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# Development And Marginalisation: A Study Of The Bcpl Plant

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## ABSTRACT

Development is a multi dimensional phenomenon which includes every aspect of human life. Development projects are meant for the development of the society as a whole but in the recent times many development projects have been found to have adverse implications on the human security for certain groups of people. The benefits of the development projects are not equal to everyone. The Brahmaputra Cracker and Polymer Limited (BCPL) project is also assumed to have all round development for the whole society but it has adverse impact. The BCPL project has resulted in the loss of residential place of more than 500 families and most of the people are from the tea garden labourer community. It has also threatened the livelihood of the marginalized community who are living in the adjacent areas. People who were displaced from their houses were promised to resettle them to other places, but till now no initiative has been taken for the re-settlement of these people by the concerned authority. Thus, it becomes important to discuss the impact of developmental projects and industries on the livelihood security of the concerned communities who are solely dependent on particular engagements like fishing, agriculture, or similar professions. The lives of many people are at risk after the sudden act of establishing industries affecting their source of livelihood without adopting regenerative measures to manage the accumulated waste and developing alternative avenues for survival. This paper tries to analyse the negative impact of BCPL plant on the livelihood of marginalized community.

**Keywords:** Development, Marginalize, BCPL, Livelihood, Displacement, Community.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Developmental projects are implemented with the purpose of making positive changes in human life, for developing the economic and social well-being of all the sections of society, specifically the weak, poor and vulnerable. The chief intention of developmental projects is to accommodate the aspirations and grievances of the marginalized section, so that they can also be elevated to the level of other fellow beings. Such projects are executed to realize the ideals of democracy like equality and rights, to empower the deprived section by providing income avenues and alternative sources of livelihood. However, there are instances when the developmental projects have threatened the livelihood security of the marginalized communities. It has been observed that the spurt

in developmental projects give rise to apprehension among the people residing in the adjacent areas because of many reasons. They become worried about their future due to the fear of eviction, displacement, erosion and negative consequences and externalities. In this regard, the strategic location of a particular developmental plant may also become an issue of concern, contestation and tension.

The establishment of the Assam Gas Cracker Project was agreed upon in the Assam Accord, which was signed on August 15, 1985 between the Union Government of India and the All Assam Student Union (AASU) and All Assam Gana Sangram Prishad, who together led the Assam Movement during the late 1970s and early 1980s. The main demand of the movement was to deport the illegal foreign migrants entering into Assam from Bangladesh in order to protect the identity of the Assamese people, but the movement was fueled by the perception of underdevelopment of Assam, people felt that they were not getting dues, despite the region being rich in natural resources, because of the step motherly treatment by the Union Government to of India.<sup>1</sup>

Brahmaputra Cracker and Polymer Limited (BCPL) has been set up a Petrochemical Complex at Lepetkata, Dibrugarh. The complex is spread over 3030 (999.9 acar) Bighas of land at Lepetkata, and is situated at approximately 15 Kilometers away from the Tea City Dibrugarh, Assam. Dr. Manmohan Singh, Honorable Prime Minister of India laid the foundation stone of this project on 9th April, 2007. The plant was inaugurated on 2nd January 2016 by the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Narendra Modi and he dedicated BCPL Petrochemical Complex to the nation on 5<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2016.<sup>2</sup>

The BCPL plant was established aiming at the socio-economic development of the entire North Eastern Region of India. It produces petrochemical products which will contribute in developing a market for petrochemical products mainly in North-east region of India. The project is expected to give a boost to further investments in downstream plastic processing industries and allied activities with a potential for substantial direct and indirect employment generation. The petrochemical complex would comprise a gas separation plant, cracker unit, downstream polymer and integrated off-site and utilities plants. The complex has been configured with a capacity

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1. Sarma Dilip, Madhurjya Prasad Bezbaruah, Geeta Gudihal and Nayan Jyoti Bhuyan, "Conflict and Development in the Context of Human Security in Northeast India", In Acharya Amitav, Rajaretnam M, Singhdeo Subrat Kumar (Ed), "*Human Security: From Concept to practice-Case Studies from North-East India and Orissa*", World Scientific Publishing Co. Pvt Ltd, Singapore, 2011.

