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## Expansion of Capital as Development: Does the People's Struggle Provide an Alternative?

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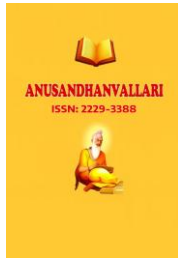
**Abstract:** The struggle against the Coca-Cola plant in Plachimada, in the Palakkad district of Kerala, India, highlighted the livelihood challenges confronted by the residents, chiefly the marginalised sections, when the Coca-Cola plant extracted and depleted the aquifer and polluted the surface water in Plachimada during 2000 – 2005, challenging the people's right to water. 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 and the resultant economic, social and cultural effect on the Adivasis and Dalits, dependent on common property resources. The study will be situated within the more extensive debate on development by the State and Corporations during Neoliberalism. The paper critiques the neo-liberal model of development, the impact of the mass mobilisations by the affected communities and the stance of the governments, which is the principal vehicle for implementing the neoliberal development discourse. After analysing the mass mobilisation by the people under the leadership of the Adivasis, the paper argues that the mobilisations of the people is the sole way to counter the adoption of the hegemonic model of government in neoliberal period.

**Keywords:** Right to water, Neoliberalism, Common Property Resource, Neoliberal Discourse of Development.

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“There is a small well in front of my house. We have been drinking the water from the well all these days. Now, the water is not good. We are not against giving any company a permit or an award. But can you bring the good water back to our well?” (Pariyadath, 2016, pp. xxxvi). The question of late Mayilamma, the leader of the Plachimada struggle, sums up the hardships experienced by the community due to the pollution and depletion of water in the village as a result of the bottling unit of the Coca-Cola Company. Her words, bordering on subdued impotent rage, illuminate the menaces involved in commodifying the global commons. The access to water, free of cost, was a privilege enjoyed by the people of Plachimada. The livelihood of the community is riveted around the availability of water. However, the people of Plachimada had to suffer untold miseries when the water sources were depleted and polluted by a government-facilitated development programme intended for rapid industrialisation and enhancement of gross domestic product. The government believed that the flow of capital, both domestic and foreign, would create employment opportunities and augment technology.

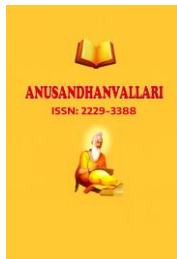
The Coca-Cola Company, which left India in 1977 due to its unwillingness to comply with the norm in the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act that it should divest 40% of the equity to local participants, returned to India in 1993 with the inception of the liberalisation. After its return to India, it commenced subsidiary units in different parts of the country. Accepting the invitation of the Left Democratic Front government in Kerala, the company established a bottling plant in Plachimada in the Palakkad district of Kerala in 1999. Within a short period, the company allegedly guzzled the ground water, depleting it and polluting the surface water resources in Plachimada. Contrary to the hopes about regional development and the people's anticipations, the project despairingly posed a challenge to their livelihoods. The instance quoted at the beginning of this paper demonstrates the subtle ways the Adivasis and Dalits have been dispossessed on the eve of a state-facilitated development project in the village of Plachimada. The Coca-Cola Company was set up on 34.64 acres of land,



which included a multi-cropped paddy field procured at market price from various small landholders. The company constructed the factory after filling the paddy fields. The authorities ignored the violations of the Kerala Land Utilisation Act. The land was converted for industrial purposes with the support of local as well as state governments. The company secured the clearances from the Kerala State Pollution Control Board and District administration, without fully complying with the norms, by using the *Single Window* mechanism, a state industrial promotion initiative, to lure potential investors to Kerala. The state promised rapid development and employment opportunities for the local people at the time of the commencement of the factory to win the confidence of the native population. The company declared its aim to be to quench the thirst of the world and offered decent employment to the people. The company started functioning in March 2000. It produced aerated drinks under various names and sold them in the market. The company guzzled approximately 5 lakhs to 1.5 million litres of water per day, and it continued with slight variations till its closure in 2005. With the commencement of the factory, the marshy lands of Plachimada dried up posing livelihood challenges.

