complex matrices of social institutions and relationships that exist in all societies. Such matrices will continue to exist in the foreseeable future, however such society gets modernized or globalized.” (Srinivas, Shah and Ramaswamy 2002: iv).

The paper, based on the author's fieldwork during the last decade, seeks to reveal some slices of narratives. As part of the process it seeks to address some core methodological issues and their implications, which also give rise to a predicament to a researcher who is supposed to explore the ‘actually existing reality’ as *professional stranger*. The following discussion would reveal that while there are some hazards in being a stranger in an unknown setting, sometimes the people concerned speak more frankly to the stranger than to someone of their own. In the process, the professional stranger's pre-set ideas are also challenged and transformed.

NARRATIVE TURN : RETHINKING PRACTICE

The ‘narrative turn’ in social science has largely coincided with and been reinforced by the advent of qualitative research methodology. The latter seeks to probe deeply into the moral, ethical and political dimensions of the themes and subjects of the concerned enquiries (Chesebro and Boriosoff 2007; Drummond and Camara 2007). It has unleashed prolific literature (Czarniawska 2004; Josselson, and Liebeck 1995; Shaffir and Robert A. Stebbins 1991) on narrative enquiry which had long been contemptuously dismissed as “mere stories” and/or myths and anecdotes. While there has been a welcome departure from the near-monopolistic control of quantitative research and its favourite child, the Survey

Method, the situation has not yet resulted in a radical transformation of the existing methodological scenario, a point which will be taken up later in the discussion. The unpleasant truth is that the ‘narrative turn’ in social science has been dominated by the social theorists debating on the modes of ‘narrativising’, with the result that there have been very few attempts to address and analyse the real-life narratives that are sourced from the field. The scholars in Development Studies, who also have to share the blame, have been the worst victims of the trend in which meta-theory, that is, theory about theory, tends to overtake ‘action out there’. In a way, though not necessarily in a conscious manner, the specialists in Development Studies, with some notable exceptions, have played into the hands of the policymakers who, as mentioned earlier, have sought to ensure discursive closure vis-à-vis the development process. On the other hand, whenever the researchers get the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the narratives from the field they are faced with a constructive challenge. As part of exploring the development scenario, the process of encountering and situating the related narratives becomes exceedingly complex, often culminating in the reversal of many of her/his long-held ideas and set assumptions.

Broadly speaking, a narrative is a text structured by the time sequence of the events it represents. Narratives are supposed to have a take-off point, a middle portion and an end, incorporating and outlining a specific course of events, thereby, in the context of our theme, making a complex and multidimensional process of development ‘simple’ in terms of representations. To Leach and Mearns (1996), narratives are “received wisdom” embedded in specific institutional structures or actor-network groups. By virtue of being ingrained in social texts narratives are an important part of the study of texts and textuality. Narratives may or may not have a clear connection with a broader set of values. However, in this paper we prefer to view narrative more as a critically reflective mode with ideological slant in which a story is *told by the subject*. Ricoeur(1984) in this context reminds us that narratives are expanded into public form through *guiding metaphors* and *employment of action* to provide a meaning-context. Narratives,

as we encounter them in the field, are intertwined with everyday experiences and practices as lived and negotiated by the ordinary people as 'subjects'. They, as Roe extensively discusses (1991), highlight the uncertainties and ambiguities of development activities. While apparently the narratives to be cited here reveal the dialectics of point-counterpoint, a deeper look would show the 'plot' in the background.

