

# War, Economic Catastrophe and Environmental Degradation. Under the Guise of Progress and Development

## Poverty and Despair in India

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*Indian finance minister P.Chidambaram once claimed that his government's policies were pro growth and pro equity (1). He talked of alleviating poverty in India 'in our lifetime' by implementing the type of development policies currently being pursued. The minister envisages 85 percent of India's population eventually living in well-planned cities with proper access to water, health, electricity, education, etc. Based on today's population size, which is set to continue to rise, that would mean at least 600 million moving to cities. He stated that urbanisation constitutes 'natural progress'.*

The type of urbanisation being pursued in India is not 'natural', however, nor does it represent 'progress'. It has thus far been largely based on unconstitutional land takeovers, the trampling of democratic rights, increasing and unsustainable resource usage and air and water pollution. But for Chidambaram and other supporters of cronyism, cartels and the manipulation of markets (2,3,4), which all go under the guise of economic 'neo-liberalism', such processes increase the amount of money flowing around the economy, which therefore increases the GDP figure and thus represent progress. In this respect, chopping down an ancient forest and selling the timber represents progress, and removing people's access to traditional lands by handing them to corporations to somehow make cash profits from is also positive.

This warped notion of development has seen the poverty alleviation rate in India remain around the same as it was back in 1991 or even in pre-independence India (0.8 percent) (5), while the ratio between the top and bottom ten percents of the population has doubled during this period. According to the Organisation for Co-operation and Economic Development, this doubling of income inequality has made India one of the worst performers in the category of emerging economies (6).

This is the type of development being forced through by Indian politicians on behalf of national and international elite interests via the World Bank, WTO, and the G8, etc, and it is based on the idea that shifting people from agriculture to what are a number of already overburdened, filthy, polluted mega-cities to work in factories, clean the floors of a shopping mall or work as a security guard improves the human condition; or, more realistically, to live in slum-like conditions and be unemployed or underemployed, given that hundreds of millions are to be booted from the land to achieve Chidambaram's 85 percent urbanisation figure.

Urbanisation is being forced through by what Vandana Shiva says is the biggest forced removal of people from their lands in history and involves one of the biggest illegal land grabs since Columbus, according to a 2009 report commissioned by the rural development ministry and chaired by the then minister Raghuvansh Prasad Singh.

In the West, urbanisation was not 'natural' and involved the unforeseen outcomes of conflicts and struggles between serfs, lords, peasants, landowners, the emerging bourgeoisie and class of industrialists and the state. The outcomes of these struggles resulted in different routes to modernity and levels of urbanisation (7,8).

Similar struggles are now taking place in India. The naxalites and Maoists in India are referred to by the dominant class as left wing extremists who are exploiting the poor. How easy it is to cast legitimate protesters together and create an 'enemy within'. How easy it is to ignore the state-corporate extremism across the world that results in the central state abdicating its responsibilities by submitting to the tenets of the Wall Street-backed 'structural adjustment' pro-privatisation policies, free capital flows, massive profits justified on the basis of 'investment risk' and unaccountable cartels which aim to maximise profit by beating down labour costs and grabbing resources at the cheapest possible costs. That's the real nature of extremism. It is the type of extremism that is regarded as anything but by the mainstream media.

Powerful corporations are spearheading the agenda for 'development' in India and have been handed the rights to this process via secretive Memorandums of Understanding. The full military backing of the state is on hand to forcibly evict peoples from their land in order to fuel a wholly unsustainable model of development that strips the environment bare and ultimately negatively impacts the climate and ecology.

Moreover, due to the restructuring of agriculture in favour of Western agribusiness, over 250,000 farmers have committed suicide in India since 1997. And yet the corporate-controlled type of agriculture being imposed only leads to bad food, bad soil, bad or no water, bad health and bad or falling yields (9,10,11,12). Unconstitutional land grabs for SEZs, resource extraction, nuclear plants and other projects have additionally forced many others from the land.

With GDP growth slowing and automation replacing human labour the world over in order to decrease labour costs and boost profit, just where are the jobs going to come from to cater for India's increasing population, never mind hundreds of millions of former agricultural workers?

To push through the type of progress and development Chidambaram wants, it is clear that farmers represent a 'problem' to be removed from the land and a problem to be dealt with once removed. Food producers, the genuine wealth producers of a nation, only became a problem when Western agribusiness was given the green light to take power away from farmers and uproot traditional agriculture in India and recast it in its own profiteering, corporate-controlled image. This is who is really setting the 'development' agenda. The processes involved constitute the 'progress' and 'natural' move towards depopulating rural areas that Chidambaram spoke of.

If it can't be done via mass suicide and making it economically non-viable to continue farming as a result of world trade policies, 'free' trade agreements and 'structurally adjusting' (plundering) traditional agricultural practices and economies to ultimately ensure

petro-chemical farming (and thus oil and the US dollar (13) remains king, let tens of thousands of militia into the tribal areas to displace hundreds of thousands, place 50,000 in camps and carry out rapes and various human rights abuses (14,15).