2. *Overview, Brahmaputra Cracker and Polymer Limited*, retrieved 29/12/2016 from <http://www.bcplonline.co.in/content.php?pageNo=1&pageid=24&SubpageNo=1>

of 2.20 lakhs Tones annually of ethylene and 60,000 Tons annually of propylene with natural gas and naphtha as feedstock.<sup>3</sup>

Various ranges of polymers, manufactured by Brahmaputra Crackers and Polymer Limited can be used in different applications in sectors such as packaging injection, raffia, and blow molding. This, in turn, is expected to boost the supply of different end use products like water storage tanks, household items, house-wares, crates, buckets and packaging materials, woven sacks for packaging of fertilizers and cement, containers for edible oil and chemicals in the North Eastern states. These products will be marketed which has a wide marketing network in the country and has approximately 21 percent share in domestic polyethylene market.<sup>4</sup>

The present study attempts to scrutinize the impact of developmental projects on livelihood security of the fishing fraternity of Lezai-Kolakhowa area of Dibrugarh district, who have been facing persistent threat from the Brahmaputra Crackers and Polymer Limited, a Government of India initiative.

## **2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Walter Fernandez and Gita Bharali (2011)<sup>5</sup> make an overall study of the development-induced displacement in the eight states of the North-East India. They extensively dealt with the various projects of government of India which have created internal displacement and threatened the livelihood security of the people. They have made specific study on the displacement of people due to the construction of dams, establishment of industries, formation of national parks and sanctuaries, development of infrastructure, urban development etc. They state that the resettlement and rehabilitation of the displaced persons is very low and people are displaced from their homes without any physical relocation. Most of the displaced persons are tribal people for whom land is the main source of livelihood but due to the displacement from their homes they lost their lands as well as their source of livelihood.

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<sup>3</sup>. *BCPL: Glorious catalyst of Hope for the North East*. Retrieved on 30/12/2016, from <http://www.nelive.in/north-east/business/bcpl-glorious-catalyst-hope-north-east>

<sup>4</sup>. *PM Narendra Modi dedicates twin important projects to nation*, Staff report, 5<sup>TH</sup> Feb 2016, retrieved on 20/12/2016 from <http://www.eastern-today.com/entries/editorial/bcpl-magnificent-spark-of-hope-for-the-north-east>

<sup>5</sup> Fernandez, Walter and Bharali, Gita, "Uprooted For Whose Benefit? Development-Induced Displacement in Assam 1947-2000", North-Eastern Social Research Centre, Guwahati, 2011.

Monirul Hussain (2008)<sup>6</sup> focuses on development-induced displacement of population in the North-East region in the post colonial period. He stresses that despite state-sponsored development initiative, the North-East still remains highly underdeveloped and politically disturbed. Various development projects initiated by the state led to massive displacement of population within the region, which have virtually gone unnoticed. Manirul Hussain questioned the existing pattern of development which has been very much biased and unequal in its manifestation. Consequently, he also discussed about the popular resistance movement that have taken place. Hussain states that the people have been demanding the inclusion of human rights, human dignity and justice besides popular grass root level participation in the planning and implementation of development agenda.

Dr. Harshas S. (2011)<sup>7</sup> has discussed how the mainstream theories and models have overlooked the environmental concerns and the question of sustainability. Most of the theories emphasize on the economic growth and stagnation, conflict, inter class exploitation and alienation, unequal international exchange and dependency but overlooked the issues like resource depletion, environment pollution and ecological predicaments that weakens the very foundation of human progress. Dr. Harshas also stated that during the past two decades the state-centered paradigm of development has shifted to more market driven perspective. In this regard he refers to the example of Latin America where old views of development are challenged by the neo-liberal ideologies. The impact of the neo-liberals is more dangerous because it causes more environmental pollution, encourages consumption of environmentally hazardous production, worsening the greenhouse effect, ozone layer depletion etc.