The *people's narratives* to be cited in this paper, are in most cases reactive vis-à-vis the *modus operandi* of the mainstream development paradigm. They are narratives and not mere utterances because they incorporate the features mentioned above. We designate this category as the *sour narratives*. They counter the *sweet narratives* of policymakers, having emerged and circulated at the grassroots level. They also tend to reflect the failed promises and the disappointment of the receivers of development, often vehemently contesting and occasionally subverting the dominant messages and ideas that are almost relentlessly simplistic and linear to serve the interests of the policy Establishment. This prevents the dominant sweet narratives from becoming hegemonic because their knowledge claims are countered by the field-mediation. On a broader scale the people-sourced narratives also explode the myth perpetuated by the policymakers that the cases of policy/ project/ programme failure have nothing to do with the process of formulation and everything to do with the problems of implementation. This is notwithstanding the fact that the sweet narratives are not only dominant but also more visible and organized, having been sourced from the domain of the powerful class, and the sour narratives are mostly scattered and based on informal interactions. Yet, there is more to it. We have found cases marked by a shift in the people's narratives. Such shifts act in both ways. The narrative can shift from sour to supportive, and even congratulatory, if it serves the interest of the concerned persons. It can also be a case of a supportive tenor turning sour, with the expectations and demands remaining unfulfilled, and the grievance-curve heading upwards. There can also be internal power struggle in sour narratives. This occurs when, as we shall cite an instance in the following discussion,

one particular group marginalizes another within the same orbit of deprivation and dispossession. The varieties obviously enrich the people's narratives.

SWEET NARRATIVES

Before we refer to some of the sour narratives, let us provide a sample of what we have described as its counterpart— the sweet narrative. The first specimen provided here is significant for a number of reasons. First, its central theme is information technology, which is widely considered by the sponsors of the mainstream development as the "magic wand" with the power to swiftly transform years of underdevelopment to spectacular development. Second, it has an ideological positioning in reflecting the supposed invincibility of technology-propelled progress which needs no social negotiations as it does not recognize the differential character of the spaces which it is supposed to transform. A specimen :

Imagine hundreds of queue-weary citizens flocking to Internet kiosks for everything.... Imagine a farmer accessing the net to find out crop prices! Imagine citizens' groups web-tracking public expenditure...thus creating ideal, real democracy.... (T)hey are very soon going to be ground reality.... Andhra Pradesh is on the highway to 'governing' the e-way.... Gujarat is leveraging IT.... It is at the helm of affairs in Karnataka.... Orissa's use of IT in urban development has done away with middlemen entirely.... Rajasthan has started a little late but now has taken a swift path to 'E'...

The hype of IT-led development is ingrained in every part of the narrative. While it apparently exhorts the readers to imagine a future scenario it, in effect, leaves nothing to imagination. One state after another in a developing country like India, including some which rank very low in the scale of human development (such as, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa) are claimed to have surged ahead in the so-called e-governance. The narrative transcends all social, political, economic and cultural barriers to promote friction-free development. As the twenty-first century protagonists of the mainstream development mode (in the face of increasing

criticisms of its undemocratic character) have the added task of linking development to democracy, the IT-led development is also supposed to provide “ideal, real democracy”. In the specific case of Andhra Pradesh, the most hyped state of e-governance with the human development ranking of lowly 23rd, several studies (Sinha 2005; Mooij 2003; Reddy 2002) have pointed out the pathetic lack of efforts at democratic decentralization at the grassroots-level, which is regarded as an obligatory step to make governance people-centric. There is hardly any doubt that Chandrababu Naidu’s dream of corporatizing Andhra Pradesh by IT through destroying potential and existing avenues of popular participation turned into a nightmare.

Or, take the case of the Indian Finance Minister P. Chidambaram’s statement (in his Budget Speech, 28 February 2008) on a scheme that is receiving lot of publicity in recent times:

[The] National Employment Rural Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) will be rolled out to all 596 rural districts in India....
Let there be no apprehension in anybody’s mind: as demand rises more money will be provided to meet the legal guarantee of employment. [Italics mine]

The statement, based on a high note of complacency, is too reassuring. In the process it neglects the possible situations in the field, which have now turned out to be real, with regard to the implementation of the NREGS. No doubt, the scheme has lot of value in ensuring some degree of livelihood among the poorest of the poor in rural India, who are the worst victims of a nation growingly divided between the affluent and the dispossessed. Its value is also enhanced by the fact that it provides the Indians with the first ever opportunity of open social audit of a scheme that legally guarantees the right to work and the chance of documenting its anomalies. No less important, the NREG Act, like the Right to Information, is also the result of an intense struggle by the civil society in which the ordinary people had visible participation. However, the evaluation of the scheme reveals that most of the states in India have pathetically failed to provide hundred days work— with the average rate of work provided remaining below twenty. Then again, such abysmally low level of