The Adivais of the locality noticed the lowering of the water level in wells and the change in the colour and smell of water within six months after the commencement of production. Though the Adivasis and Dalits pointed out the issue early, it was not seriously taken up by the people or authorities. “The Tragedy of the Commons” by Garret Hardin (1968) initiated discussions on the use of global commons though the essay was primarily about population growth. While critiquing Bentham’s idea of ‘the greatest good for the greatest number’ and Adam Smith’s laissez-faire doctrine, Hardin warned of the depletion of the commons. The essay invigorated introspection in the utilisation of natural resources by human beings in a period of resource degradation. However, the increased dependence on the global commons for development commenced with the adoption of liberalisation as a state policy. Since then, a good number of studies have been conducted on issues linked to global commons, like privatisation of the commons, mobilisations of the people, resistance movements and rehabilitation due to development-induced displacement. Amita Baviskar’s study (1995) on the cultural politics of natural resources has articulated the pitfalls of state-induced developmental projects. The study has problematized the death of a river and the subsequent dispossession of the *Bhilala* Adivasis in the Narmada valley. In her study (2002), Vandana Shiva shows the severity of the water shortage and explains how the World Trade Organisation trade rules have negatively affected the water resources in the world. She explained the disenfranchisement of the marginalised around the globe following the depletion of the earth’s resources at a fast pace. She has elaborated on how people are waging war against corporate tactics to retain the community’s control over water. The study has also exposed the corporate trick of misrepresenting the mobilisations of the people in caste or ethnic lines. Oscar Olivera and Tom Lewis (2004) explain how people regained control over the water supply by throwing out the associate of Bechtel. The dynamics of people’s mobilisation have underlined the need for grassroots-level mobilisation to challenge the neoliberal occupation of the resources of the earth. Erik Swyngedouw (2004) criticised the neoliberal assumption that privatisation of the commons can be a panacea for all social, economic and environmental ills. The study has shown dispossession through accumulation in the context of decollectivisation of water. Alf Gunwald Nilsen (2010) has demonstrated how the local demand for settlement and rehabilitation was transformed into a transnational movement. Sarmistha Pattanaik (2016) discusses water’s ecological, social and cultural context to understand the people’s movement in Chilika Lake in Odisha.

The Plachimada struggle, a landmark grassroots-level mobilisation of the Adivasis and Dalits for justice in the environmental history of Kerala, has been studied by scholars and activists from different angles. C.R Bijoy (2006), while critically examining the challenges posed by the Coca-Cola Company in Plachimada, has cited the absence of a regulatory mechanism regarding the allocation and use of groundwater. The Company has abused the legal entitlement given to Coca-Cola over the 34 acres of land to deplete the aquifers. He has rightly pointed out that governments did not make use of the opportunity through political decisions to protect the commons. Ananthakrishnan Aiyer (2007) has analysed the Plachimada struggle as a reflection of the agrarian distress