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<sup>6</sup> Hussain, Monirul, “Interrogating Development: State, Displacement And Popular Resistance In North East India” SAGE Publication India Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Harsha, S., “Contemporary Development Paradigm and Sustainability” in Dibyajyoti Dutta and Jutika Ratna Saikia (eds), ‘Environment And Development: Emerging Issues And Debates’, Planet ink, 2011.

Amartya Sen (1999)<sup>8</sup> explores the relationship between freedom and development where freedom is the basic constituent of development. Freedom is both constitutive of development and instrumental to it. Instrumental freedom includes political freedom, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency and security which are all different but inter-connected. Sen suggests focussing on substantive human freedom and he argues for a broad view of freedom that encompasses both processes and opportunities and for recognition of the heterogeneity of distinct components of freedom. Sen also stresses upon the capability deprivation as a better measure of poverty than low income, because it can capture aspects of poverty hidden by income measures.

The hand book “Concern worldwide livelihood policy”, (June 2003)<sup>9</sup> discusses about the right to livelihood security and its various approaches which deal with the concept of livelihood security. It states that a livelihood is the means by which a person or household makes a living over time. The hand book has provided information regarding various articles related to livelihood security which are enshrined in United Nation and other allied agencies. The right to a secure livelihood is enshrined in several UN charters, most notably in the International Covenant on Economic, Cultural, and Social Rights and in the Declaration on the Right to Development .Livelihood security approaches have evolved from thinking about the root causes of food insecurity.

John Cameron (2011)<sup>10</sup> elaborately discusses about the Social Cost Benefit Analysis (SCBA). Social cost benefit analysis was originally developed in the 1960s in response to continuing demands on the State to build basic infrastructure. Cameron also stated that this technique was prompted by the growing confidence in a mixed economy with associated widespread market prices, innovations in electronic data processing capacity, and shortage of investable savings and international purchasing power. Originally, the social cost-benefit analysis was developed by Little & Mirrlees and

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<sup>8</sup> Sen, Amartya, “Development As Freedom”, Oxford University Press, London, 1999.

<sup>9</sup> [www.concern.net](http://www.concern.net).

<sup>10</sup> Cameron, John, ‘Social Cost-Benefit Analysis’ <http://www.who.int/water-sanitation-health/publication/2011/ch11.pdf>.Retrived on 13/06/2016.

UNIDO that gave answers to a number of technical questions in pricing costs and benefits. This gave economists the apparent power to make a comparative appraisal of any developmental activity against an international standard in terms of their net benefits to the global human condition.

### **3. OBJECTIVE**

The objective of the study is to examine the impact of developmental projects on the livelihood of people. It attempts to examine how the developmental projects threaten their livelihood security by making hazardous pollution of the river life.

### **4. METHODOLOGY**

This research paper is based on both primary data and secondary data. A comprehensive survey is carried out in order to find out the impact of BCPL on the lives of the people particularly of the fishing community of Lezai-Kolakhowa area. Secondary data are collected from books, journals, research papers, annual reports of different government agencies, websites etc. The research work is both qualitative and quantitative in orientation. It is carried out by adopting empirical and analytical methods.

### **5. DISCUSSION**

#### **5.1 Lezai-Kolakhowa: Most affected areas due to the pollution of Sessa River-**

The Lezai- Kolakhowa area consists of two Panchayats (Primary tier of Rural Local Self Government) i.e. Lezai panchayat and Kolakhowa panchayat. These are the immediate adjacent areas of the BCPL plant. The inhabitants of these two areas are mostly scheduled caste and scheduled tribe people and their primary source of income is fishing. Thus, the pollution and contamination of the river water of the Sessa directly impacts the people of the Lezai-Kolakhowa area.

