

Rethinking Development, Welfare and Culture in India

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India is now one of the fastest growing economies in the world, with a high rate of development activities. The term 'development' as conceptualised in the Indian economy is problematic; it places more emphasis on the financial rather than the human aspects of development. The globalisation-led development and consequent displacement is creating poverty at a faster rate than it is alleviating it. The problems created by development activities are copious in number and enormous in magnitude. The current policies of development are biased towards infrastructure rather than services, towards big cities rather than small cities and rural settlements, towards already developed areas rather than backward areas, and finally, these policies are privileging richer communities and dispossessing the poor from their rights to land and basic services. Thus, the gap between the haves and have-nots is continuously growing, and an increasing proportion of the population is moving down below the poverty line. The new economic forces are reshaping landscapes throughout the length and breadth of the country.

In these hyper-activities of growth and development, there emerges a crisis of equity and environment. The increasing population is placing greater demands on finite resources of the earth and consequently impacting the environment, making the future of the earth unsustainable. In the process of development, both the physical and cultural landscapes are being re-shaped. The human intervention on rivers, in the name of management for multipurpose development activities, is changing the physical and cultural landscapes in the river basins. The land, water, forest and energy sectors are all facing major resource crises. To cope with the increasing demands of these resources, the environment is deteriorating as it now exceeds the limit of any homeostatic mechanism for efficient recovery. The globalisation-led intervention of multinational companies has changed the nature of resource use and has increased the pre-existing regional inequality and disparity largely. Climate change and natural disasters are occurring at a higher rate, impacting the livelihoods of millions of people, the majority of whom are poor.

In the process of new global order development, the gaps between the rural and urban as well as the rich and poor are increasing. Development programmes are more oriented to the time-bound, specific projects funded by outside agencies like the World Bank and DFID. Continuous development activities are non-existent, thus raising the question of equity. The distribution of resources and services are skewed in nature, pushing marginal communities further towards the periphery of power and development. However, one positive aspect of Indian democracy has emerged in recent years—the protection of rights of the citizens in different spheres of life, starting from the right to information and education, to work and food.

For the second issue of 'Space and Culture, India', we decided to include a variety of articles from various disciplines, thereby developing a common platform for interactions between scholars who are working on diverse questions related to India. This issue looks into matters of development, rights and movements, and equity, besides presenting an ethnographic analysis of the cultural geomorphology of river islands and a comparative analysis of Shakespearean performances in India and East Ger-

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many. Benjamin looks into the uneven urban development under globalised forces, which bypasses the less developed regions and increases the levels of regional inequality between Northeast India and other parts of mainland India. Bezbaruah analyses different aspects of India's National Food Security Act. He suggests that more emphasis should be given to the implementation mechanism and suitable measures be taken to mitigate the apprehended undesirable consequences of the Food Security Bill, to ensure social welfare of the poor.

Economic development and laws are not enough for equity and justice to all sections of society. Borpatragohain explains how, in spite of having efficient laws to protect the rights of women to live with dignity, social factors like male dominance, discrimination, subjugation and exploitation create obstacles and inhibit the law. The social health of the Indian democracy is deteriorating in all aspects, which he has labelled as a *multiple organ failure*. He argues that appropriate implementation of the law can be one of the solutions, but cannot be the sole solution to the problem of the continuous rise of violence against women. This viewpoint also expresses concern and stresses the need for a collective effort to bring about an appropriate attitudinal change for all Indians.

Namami Sharma's article explains the importance of movement to ensure the protection of rule of law, without which Borpatragohain opined that even efficient laws are insufficient. This article traces the story of a social actor who is providing constant support to the Baiga tribes of Madhya Pradesh for the people's struggle for resource rights in the area. This article illustrates how a generous effort can help marginal people to fight with and to win over the powerful state machinery, to protect their own resources and livelihood. Binary divisions and dualism within disciplines often undermine the worth of research and teaching of the subject and put the discipline in a problematic situation. Sahariah et al. explain how natural and cultural phenomena are interlinked in the development of *Satra* (Vaishnavite monasteries) in the Majuli Island, and challenge the binary division of geomorphology and cultural geography as absolutely separate sub-disciplines within the field of Geography. The article explains the cultural geomorphology of the development of *satra* in Majuli Island, where the boundaries between physical and cultural landscapes are getting blurred, and giving rise to the concept of landscapes, which can never be identified as either physical or cultural.

The research article by Dhurjjati Sarma makes a comparative study of the Shakespearean appropriations in late 19th century India under colonial rule on one hand, and in mid-20th century (East) Germany on the other. The article argues that the process of globalisation should be intercultural; that is, the *praxis* or the substance of the plot or action should be assessed on its variable adaptability to new contexts and situations. According to Sarma, the validity of Shakespeare studies in the 21st century lies not merely in the assessment of the extent to which a Shakespearean translation or an adaptation departs from the 'original' text, but also in re-examining the new meanings which are generated in the process. In the publication watch, this issue shares a long list of publications, both from the web and print sources, on different matters related to India.