

## **Conflict Politics as Developmentalism-**

**Raktim Ray**, Lecturer, The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, University College of London, United Kingdom

**ORCID id:** 0000-0003-4308-6062

**Author Bio:** Raktim Ray is a Lecturer at The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, University College of London. He has an interdisciplinary background in Geography, Urban Planning and International Development. He completed his PhD from Development Policy and Practice, The Open University. His PhD titled 'Spatial Adhocism as Practice for Conflict Politics: Theorising Urban Politics in Kolkata' looks at spatial manifestations of conflict politics in the city Kolkata. His current research is focused on two thematic areas: a) looking at how politics of care is operationalised during the pandemic through voluntary groups and b) what forms of infrastructure is required for spatial occupation at protest sites.

### **Key words:**

**conflict politics:** heterogenous political relations between state and citizens

**developmentalism:** developmentalism is a politics through which development is practised and get operationalised through a hegemonic form of power

**postcolony:** postcolony is a condition that exists outside the Eurocentric modernity and demonstrates a hybrid category where its history is always under transition

### **Abstract**

The contested discourse around development is becoming more prominent with increasing global inequalities and subsequent dispossession of people at the margins. Developmentalism which operates through hegemonic power relations, manifests these dispossessions. This chapter counters that notion of developmentalism and offers an alternative framework to understand the nuances of developmentalism. It argues the state maintains an ambiguous relationship with its citizens to implement developmentalism. On the one hand, it dispossessed the marginalised people in the name of development. On the other hand, it rehabilitates them informally. Similarly, citizens also maintain various political relationships with the state which are sometimes negotiations, bargaining and sometimes through direct antagonism. This chapter defines these various relations as conflict politics and argues such a framework is important to understand developmentalism.

## **Conflict Politics as Developmentalism**

### **Introduction**

The discourse of development is contested. The nature of contestation lies in the way development is conceptualised and practised. After decades of developmental efforts, global inequality and subsequent dispossession of people at the margins are increasing. Murray Li (2000) argues that development is a form of governmentality which allows the state to govern and regulate the conditions of its citizens. For her, development is a 'project of rule' for implementing disciplinary powers (Li, 2000).

The idea of development is embedded in the modernisation discourse of the 'West' which for a substantive period of time considered the postcolonial or the colonised world as 'others'. This 'othering' was imparted by the intertwined concept of modernity and developmentalism to the 'non-western' world where development needs to be done, or development is at waiting. The only possibility for the non-western world is to 'catch up' with the west through a developmental process or to be managed towards a categorisation of progress that is legible to the west (Brett, 2009). This 'otherness' has its roots in the colonial imagination, which undermined contextuality and differences along with the hegemonic appropriation of power (Robinson, 2006). The colonial and postcolonial hegemony has been justified by liberal and neoliberal values of private property and free markets, sustaining the western supremacy and the subordination of the non-western world. Hence, development has become a problematic discourse that acts as an apparatus for extension of neo-imperialist power of the West (Escobar, 2000; Ferguson and Gupta, 2002; Cooke and Dar, 2008).

The dilemmas of development discourse are prominent in recent days with increasing challenges of climate change, refugee crisis and the political-economic transformation of the state. Development being a political project often finds itself at the crossroads of 'development alternatives' and 'alternatives to development'. As a discourse, development is often criticised for reproducing hegemonic political norms through new forms of domination and subordination and underestimation of the 'local' (Escobar, 1992; Ziai, 2004; Gibson-Graham, 2007). This chapter acknowledges the importance of these critiques of development and defines development more as a generative process that takes place through conflict politics. Conflict politics can be defined as heterogenous political relationship between the state and the political society. Defining developmental politics or

developmentalism through the framework of conflict politics democratises development processes and goes beyond any binary conceptualisations and opens possibilities for a more generative politics.

### **What is conflict politics?**

Binary understanding of political relationships between the state and the citizens is often parochial and looks at dominance vs resistance. Resistance is often conceptualised as an act against domination (Sharp *et al.*, 2000). Sharp *et al.* (2000) encourages to look beyond this and argues resistance as an extension of power than challenging it. Here, power can be interpreted as the flow of social relations that gets mobilised through various networks (Allen, 2003, 2009). Hence, resistance becomes the diagnostic apparatus for identifying differential power relations (Pile, 1997). For citizens, the way they politically engage with the state is much more complex. It is neither always subordination to the state power nor resisting it. It often uses bargaining, negotiations and patronage as political tactics to engage with the state to receive 'fruits' of development. These other forms of engagements do not undermine the importance of direct antagonism or resistance as a political process that is intrinsic to developmental process but expands to a multi-layered understanding of developmental politics.

Hickey (2009) observes conflict and struggle in politics have always been central to development. The very process of state formation has been characterised by violence and struggle, with states establishing control over territorial space and people through coercion. For Hickey (2009), development related political engagements between the state and citizens are a form of a social contract through which the state establishes norms of social protection and provides developmental outcomes that is at the heart of liberal democracy. Simultaneously, the state also uses this social contract to legitimise its control over citizens (Hickey, 2009). This characteristic of the state is more prevalent in the postcolony where colonisers used a similar tactic to control the colonised groups. Post-independence state formation in the postcolonial world happened through a hybrid process, an intermediate state between the Empire-state and the sovereign- state. This hybridity also helped the postcolonial state to represent itself as a provider of redistributive policies in broader political imaginations. Several conflicting and confusing mechanisms were developed for subtle exploitation along with redistribution. This also made the state more as a crisis management apparatus than a welfare provider. A very common example of this can be found when the

state legitimises evictions of poor people from informal settlements in the name of 'development' but alongside makes adhoc arrangements with poor people and rehabilitate them at the margins, which are also informal. This conflicting practice by the state can be seen as an oscillation between a 'rational mode' and a 'magical mode of being'(Das, 2004). By adopting a 'rational mode', the state responds favourably to the market demands and promotes capital accumulation through development. Through a 'magical mode of being' the state maintains an elusive trust among its citizens and ensures its own political survival (Ray, 2020).