performance is not due to the reluctance of the poor to engage in work, but because of the lack of work opportunities given to them— beyond stone-digging and mud-digging in hot and humid climate— by the concerned officials. There are also perennial instances of nepotism, and manipulation of the scheme card by the local politicians and administrators. Most important, as the next section would reveal, in the life of the poorest of the poor in India the fifteen day waiting period, stipulated by the NREG Act poses severe problems. But the minister’s statement induces a discursive note in which all such ‘frictions’ that come in the way of implementation of the scheme are either not taken into account or ruled out. “Let there be no apprehension in anybody’s mind” is the pointer that erases any possibility of harbouring any doubt about the scheme. Such exclusions of the ‘bitter’ loopholes and pitfalls are typical of the sweet narratives.

SOUR NARRATIVES

Compare the sweet narrative with its sour counterpart, which has the same theme, that is, IT-led development, but with a completely contrasting view emerging from the grassroots-level experience. In a project in West Bengal to assess the functioning of self-help groups constituted by the BPL (below-the-poverty-line) category of rural women, we were faced with several complaints about the gender-bias that tends to dominate the use of IT and the related mindset. The following excerpt reflects it:

We (women) are regarded as untouchables insofar as computers are concerned. You know, many of us have performed better in Madhyamik (school leaving) examination than our husbands and brothers. But men in the village laugh loudly at us whenever we have expressed the desire to have training in computers. Even the officials of rural local government institutions ridicule us and the officials of the public sector banks and rural cooperative banks look at us with disbelief when we tell them about our desire to earn from computer-related work. All of them believe that we do not have the basic intelligence to operate computers. But they do not bother to find out that many girls in the nearby town are operating computers.

The sweet narrative, if read alongside this specimen of sour narrative, tends to expose the false projection of the grassroots-level reality in the former, which in this case reflects what has been described by feminist scholars as technology's *masculine culture*. The specific instance here also reflects a 'double bind' insofar as the members of the self-help groups are concerned—they are excluded both because they are poor and because they are women.

On occasions the researchers themselves, mostly unknowingly, reinforce the core assumptions and parameters of sweet narratives. It is to their long-term academic gain that they may encounter sour narratives as reaction. Thus, when the author of this essay met a group of local residents in a town with the purpose of taking their view on the promised establishment of information kiosks, he was asked to explain what IT means. While elaborating it and aligning it with the 'new' technology, he was confronted with a narrative that challenged the root of his core assumption. The gathering of the elderly, composed mainly of small traders and factory workers, would describe the promise as "hollow". On being asked why, they would explain that as the powers that be have in the last six decades since independence progressively weakened the "most fundamental information hubs," the newly-formed information kiosks would not be able to bring much change in the scenario. The "most fundamental information hubs", to them, were the primary and the secondary schools of the locality.

Let us now refer to another sour narrative, which relates to a calamity that devastates a number of districts in West Bengal—riverbank erosion. It is to be noted that the governments, both at the state and the centre, lack a coherent policy to counter the devastating phenomenon. As a result, the sweet narratives that are formulated and circulated from the official levels mainly rest on crass adhocism, with no coherent projects and programmes. What is most important in the context of our discussion is that the constitutive logic of the sweet narratives on riverbank erosion is based on the technocratic assumption that the rivers can be controlled with erection of boulders and thereby erosion can be countered. But the following narrative, emerging from the people

who have been displaced several times from their ancestral place and shelters thereafter, shows how the very foundational logic of the embankment technology and hydraulic geometry of the modern-day development is contested head-on. While it would be tempting to explain the following in terms of local knowledge pitted against scientific-technological knowledge, the deeper lifeworld consciousness can hardly be underestimated.