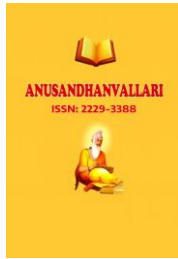


following liberalisation. Though the agrarian crisis is a limited frame in relation to the Plachimada struggle, the challenges posed by deregulation in the agricultural sector have been rightly pointed out by it. K.N Nair, Antony Paul and Vineetha Menon (2008) have highlighted the livelihood challenges and argued that institutional failure is the root cause of the problem. In his study, Dr. P.R. Sreemahadevan Pillai (2008) illustrated how the water was polluted by the actions of the Coca-Cola Company in Plachimada. Ravi Raman (2010) studied how the Adivasi Dalit mobilisation from below was transformed into a global level by connecting with the rest of the world. Ruchi Sree (2010) has critically examined the place of water as a right in contrast to the idea of water as a commodity. Henrik Berglund and Sofia Helander (2015) illustrated the role of civil society in the struggle and explained how the campaign affected the political participation of the Adivasis and Dalits of Plachimada. Raju Narayana Swamy (2017) concentrates on water governance to avoid mismanagement and the perils of water privatisation in the context of national water policy. Privatisation efforts and their effect were the focal point of the study by Mangala Subramanian (2017). She has cited the mobilisation of the people in Flint in Michigan and Plachimada in Kerala and has elucidated the ambivalent position of the state and global forums. Since the aforementioned studies on Plachimada struggle have not adequately analysed the lived experiences of the Adivasis and Dalits, this paper aims to draw from the life experiences of the Adivasis and Dalits of Plachimada from the setting up of the plant to its closure to understand how the already poor have been completely pushed to the fringes by a state-sponsored developmental programme. The lived experiences of the Adivasis and Dalits of Plachimada, collected from the ethnographic study and the other narratives of the state, judiciary, media and civil society will be triangulated to understand how the state creates conditions for accumulation, impacting a spiralling effect on the lives of the poor of the globe. The analysis of the repercussions of the expansion of capital on the lives of the Adivasis and Dalits of Plachimada, who were robbed off with the establishment of the plant would situate the Adivasis and Dalits of the Plachimada as victims of immobile dispossession, a contemporary and tacit form of deprivation. It aims to transcend dispossession by going beyond the conventional understanding of dispossession, as blatant pilfering to invisible, silent violence, dismantling all the constitutional assurances of the Adivasis and Dalits. This dispossession is an immobile form of dislocation affecting generations.

The neoliberal framework of deregulation and privatisation has necessitated the emergence of a new set of assumptions. The shift in policy towards a market economy aided favouring the capitalists, which led to land grabs, forcible expulsion of peasants, and ruthless exploitation of natural resources. The shift that internalised the predatory practices changed the regulatory framework favouring capitalist development. This reorganisation has remodelled Primitive Accumulation to 'Accumulation by Dispossession'. Harvey (2003) states that:

“...These include a wide range of processes like the commodification and privatisation of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant population, conversion of various forms of property rights - commons, collective, state etc. into exclusive private property, suppression of the rights to the common, commodification of the labour power and the suppression of alternative, indigenous forms of production; colonial, neo-colonial and imperial processes of appropriation of assets, including natural resources, monetisation of exchange and taxation, particularly of land, slave trade; and usury, the national debt and ultimately credit... (Harvey, 2003, p. 145)”.

The state is pressurized to oblige to the demands of capital when accumulation by dispossession is set in motion. The state will, either have to facilitate or acquire land for reallocation to companies. The state, therefore, acquires the land of the farmers and the marginalised sections by promising rapid development and enhancement in their lifestyle. The acquired land was either transferred to the companies or converted into special zones where the capital could be invested in profitable ventures. In most cases, the people who lost land were neither compensated nor rehabilitated. To facilitate resistance-free acquisition, the state often acquires the land of the poor and marginalised, throwing the brunt of development on peasants and marginalised



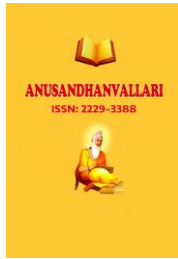
communities. So, the dispossession of the people of Plachimada could be interpreted through the lens of 'Accumulation by Dispossession' as the state colluded with capital in the name of development.

According to the Plachimada High Power Committee report published in 2010, the Plachimada area is comprised of wards 4, 8, and 9 of Perumatty panchayath, with a total area of 14.51 square kilometres. Despite being located in the rain shadow region, Plachimada's groundwater reserve was enough to sustain the local population and agriculture. According to K. Jayakumar, who chaired the High-Power Committee, there are 179 agricultural wells, 2753 open domestic wells, 66 public wells and 37 bore wells in the panchayath. The Adivasis and Dalits of Plachimada lived in three *oors* (tribal habitats), two in Perumatty Panchayath and one in Pattancherry panchayath. The houses were made using baked mud in the small landholding they had. Before the setting up of the plant, life revolved around agriculture and fishing in the marshy paddy fields. Plachimada's development indices are below the Kerala average. The government support extended to them was limited to a Lower Primary school and a Primary Health Centre. They had access to a limited medical facility in the form of a physician in the Primary Health Centre.