If anyone perceives that this 'natural progress' is not based on acquiescing to foreign corporations, they should take a look at the current corporate-driven, undemocratic free trade agreement being hammered out behind closed doors between the EU and India (16,17,18). It all adds up to powerful trans-national corporations trying to by-pass legislation that was implemented to safeguard the public's rights. Kavaljit Singh of the Madhyam research institute argues that we could see the Indian government being sued by multinational companies for billions of dollars in private arbitration panels outside of Indian courts if national laws, policies, court decisions or other actions are perceived to interfere with their investments; this is already a reality in many parts of the world whereby legislation is shelved due to even the threat of legal action by corporations (19). Such free trade agreements cement the corporate ability to raid taxpayers' coffers even further via unaccountable legal tribunals, or to wholly dictate national policies and legislation.

Of course, the links between the Monsanto/Syngenta/Walmart-backed Knowledge Initiative on Agriculture and the US sanctioning and backing of the opening up of India's nuclear sector to foreign interests (on the back of a cash for votes scandal in parliament (20)) have already shown what the models of 'development' being pushed onto people really entails in terms of the erosion of democracy and the powerful corporate interests that really benefit (21,22).

Industrial developments built with public money and strategic assets, such as energy sources, ports, airports and seeds and infrastructure support for agriculture are being sold off. And how is this all justified? By the amount of cash sloshing around the formal economy (notwithstanding the massive amounts of money being siphoned off via corrupt deals and hidden from public gaze) and the reference to GDP growth - a single, warped, narrow definition of 'development' - a notion of development hijacked by economists and their secular theology which masquerades as economic 'science'.

Do people really believe India's future lies in tying itself to a corrupt, moribund system that has so patently failed in the West and can now only sustain itself by plundering other countries via war or 'free trade' agreements, which have little if anything to do with free trade? At best, it shows a lack of foresight. At worst, it displays complete subservience to elite interests at home and abroad.

Finally, if anyone perceives the type of 'development for all' being sold to the masses is actually possible in the first instance, they should note that 'developing' nations account for more than 80 percent of world population, but consume only about a third of the world's energy. US citizens constitute 5 percent of the world's population, but consume 24 percent of the world's energy. On average, one American consumes as much energy as two Japanese, six Mexicans, 13 Chinese, 31 Indians, 128 Bangladeshis, 307 Tanzanians and 370 Ethiopians (23).

The Earth is 4.6 billion years old and if you scale this to 46 years then humans have been here for just four hours. The Industrial Revolution began just one minute ago, and in that time, 50% of the Earth's forests have been destroyed (24). Forests are just part of the problem. We are using up oil, water and other resources much faster than they can ever be

regenerated. We have also poisoned the rivers, destroyed natural habitats, driven some wildlife species to extinction and altered the chemical composition of the atmosphere - among many other things.

Levels of consumption were unsustainable, long before India and other countries began striving to emulate Western levels and high energy use. The current model of development is based on a totally misguided dream; or, to put it another way, a deceitful ideology that attempts to justify and sell a system that is designed to fail the majority of the global population and benefit the relative few (25).

Capitalism has for a long time succeeded in making most people blind to the chains that bind and which make them immune to the falsehoods that underpin the system. This wasteful, high-energy system is tied to what ultimately constitutes the plundering of peoples and the planet by powerful transnational corporations. And, as we see all around us, the outcome is endless conflicts over fewer and fewer resources. Such conflicts are likely to gather pace as wars are not only fought to grab resources, but are also manufactured in order to destroy states from within by fomenting civil wars and thus destabilize economies and reduce demand for resources (26). The outcome is also environmental destruction and an elitist agenda being forwarded by rich eugenicists who voice concerns over there being 'simply too many mouths': those mouths would only take food from their rich bellies - bellies that long ago became bloated from the fat of the land, lucrative wars and the misery brought about by economic exploitation. The super rich who currently run the world regard most of humanity as a problem to be 'dealt with' (27).

Finally, it is worth considering that the US as a nation and its oligarchs in particular achieved the level of affluence that they did more by way of 'gansterism', not by 'freedom and democracy' or 'free market' economics as that nation's leaders like to tell the world. That much was admitted by the late Major General Smedley Butler, the US's most decorated marine: he listed various corporations on whose behalf he fought for during his various military campaigns (28). Of course, little has changed since Smedley wrote about his experiences in 1935.

Maybe Smedley's description of this aspect of the US's route to 'development' are what certain Indian politicians really respect, as the strong (and soft) arm of the state works to secure access to the nations resources for powerful corporations.

## Notes

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- 14) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salwa\\_Judum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salwa_Judum)
- 15) <http://www.infochangeindia.org/human-rights/no-mans-land/caught-between-the-maoists-and-the-salwa-judum.html>
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- 17) <http://corporateeurope.org/trade/2013/05/court-ruling-over-privileged-access-business-eu-india-free-trade-talks>
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- 20) [http://archive.tehelka.com/story\\_main49.asp?filename=Ne020411Coverstory.asp](http://archive.tehelka.com/story_main49.asp?filename=Ne020411Coverstory.asp)
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