People of both the panchayats are basically engaged in agriculture, fishing and other allied activities. People living in the area speak Assamese, Bengali, Mising, Bodo and Tea Tribe languages. After its commissioning, it is reported that the BCPL plant has affected many villages of Lezai-Kolakhowa area. The alleged dumping of BCPL produced wastage in the Sessa river in turn has affected the people who are dependent on the river for their livelihood. Some affected villages of Lezai-Kolakhowa area are - 1. Bordoibam, 2. Dewanbari Gaon No.1, 3. Dewanbari Koibarta Gaon No.1, 4. Dewanbari Koibarta Gaon No.2, 5. Lezai Gaon, 6. Lezai Miripathar 7. Lezai Matak Gaon No. 8. Pani Gaon No.1, 9. Kolakhowa Gajai Gaon, 10. Sessakuch No.1, 11. Sessa Kuch No.2, 12. Sessakuch No. 3.

The strategic location of the BCPL plant has been a reason of difficulty for the river side people. Even before its inception, during the land acquisition process for the project, 500 families have lost their residential plots and farm lands. Adding to this, after its commissioning the BCPL residues and wastes are being dumped in the Sessa river, because of its proximity and lack of other alternative dumping areas which has converted the Sessa river to almost into an abandoned river. Infact the Sessa River has turned into a 'Bane from a Boon'. Thus, from all the above discussion, it can be safely concluded that the strategic location of the BCPL plant have contributed in creating livelihood security related problem. Because it is located amidst areas which are vastly populated and is adjacent to a river, which hitherto have been providing livelihood assets to the people living in the villages situated in the river bank, the BCPL has become a cause of distress for the people for the people have been located in some isolated or secluded area far from residential places and natural entities river, it could have less affected the people and the environment.

### **5.2 The issue of staking livelihood security of the affected families-**

As mentioned in the forgoing discussion, the wastes of BCPL plant are dumped in the Sessa River leading to the pollution of the river water and affecting the lives of the fishing community. Because, almost majority of the people of the Lezai-Kolakhowa are dependent on the river water for their livelihood, thus their livelihood security is not only in stake but also in danger. The negative impact of BCPL plant has grossly affected the people of Lezai-Kolakhowa area, specially the fishing community is under clouds of an unseen and insecure future. Though, the BCPL was expected to generate production, creating income avenues and the people living in the adjacent areas of the plant were very much hopeful of getting secure jobs before its establishment but in reality the plant has become a threat even for their settled parental occupation from which they hitherto were getting their source of income. Infact, as an immediate effect, the BCPL is directly impinging on the livelihood security of the fishing community. After the commissioning of BCPL plant, wastage that are generated by the BCPL plant are dumped in the Sessa river which polluted the river as well as the fishes which are found in the river eventually deteriorating the quality and even the quality of the fishes. In an interview conducted by the researcher the people living in the nearby village reported that they are grossly affected by the negative consequences after commissioning of the plant. They opined that not only their source of income, but their health is also affected by the emissions caused by the plant pushing them to meet unseen fate and future.

### **5.3 BCPL externalities and Impact on Health of the Marginalized Communities-**

The pollution of the river has a multidimensional affect on the lives of the people of Lezai-Kolakhowa area. The water pollution has not only affected their livelihood but

also created severe health problems and diseases. The pollution caused by the BCPL has lead to severe health hazards and diseases. Contagious health diseases are in rise in the villages which are the product of the pollution which the river is experiencing since the set-up and the functioning of the BCPL. When enquired, the doctors at the local hospitals also confirmed that people of all ages were complaining of stomach aches, headaches and fainting fits in a greater frequency than the previous years. They also stressed that in the early months of the functioning of the BCPL there were a few cases where patients had psychological problems because of disturbed sleep due to loud noise emanating from the plant. It was also stressed that several people from the villages had psychological problems due to the fear of the loss of livelihood because the pollution in the rivers rendered fishing impossible. Thus, as far as health security is concerned for the least privileged who are the residents of the places near to the BCPL plant, the plant which is supposed to provide 'socio-economic' benefits, is largely lacking it and instead new and expensive medicines and way of life is being made essential for these people already in trouble and trauma.