The Adivasis and Dalits of Plachimada who were the early migrants from neighbouring Coimbatore were coolies in the paddy fields and coconut plantations. The Adivasis and Dalits are comprised of *Malasar*, *Elavar* and *Cheruman* communities. The people of the locality depended on open wells for domestic and agricultural purposes. In the year 2000, the labourers in the paddy field were employed for Rs. 80/- and Rs. 50/- per day for men and women respectively. They used to get approximately 200 days of work a year. The farmers used to get 10,839 nuts per acre and 3085 k.g rice per hectare (Nair et al, 2008). Despite the caste-ridden hierarchy of exploitation, the farming community led a difficult but uneventful life.

The commencement of the factory signalled a shift in the government's approach towards development in favour of private and global investors in a state that had resisted this for a long period of time. The shift in industrial policy was justified by citing the critique of the 'Kerala model' of development indicating the inability of the state to generate revenue to sustain the development matrix that it had achieved. This change necessitated attracting industries and creating a conducive atmosphere for domestic and foreign capital flow. To facilitate this, the state resolved to address issues of labour militancy, resistance to procurement of land and relaxation in labour norms. Along with this, the privatisation of the production and service sector was pushed aggressively. The state Industrial policies of the post-1990s were designed to make provisions for mechanisms to implement this shift in policy. The state, mainstream media, and the agents of the capital made the people believe that foreign capital would usher in the development of the village.

The red-carpet welcome accorded to the company by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) led Left Democratic government in the state strengthened the belief that foreign capital could facilitate regional development. The state explained that the revenue of the panchayat would go up and it would give more fillip to future developmental projects. The state-centred propaganda claimed that poverty would become a thing of the past once industrialisation gained momentum. The mothers of Plachimada dreamt of their children working in factories in their village, ending their woes and their endless journey to garment factories in Coimbatore for employment. They believed this would further motivate their children to educate themselves better and climb the social ladder. The promise that the dawn of modernisation would ensure quality education, health and improved sanitation facilities in their habitat caught the imagination of the villagers. The small and medium land-owning communities believed the land price would increase due to urbanisation, making them prosperous. Furthermore, people also believed that the opportunities triggered by urbanisation, like the prospects of new commercial establishments, could be great. The Adivasis and Dalits dreamt of getting regular employment in the factory. The majority of the population was initially happy, under the euphoria whipped up over the discourse of development. However, a small section was sceptical about the promises (Bijoy, 2006).

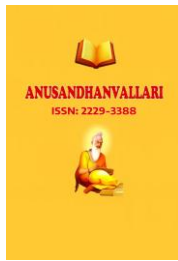


The Adivasis and Dalits who were first hit by the operation of the company registered their protest the Company as well as the policies in a nonviolent and democratic manner. They organised a demonstration in front of the Panchayat office under the leadership of Mayilamma. Within a short period of time, environmental activists extended support to the agitation. On Earth Day in 2002, the Adivasis started a non-stop sit-in before the company demanded its immediate closure. The struggle initiated by the Adivasis grew into a movement as it could attract the attention of civil society groups and environmental activists. The Adivasis' struggle gained momentum, and it became a movement against dispossession. The rationale of the agitation was explained by Late Veloor Swaminathan, "It is a new experience for us that water has become a market commodity. It is alien to our habits. To sell bottled water is unjust and anti-nature" (Vasudevan, 2005). The company ignored the agitation and continued its operations, shattering the livelihood of the native inhabitants. They used all means to crush the agitation. Though the Adivasis and Dalits lodged petitions with the panchayat, district and state administrations, their narrative of their life experiences was rejected. The breach of promises and the disappointment of the people is reflected in the words of the late Mayilamma, the leader of the struggle when she said:

They came to our village with glittering offers; that our people would get ample job opportunities in the plant; the overall development of the village would be taken care of...On the contrary, six months went by, slowly we started facing the reverse effects. Our precious water resources had been stolen (Vasudevan, 2005).