Nature has ensured balance between soil and water. That is why when one side of the bank is eroded, *char* (sandbar) grows up in another side. But if you play with water, if you use technology to control Nature, if you are boastful of your ability to control what should be left alone, the Ganga and the Padma, the rivers would take their revenge. Land is masculine and river feminine. By controlling and preventing the rivers from coming closer to the land you act against natural attraction and arouse the rivers' wrath. They do it and we bear the brunt. (*Brackets mine*)

We have already hinted that some narratives of the ordinary people in the field seek to negotiate, rather than confront, the dominant mode of development and the associated narratives. The following sample would help illustrate the point. Entrusted with the task of mid-term evaluation of the foreign-funded NGOs by their funding agencies the author of this essay had to make successive visits to a specific area of Bihar, which is now under the newly-formed state of Jharkhand. I was guided by the assumption that foreign-funded development efforts would generate a violent conflict in the area known as the 'red fort' of the Maoist groups, which included the dreaded People's War Group. Media reports, pamphlets and leaflets, and the slogans and graffiti in the areas reinforced such a pre-conceived notion. The writing on the wall was clear, literally speaking, with the Maoists warning people against the danger of global capital and the role of the NGOs as "new tools of imperialist forces". But the findings challenged the pre-set assumptions as we could find that a large part of foreign funds were being siphoned off for the promotion of cultural activities of the indigenous people and even for waging environmental struggle against the uranium pollution of Swarnarekha river. The

narrative, excerpted below, reveals the strategy of subversion, that of using foreign funds for resisting one of the most dangerous manifestations of the mainstream mode of development—destruction of environment by toxic material as part and parcel of the production process :

We were initially at a loss.... What to do with the money? Should it be spent only in constructing tubewells and roads and establishing schools? These are important tasks too but we also realized the need to preserve our culture, habitat and livelihood. This is why we are utilizing the money to fight companies which pollute our 'lifeline' (that is, the Swarnarekha river) with uranium, against people who construct dams to destroy our land, against those who pollute our culture with theirs. We are utilizing the fund for establishing *Ubero Gram, Ubero Raj* (Our Village, Our Governance). We are thus using the funds of the *firangis* (foreigners) to discard the system they imposed on us. (*Brackets mine*)

There are many narratives which reflect candid, self-critical and realistic assessment of the local communities in relation to the failure of the development activities. Thus, for instance, in the specific case of the failure of North Bengal to adopt appropriate technology for dairy development, a focus group discussion sparked off critical self-assessment at the 'we group' level. On the specific question of the oligopolistic role of the multinational corporations in controlling the dairy products, the villagers in Hatigisha, near India-Nepal border, would explain how the potential of Himal Dairy Cooperative was "systematically" subverted to make way for the dairy products of the MNCs. However, in the aforementioned focus group discussion the narrative took an unexpected turn when the 'subversion thesis' was balanced by a self-critical assessment:

Why blame the foreign companies for our failure? Look at Amul company's performance...how despite being an Indian company it has beaten Nestle in the race for production and marketing of dairy products in India. We have failed because we ourselves failed to sustain the cooperative by indulging in petty politicking among ourselves. The idea of cooperative

has been lost. We have been the worst sufferers. The politicians blame the foreign companies but they drive a wedge among us. Now they are happily eating Nestle's *Mishti Doi* (sweet curd). (*Brackets mine*)

The most significant point in the narrative is the realization that "our" problems need "our" agency and "our" solutions. It also implies that if the problem is not "theirs" the solution cannot come from them, whoever they are. To add, such critical self-assessment, revolving round one's own deficiencies while at the same time realizing the power of the adversaries, also reflects a high degree of awareness and realistic evaluation of the situation.

In some narratives there is an attempt to delve deep into the problem of development. In the course of fieldwork³ in a remote corner of Darjeeling Hills the local people were pointing out various "missing issues" of development, but what was most striking was their repeated emphasis on the "problem of communication" as the "root cause". When asked to explain, they responded in the following manner:

A major problem lies in Bengali being used for communication. Most of our administrators and trainers do not have knowledge of Nepali. Thus, we find it difficult to follow them. We hardly understand what they mean and what they want us to do. We have respect for Bengali language but it is of little use in our case, in these remote areas. It not only gives us the feeling that they are different but also the feeling that they do not want to take the trouble of coming closer to us.

The noteworthy feature is the way the local people would in a straightforward manner put forth their point without showing any animosity to Bengali as a language. As a result, the insensitivity of the development administrators to a crucial local need in the specific areas is exposed without any show of insensitivity on the part of those who bear the brunt.