## **6. RESULT**

### **6.1 Shifting pattern of the livelihood owing to the pollution-**

The pollution caused by the BCPL plant has made noteworthy effect in the pattern of livelihood avenues of the fishing community. The people of the Lezai-Kolakhowa area, who formerly wholly and solely were engaged with fishing, are now in the process of abandoning their parental profession. A bulk of fisherman have already changed their hitherto exploited fishing profession and moved ahead in search of other engagements. The fishermen who are still engaged in the profession are the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation fisherman and they are not inclined to pass it on the profession to their offspring. Rather, they are in support of sending their successive generation to industrial places like Bangalore and Kerala to work as manual laborers. The respondents who are still carrying the burden of being a 'fisherman' are only acting as 'half fisherman' as they also work as wage earners under MGNREGA and also as manual worker in other informal and unorganized sector because fishing no longer substantiate the needs of their life. Waste dumped in the Sessa river has polluted the river to the extent that the fishes with unbearable smell faded pale colour and bad taste can't attract any customer now. Thus in such situation, there is no other ways out for the fishermen to abandoning their erstwhile profession and search and adopt other avenues for the sake of survival. Though, the fishermen are facing a tuff time to get alternative sources of livelihood because of not having any professional skill and training required for other work, but they are definitely in search of better avenues which are secure and on which they can rely upon permanently.



Thus, it can certainly be said that the pollution caused by the BCPL plant has a direct influence in shifting the pattern of livelihood of the people of Lezai-Kolakhowa area from conventional fisherman to new generation manual workers and wage earners.

## **6.2 Impact of BCPL externalities on the Livestock-**

Livestock has a great importance for the marginalized rural poor who have no any stable economic assets, deposits and investments .The rural people depend on livestock to meet with any type of unseen emergency like medical expenditure, educational requirements of children etc. Moreover, livestock work as a source of food. As the poverty ridden people of the rural areas can't afford to buy nutritional foods from the market, they completely depend on the livestock like cow, goat, pig and poultry for milk, butter, meat, egg. Moreover livestock has also an immense importance for agriculture and cultivation as like most of the places in Assam also ploughing with cattles is done in large scale till today. It is important to mention here that pollution caused by the BCPL has not only impacted livelihood security of the people but also has a huge impact on the livestock. The domestic animals like cow, dog, goat, duck etc are getting affected due to the breathing of polluted air and consumption of water from the polluted Sessa River. Livestock are either falling sick or dying rapidly. Chickens and ducks are dying due to the foul environment created by the gases and other effluents being released by the BCPL as prior to it such problems had never arisen. These farmers were clearly depressed about the loss of income from the produce of these animals as well as the fact that they could no longer rely on such produce for their own diet.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

The above account of livelihood security of marginalized communities and developmental project has clearly portrayed the interconnectedness between the developmental projects and the after-effects that this project has made. It has been found that the BCPL has not only affected the economic life of the rural marginalized community living in the adjacent areas, but has also socio-political, individual and psychological repercussions leading to imbalance in social and individual life of the affected people. Moreover the BCPL plant also has immensely contributed in deteriorating the physical and mental health status of the rural poor. The plant has also impacted the livestock posing a threat to the sole alternative source of livelihood which is available for them, other than fishing. The consequences of BCPL externalities are so severe that these have provoked the people of the adjacent areas to launch organized agitations and strikes. Though, the BCPL claims that all the safety measures that are prescribed by the pollution control board are adopted to resolve the issues of pollution and contamination of air and the river water but the local people do not undertake this claim of the authorities. Various Groups and parties are taking note of the pathetic

condition of the marginalized rural poor and thus it can be expected that the matter will be deliberated by formal government agencies like the legislature and that solutions to the problems based on neutral study will be available soon.

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