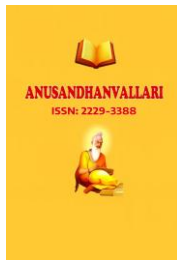
The Adivasis and Dalits who protested demanded the immediate closure of the company. They asked the governments to inquire about the company's clandestine operations. The people also demanded that the company be prosecuted more than demanding compensation for the injustice perpetuated on humanity. However, the resistance generated by the Adivasis and Dalits was dealt with severely by the state and the company. Brute force was used to quell the resistance which questioned the concept of development advanced by the state. The sense of security enjoyed by the villagers was lost as the company employed local goons to threaten the Adivasis and Dalits in a bid to weaken the struggle. The behaviour of the state has been explained by Harvey, quoting Rosa Luxemburg, as it applies force, fraud, oppression and looting are openly displayed without any attempt at concealment. With its monopoly of violence and definitions of legality, the state plays a crucial role in subjugating its citizens (Harvey, 2007. p. 145). Muthulakshmi complained that the agents of the Company had beaten her husband up and threatened to demolish their house. "They had beaten my husband without any reason.... They attacked my house by pelting stones at night to frighten us...But we continued our fight against the company". (Muthulakshmi, personal communication, December 30, 2017) The state looked upon the protestors as enemies. The contractors either sacked or threatened the people who demanded higher wages. The attempt to form a trade union was foiled and a company-sponsored trade union was formed. The mainstream political parties were deeply involved in this process. The cases filed against the Adivasis were aimed at deterring them from participating in the struggle, whereas the cases filed as per the provisions of S.C/S.T Atrocities Prevention Act for assaulting Adivasis were mediated by the local politicians. The course of law, coerced by political power and economic might made it inaccessible for the marginalised communities. In this way, the state facilitated the plunder of natural resources and left it to the company to commodify and later upgrade and speculate (Harvey, 2007).

Initially, the landowning class declined to support the Adivasis and Dalits. The situation further deteriorated within a period of one and half years, as the water table went down significantly; the available water became polluted and the slurry deposited as fertiliser reduced the productivity of the fields. The slurry from the company deposited in the field as fertiliser in the paddy fields destroyed the farming community. Later, the British Broadcasting Corporation reported that an examination of the slurry at the University of Exeter revealed the presence of lead and cadmium in it. People from all sections of society started listening to the agitators and



supported the struggle. The depletion of water, the pollution of the paddy fields and the loss of employment resulted in the dispossession of the Adivasis and Dalits. In spite of the staunch opposition of the state agencies and mainstream political parties, the movement succeeded in closing the Company in 2005. Later, the High Power Committee of Mr. K. Jayakumar found all the allegations raised by the agitators true. As per the recommendations of the committee, a tribunal was set up to claim compensation from the Coca-Cola Company. The power of the Adivasis and Dalits was reduced in favour of the capitalists by the tacit play of the state, and it further augmented the accumulation process by dispossession. Though the Adivasis and Dalits, who felt disenfranchised, were not physically displaced, their livelihood strategies were completely destroyed, as the entire ecosystem services were rendered defunct. Contrary to the promises of the state and expectations of the people, the Adivasis and the Dalits of Plachimada did not get any of the benefits promised or expected. Instead, an ecosystem of people were turned into ecological refugees (Gadgil & Guha).