Similarly citizens also adopt various mechanisms to access any developmental outcome from the state. These mechanisms can be considered as 'strategic essentialism'. 'Strategic essentialism' can be seen when irrespective of the difference of conflicting class interest or political identity, people engage in essentialising common interest (Spivak, 2012). Citizens sometimes bargain and negotiate with the state to access resources. Sometimes they resist the state through direct antagonism, and sometimes they co-opt with the state. Examples of these can be cited when citizens in the postcolonial context use bribes to access various services offered by the state. Simultaneously, when it is needed the same citizen groups protest against the state or curtail any developmental interventions that can be seen in various anti-land acquisition movements around the postcolonial world. These various forms of relationships that the state and citizens maintain is defined as conflict politics. Conflict politics often constitute strategic choices of various options, and it is not impromptu solutions. The outcome of the conflict politics on a particular issue is always dependent on how various actors mobilise resources within the power network.

### **Conclusion**

From the above discussions, it is evident that development as a 'political project' operates through the state where the relationship between the state and citizens are not always linear. Indeterminacy of the state to practice developmental politics is evident where the state maintains certain ambiguity with its citizens and simultaneously implement dispossession and rehabilitation of dispossessed. This indeterminacy serves two purposes. In one way, it facilitates capital accumulation through development and on another way, it maintains its political stability by offering ambiguous trust to the citizens. As an extension of these relations, citizens also maintains heterogeneity of relationships with the state to access developmental outcomes. Hence, conflict politics as a framework to understand

these heterogeneous political relationships between the state and citizens helps us understand the nature of developmental politics and offers a nuanced understanding of conflict beyond binary of dominance vs resistance.

## Bibliography

Allen, J. (2003) *Lost Geographies of Power*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Allen, J. (2009) 'Three spaces of power: territory, networks, plus a topological twist in the tale of domination and authority', *Journal of Power*, 2(2), pp. 197–212.

Brett, E.A. (2009) *Reconstructing Development Theory: International Inequality, Institutional Reform and Social Emancipation*. Macmillan International Higher Education.

Cooke, B. and Dar, S. (2008) 'Introduction: The New Development Management', in Dar, S. and Cooke, B. (eds) *The New Development Management: Critiquing The Dual Modernization*. London and New York: Zed Books, pp. 1–17.

Das, V. (2004) 'The Signature of the State- The Paradox of Illegibility', in Das, V. and Poole, D. (eds) *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 225–252.

Escobar, A. (1992) 'Imagining a Post-Development Era ? Critical Thought , Development and Social Movements', *Social Text*, 31(32), pp. 20–56.

Escobar, A. (2000) 'Beyond the Search for a Paradigm? Post- Development and beyond', *Development*, 43(4), pp. 11–15.

Ferguson, J. and Gupta, A. (2002) 'Spatializing States : Toward an Ethnography of Neoliberal Governmentality', *American Ethnologist*, 29(4), pp. 981–1002.

Gibson-Graham, J. K. (2007) 'Surplus possibilities: post-development and community economies', in Ziai, A. (ed.) *Exploring Post-Development: Theory and Practice, Problems and Perspectives*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 145–162.

Hickey, S. (2009) 'The politics of protecting the poorest: Moving beyond the "anti-politics machine"?', *Political Geography*. Elsevier Ltd, 28(8), pp. 473–483.

Li, T. M. (2000) 'Compromising power: Development, culture, and rule in Indonesia', *Cultural Anthropology*, 13(3), pp. 295–322.

Pile, S. (1997). 'Introduction: opposition, political identities and spaces of resistance' in Pile, S. and Keith, M. (eds) *Geographies of Resistance*. London and New York: Routledge

Ray, R. (2020) *Spatial Adhocism as Practice for Conflict Politics : Theorising Urban Politics in Kolkata*. The Open University.

Robinson, J. (2006) *Ordinary Cities: Between modernity and development*. London and New York: Routledge.

Sharp, J. P. et al. (2000) 'Entanglements of power: geographies of domination/ resistance', in Sharp, J. P. et al. (eds) *Entanglements of power: geographies of domination/ resistance*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 1–42.

Spivak, G. C. (2012) *In Other Worlds: Essays In Cultural Politics*. New York and London: Methuen.

Ziai, A. (2004) 'The ambivalence of post-development: Between reactionary populism and radical democracy', *Third World Quarterly*, 25(6), pp. 1045–1060.

#### **Additional Resources:**

Escobar, A. (2017) 'Designs for the Pluriverse' [online video] Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Ouy7aN6XP&ab\\_channel=TheMonadnock](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Ouy7aN6XP&ab_channel=TheMonadnock)

Featherstone, D. (2008) *Resistance, Space and Political Identities- The Making of Counter-Global Networks*. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell.

Mahadevan, S. and Ijlal, N. (2017) 'Contesting urban citizenship: The urban poor's strategies of state engagement in Chennai, India', *International Development Planning Review*, 39(1), pp. 77–95.

Papaioannou, T. (2014) 'How inclusive can innovation and development be in the twenty-first century?', *Innovation and Development*, 4(2), pp. 187–202.

Papaioannou, T. (2020) 'Reflections on the Entrepreneurial State, Innovation and Social Justice', *Review of Evolutionary Political Economy*. Review of Evolutionary Political Economy.