To refer back to the NREG Act, which has been mentioned in the previous section, there are many "fundamental problems" associated with it. Such problems do not go well with the field reality of rural India. To refer to one major problem with the

provisions of the Act, the fifteen day-waiting period (for receiving unemployment allowance), and the time-gap that exists between the work and the payment of wages, are far too long a time in the lives of the poorest rural Indians. A refrain, familiar to those who are evaluating the impact of the Act and are in close touch with the people, would be :

We were very happy when we came to know about the 'hundred day-opportunity'. But it takes so much time to receive the unemployment allowance and even the wages that we are still compelled to depend on the local moneylenders for our survival and even refuse the work allotted to us.

The non-linearity of the development process and of its reactions has other unforeseen but interesting manifestations too. In some cases, the people-sourced narratives reveal an internal hierarchy and consequent conflict vis-à-vis the existing development scenario. Thus, while visiting the officially declared backward villages in West Bengal we have come across situations in which villagers belonging to both the Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribe categories have a fair degree of critical view of various development projects and programmes. Yet, there exists an *internal division* between the villagers of the two categories. In many villages the Scheduled Tribes suffer from relative deprivation in comparison to the villagers belong to the Scheduled Castes. This is despite the fact that the villagers belonging to both the categories are largely deprived in the concerned backward villages as the fruits of development schemes are very unevenly distributed. Contrary to the set assumption yet again, the domination of the Scheduled Castes is found even in villages in which they have fewer numbers than the Scheduled Tribes. Such domination is enforced by greater control over local political forces. The narrative of such internal division, as constructed by the Scheduled Tribe villagers, is quite significant:

It is true that we all suffer from deprivation in the village. Almost all of us are in the BPL category but we do not get adequate benefits from the schemes like National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and schemes providing cheap rice for the poor. But whatever is available is monopolized by them (the

Scheduled Caste villagers). The head of rural government at village is from that (that is, Scheduled Caste) community and some members who belong to our community are helpless onlookers. We are not even allowed to speak our mind in the village meets because they dominate the discussions on development. (*Brackets mine*)

DECODING THE NARRATIVES : METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The sour narratives in the field are too many to be enumerated in the limited space of this essay. Nevertheless, the limited numbers of specimens provided here, based as they are on personal experiences, reveal in turn an evolving broader narrative— of the daily struggle of the ordinary people vis-à-vis the spectacle of the mainstream-dominant mode of development. In terms of the implications of the methodology of such narratives, one notices a commonality in two reigning methods in social science, which otherwise compete with each other.

The positivist approach in both Development Studies and Communication Studies, with its arsenal of survey methods, statistical sampling and 'scientifically constituted' questionnaires— based on claims of validity, reliability and objectivity and the zeal for numeric coding— underestimates the importance of narratives on the ground that "facts do not tell stories and stories do not tell facts". Such narratives in their scheme of things are at best "conversations" and at worst "manipulative" or "subversive" communication, which are supposed to be of little value in "refined, formal and purposive" research. On the other hand, the postmodernist (over)emphasis on the denial of the existence of grand narratives as part of its mode of deconstruction arguably goes against the field-based reality of a non-Western society like ours. In certain ways, insofar as the field is concerned, alongside the 'fragments,' 'grand' narratives do and continue to exist in background, in which deprivation, discrimination humiliation, on the one hand, and 'subaltern agency' marked by protest and resistance, on the other hand, are integrated in various forms and degrees in lived experience. However, in both the reigning methods, the sour narratives, sourced from the local space, are relegated to the zone of silence. Such relegation is particularly

problematic in the days of globalization⁴. Elsewhere I have argued (Sinha 2006:37-50), in the context of experience in field visits, why there is all the more the need of the 'local' to be incorporated in the methodology and discourse of social science, without of course romanticizing it.