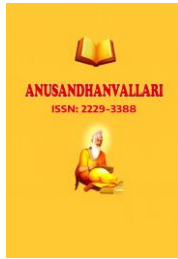
The establishment of the factory and the subsequent pollution and depletion of water converted the Adivasis and Dalits of Plachimada into ecological refugees. The people had to spend more time and energy to manage water for domestic purposes. The women, understandably, were worst hit by the scarcity of water. The strip of land that supported them hitherto was opened for commodity production and could no longer provide livelihood as paddy cultivation came to a halt and coconut production decreased due to soil depletion. The lowering of the water table hurt flora and fauna. Life in Plachimada became miserable, bereft of ecosystem services. But they were forced to live in the same area. The land acquisition for a soft drink plant in Plachimada did not trigger any protest as the company purchased the land from many people through an agent. But the peril of 'enclosure' was felt by the Adivasis when the company erected a huge compound wall, converting it into an access restricted area. Aamina, a native of the Plachimada colony, told the researcher, "Earlier, we used to graze goats in this area. Now, a huge wall has been constructed. Even if we get in, the security personnel threaten us with dire consequences. Now, where shall we go to rear our goats?" (Aamina, personal communication, May 23, 2017) The livestock rearing was initially impacted as the villagers could not take their goats and cows to the restricted premises. The wall directly affected the livelihood of those who collected herbal medicines from the area to be sold in the market. This process of 'Neo enclosure' (De Angelis, 2001) cornered the Dalits and Adivasis of Plachimada into a small area where they could no longer carry out their basic necessities of life. According to Harvey (2006), the separation of the rural poor from the means of production is a hallmark of dispossession through accumulation. This huge compound wall dissociated the company from the local people. The wall also prevented people from taking baths in the pond located inside the company premises. Hamzaveni, a native of Plachimada, told the researcher, "There was a pond here...where we used to take a bath. But it has been filled and they expelled us from here. Now, we walk miles to get a pitcher of water." (Hamzaveni, personal communication, August 3, 2017) The women of Plachimada had to walk three miles in the morning to get water due to the enclosure and subsequent destruction of the water sources. The conversion of the commons into private property and the suppression of the rights to commons become mandatory under this model. When the people starved for water, the Cola Company wasted two litres of water to make one litre of aerated drink. This profound squandering of natural resources affects current and future generations (Araghi, 2010). This happened at a time when the local populace was struggling to get a pot of water for domestic use. In addition, the effluent was diverted to the erstwhile paddy fields. In Plachimada, the company installed a reverse osmosis system two years after the commencement of the factory due to the intervention of the Supreme Court. But the environment had been polluted by that time. The company was hesitant to install this initially as the reduction of the environmental cost would increase production costs and reduce profit. The state as a monitoring agency did not ensure this as they were hand in glove with capital. It has to be assumed that the company was indulging in all these practices with the full knowledge of the impending catastrophe. The restrictions imposed by the factory and the change in land use impoverished the Adivasis and Dalits and effected irreversible changes in their life. While the company squandered water, the people of the locality had to walk kilometres daily to fetch water.



Their difficulties were undermined and unnoticed as they remained in the same place. Changes happened slowly but steadily and the lives of the people changed even without their knowledge.

The soft drink company in Plachimada operated only for five years. It guzzled 5 lakh to 1.5 million litres of groundwater daily for five years, making the people in the neighbourhood suffer water stress (Ayer, 2007, p. 643). Pazhanaanthal of Plachimada colony said, “We used to get enough and more water from the wells of Aaruchami Kownder, the landlord, who lived adjacent to the factory and from whose well people used to take water. We also used to take water when he switched on the motor pump to irrigate the coconut plantation. But after the company’s arrival, some of the wells dried up completely, and the water in the remaining was spoiled.” (Pazhanaanthal, personal communication, May 27, 2018) The commodification of water, according to Harvey, resulted in the escalating depletion of the global environmental commons and proliferating habitat degradation that precludes anything but capital-intensive modes of agricultural production. (Harvey, 2007, p 148) However, the company was unmindful of the ecological disaster it created, and it continued its operations amidst protests with the support of the state. The lives of the indigenous communities have been impacted while the company attempted to convert water into a value-added product. The company was crueller to the Adivasis than the feudal land owner, who, though they exploited them, permitted them to take water for domestic purposes. The absence of water forced them to lead a miserable life. As they were poor, they could not even think of relocating to another location.

The change in the quality and availability of water also affected employment opportunities. The operation of the company not only reduced the existing employment avenues but also created new openings for the people of the locality. Veluchami, a middle-aged man who lived in the Plachimada colony, described the double oppression, “Due to the scarcity of water, farmers stopped the practice of planting two crops a year. The working days dwindled. Nobody from our family was employed in the factory also”. (Veluchami, personal communication, December 21, 2017) Those employed for the construction of the factory and its premises were employed on a contractual basis and were subjected to various exploitations by the local contractors. After setting up the plant, the company hired labourers from different parts of the country. They employed only two people from the locality in the company. The rest of the work was given on a contractual basis. The local politicians turned contractors employed a couple of people from the locality. The promise of ‘decent’ employment was not kept as the contractual workers were not entitled to any privileges and had to work long hours for low wages. This happened because accumulation by dispossession releases a set of assets (including labour power) at meagre cost. Over-accumulated capital can seize hold of such assets and immediately turn them to profitable use (Harvey, 2007, p. 149). The commodification of the labour enabled the company to treat the Adivasis and Dalits like an industrial reserve army. The hired labourers and Adivasis were denied the labour rights citing the availability of plenty of skilled labourers and lack of professional skills. Both were exploited for different reasons. The promises of decent employment and regional development had long been forgotten. Those who raised questions were met with iron fists. Neither the company nor the state could deliver any of the promises of more employment opportunities, an increase in the people's income and the region's rapid development. Contrary to this, water, a common property resource was depleted and polluted within a short period of time. The disillusionment of the people in Plachimada is clear in the words of Ambika, a non-Adivasi, who lived in the colony and participated in the struggle when she said, “...the dream of our children working in Plachimada itself...either in the Coca Cola factory or in the companies that were expected to come after Cola, did not materialise. Our children continued going to go to cotton mills in Coimbatore and our misery only doubled”. (Ambika, personal communication, May 4, 2017) The youngsters in a focus group discussion conducted by the researcher were livid when they spoke about the shallow promises of decent jobs to them. They were not only given employment but were brutally lathi-charged when they protested against the company in a democratic manner. The change in the employment pattern was followed by health distress created by the sustained contact with the polluted water for the communities. The state's role in violating the right to clean water and subjugating

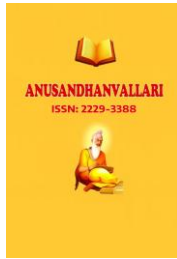


the labour norms is evident. The income of the Adivasi and Dalit families declined rapidly, affecting all spheres of life. These actions made them victims of immobile dispossession.