There have been strong theoretical reactions to the exclusionary tactics of the dominant methodologies in various forms, perhaps too many to be enumerated here, which have been non-conventional to the core. To cite a single but brilliant instance, Poitevin and Rairkar have shown (1999), in the context of traditional and oral culture of the (flour) grindmill songs of rural Maharashtra women, how the mythical figure of Sita⁵ is used as a model to project their own experiences of the dominant patriarchal ethos. In a later study, based on extensive field experience, Poitevin (2002:15-40) has extensively reviewed the contemporary politics of knowledge to come to the conclusion that there can be no single blueprint for social transformation, despite propositions to the contrary maintained by the social science enterprise. On our part we may add that the exclusionary tactics in turn have severely negative implications for theoretical articulation of both democracy and development as *communicative deliberative exercise* because it underplays contesting and opposing meanings, and descriptions and interpretations. The zeal for purifying and sophisticated methodologies reminds us of Tagore's extraordinary use of the rose leaf metaphor in one of his lectures in America in 1917, in which he would note that by putting the leaf under microscope we stretch its space so much that it no longer looks like rose leaf.

CONCLUSION : HEGEMONY BEGETS RESISTANCE

What I have analysed in the preceding section has a major implication. If development and governance are the two circles of a supposed Venn diagram, the area of overlap between the two is hegemony. Such hegemonic trends weaken the potential of democratic politics. But at the same time, the foremost message that an analyst confronts through predicaments of the aforementioned kind is that there is opposition to the process of depoliticisation (in Foucault's terminology the "technology of politics")

unleashed by the hegemonic mode of development, more specifically to its technological order and the technocratic orientation. Beneath such opposition there lie scattered and often unorganized *technologies of struggle* of varying forms and rhythms. Many of them, being based on self-understanding, are too intuitive and spontaneous to be 'captured' within the rigid mode of empirical theorizing. They may also often lack the revolutionary and emancipatory potential to liberate the ordinary people from the clutches of mainstream development practices. Thus, the people-centred narratives may not have much value for either the promoters of the mainstream mode of development or the exponents of revolutionary change. The problem is even more complicated by the other stream of scholars, who tend to adopt a dismissive attitude about these narratives, more so if they have any possibility of being 'grand' narratives. Yet, these narratives are valuable for the analysts of development for at least two major reasons. First, they assert, by virtue of emanating from the concerned subject positions, an array of identities. Second, they have a crucial role, through various inflections, in making us conscious of something we often tend to undermine— that development, in whatever mode, form and style, is a spiral process with a grounded foundation, in which the ordinary people *do* have a 'say'. The field strikes back only to reinstate such communicative praxis by being a space for contestation, resistance, subversion and negotiation, as the case may be. As long as the policy networks and policy communities continue to underestimate this point, and the analysts falter in cautioning them, development would continue to remain a highly controversial and contested concept as well as practice.

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NOTES

1. The point is not a sudden inclusion on the part of the author. The late Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's candid admission in the mid-eighties, that too in an All India Congress Committee Session, that out of Re.1/-, only 15 percent is utilized for welfare schemes of the people is still relevant, perhaps with greater degree.
2. For an illuminating discussion on the evolution of the concept of field from natural sciences to social sciences, Kenneth P. Wilkinson, "The Community as a Social Field", *Social Forces*, Vol. 48, No. 3, March 1970, pp. 311-322. Even if the framework is tilted in favour of interactional and social behaviourist perspectives, the article comprehensively explains the social field as an emergent and dynamic space both in terms of methodology and theory.
3. That this particular problem, which the author of this essay confronted three years back, persists till now is revealed by the ongoing doctoral research on Participatory Development Communication in Darjeeling Hills by Pema Lama, a local resident.
4. This is not to understate the growing awareness of the importance of ethnographic research and qualitative research in recent times beyond the realms of the disciplines of Anthropology and Sociology. However, it is to be noted that the link between Development Studies, particularly its dominant methodological trends, and ethnographic research and qualitative research is at best in its nascent state and at worst, tenuous. Exploration of the reasons for such weak link merits separate discussion.
5. Sita, the lead female character in the epic *Ramayana*, was the wife of Lord Rama, who, despite her unwavering loyalty to her husband, ultimately had to prove her fidelity, with the Fire God as the witness, as she was abducted by Ravana, Rama's *bête noire*.

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