Amaravathy of the Plachimada colony, who participated in the struggle as a young woman, said, "...We were poor, but now, we have lost everything. Our children are perpetually sick; every day we have to take them to hospitals, they have stopped going to school". (Amaravathi, personal communication, April 9, 2018) The daily travails of their existence were described by Thankavelu, son of Mayilamma, "We suffered a lot...the contact with the water resulted in losing hair and itching in different parts of the body". (Thankavelu, personal communication, April 27, 2017) Initially, The administration hesitated to listen to them, but the medical reports later testified that prolonged use of the polluted water had caused dermatological problems. The study of Hazards Center (2006) New Delhi identified the presence of a heavy concentration of cadmium, chromium and lead in the water samples collected from Plachimada. The Center found that the water sources were contaminated and revealed that even if a human did not consume the contaminated water, the hazardous chemicals could still make it into the human body. It also warned that the chemicals entered into the human body will be biomagnified, causing more harm in the long run (2006). The report has highlighted all the hardships that the community had to endure. The men and women who used to work relentlessly under the sun's scorching heat reported fatigue and inability to engage in hard labour. Instances of miscarriage among the women of the locality and cases of weight loss among children became frequent. The threat posed by the destruction of the biosphere and its impact on health is evident in the statement of Kanniyamma, who is leading the struggle after the death of Mayilamma when she said, "My granddaughter gave birth to two kids. After a few months, one died and the doctors told us that the boy had no kidney". Men are unwilling to marry girls from our *oors* (tribal habitat) as they fear that children will have no kidney..." (Kanniyamma, personal communication, May 29, 2018). The fear of health hazards ostracized the community further. The life of Adivasis had turned worse than what it was earlier. The continued use of the water resulted in rashes all over the body. Diarrhoea and hair fall became common among the tribal habitats, and children complained of irritable bowels and a burning sensation in the eyes. The sudden change in the quality of water and its impact on nutrient cycling further impoverished the Adivasis and Dalits. Though polluting the water source of the Adivasis and Dalits is a punishable offence as per Indian law, no action was initiated against the company even after giving complaints in writing. The inaction of the state for the capital stripped off the basic rights of the Adivasis and Dalits.

Daily life became miserable as the Adivasis and Dalits were left with the only option of using the available water, which was polluted. "The food we prepared began to give off a foul smell within two hours of cooking and the porridge had lost all the flavour it had earlier... We couldn't give this food to children when they go to school...They stopped taking food to school", complained Saanthi, who participated in the struggle as a young woman. (Saanthi, personal communication, December 28, 2017) They could not keep the food prepared in the polluted water for long. Children who carried lunch boxes from home returned without lunch, for the food became stale within a couple of hours, thanks to the poor water quality. The reports published by *Jananeethi*, a non-governmental organisation, cited this as a reason for the ill health of the local children. The children either stopped or became irregular in schools as education ceased to be a priority when the family's survival was questioned. The medical aid available in the village also vanished when Coca-Cola hired the only physician in the village to look after their employees. The health standards of the people declined and the women had to walk kilometres to fetch a pitcher of water. The state, which was bound by law to protect the health and education of the Adivasis and Dalits, was muted, paving the way for capital expansion. The children were denied the right to health and education. The model of development advanced by the state proved to be disastrous for the already marginalised communities.

The scarcity of water altered the cultural sphere of the Adivasis and Dalits. The annual festivals of drowning the effigy of the Goddess of fertility stopped due to water stress. Their slogan was that *one bowl of rice and one*

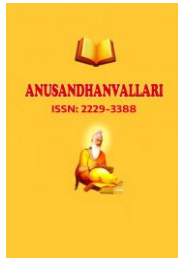


*pitcher of water* indicate the severity of the water crisis in the region. All the rituals performed in the families came to a halt as the women who made the preparations for the rituals were in the pandal, day in and day out, fighting against the company. The discussions in the *oorkkootam* were limited to the ways of organising protests against the company. In addition to this, the continuous police barricade in the village restricted the freedom of the people. They had to obtain prior sanction for festivals, which was quite challenging then. Sakthivel, who has worked for a short period on a contractual basis in the company said, “Police will ask a lot of questions about festivals and compel us to give answers in writing...Even if we give in writing, permission will be denied, sometimes without any reason.” (Sakthivel, personal communication, December 22, 2017).

The protest initiated by the Adivasis challenged the basic assumption held by the agents of Neoliberalism. It demolished the myth that development would trickle down. It raised valid questions about the feasibility of the model as it is not sustainable, both ecologically and economically. The protest send a message that an MNC would be forced to shut down the factory when it challenges the basic rights of the people. The protest demanded the emergence of a pro people development strategy which is sustainable. The demands of the people forced governments at least halt or pause the Neoliberal development strategy. The State also realised that creating conditions for the expansion of capital will not be an enduring model of development, as it is not inclusive and just.

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