

## RESEARCH ARTICLE



# EPISTEMOLOGICAL INQUIRY OF ACT, NIYAMGIRI MOVEMENTS AND THE DISCOURSES ON GOVERNMENTALITY

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### Abstract

In postcolonial country like India proliferation of ethnic and culture based assertions have been quite rampant since 1990. The paradigm of culture with its idiosyncratic features comes to the forefront of political discourse. Culture and identity based narrative resists neoliberal developmental narrative manifested into economic forms. The notion of developmental governmentality or development as governmentality which emerged after decolonization fails to represent essence of culture and identity. Episteme and epistemological orientation of culture put them outside the domain of developmental governmentality. It heralds an emergence of new governmentality which can be referred to as postmodern governmentality. This paper tries to explain development as 'governmentality' and its updated version neoliberal governmentality. It also unravels genesis of postmodern governmentality and equation between liberal and postmodern governmentality. Through ACT and Niyamgiri Movement it also tries to define postmodern governmentality and explore episteme of it.

**Key words:** Development, Neoliberal governmentality, Postmodern Governmentality, Episteme

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

The catastrophic World wars of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century made development inevitable even during an ideological struggle between two super powers. The notion of development gained further impetus and persisted throughout century both in national as well as international politics, even in 21<sup>st</sup> century as the harbinger of civilization. Though development as a term has multiple connotations, here, it refers to economic and intellectual, economy being the dominant one.

Though idea of development entices and has global implication but it became indispensable rather ineluctable for poverty stricken, exploited and marginalized postcolonial countries and war devastated countries of Europe. Since 1950 focus of the postcolonial countries in particular oriented to development so as to avail better standard of living; European nations too tried desperately to come out of eco-

nomie quagmire. The world was striving for change but the course followed by First and Third world countries were quite distinct. Driven by world politics of time, European countries embraced liberal capitalism (which later updated into neoliberal capitalism) and socialism (Marxism) allured as a force of change in postcolonial countries. In nutshell, two antithetical strategies were adopted to arrive at same point. Such events heralded genesis of development as "Governmentality" which determined the course of individuals and states[1]. Governmentality as a term for the first time was mentioned in the work of Foucault, "Security, Territory, Population (STP)" wherein he defines Governmentality as "ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analysis, reflections, calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge and apparatus of security as its essential technical instrument." So

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liberal Governmentality upholding the basic tenets 'free and responsible' (UK, USA, France) and governmentality coordinated by state (Cuba, Vietnam, China) were introduced. It is the former which triumphed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century since then development based on neoliberalism proliferated globally as Governmentality further accentuated by the prophecy of Francis Fukuyama 'End of History and last man'. Neoliberal knowledge was constructed in such a way for which there was no alternative, but such overarching paradigmatic claims of neoliberalism had been questioned since 1950. Though socialist and Marxist notions of state governmentality lost its stronghold but another Marxist inspired intellectuals had been trying to provide an alternative to liberal governmentality. Postmodern governmentality for instance, deriving its principles from Nietzsche and Lyotard has been questioning the neoliberal notion of development and challenging its universal objective nature stressing on the idiosyncrasies of particular culture, geographical, region, time and space.

The interaction between Neoliberal and socialist governmentality and neoliberal and postmodern governmentality has compelled academic community to ponder so as to distinguish and unravel interaction and antagonism taking few cases as a vantage point for instance ACT[2] movement in Zongu[3] (Sikkim) and tribal movements against appropriation of land by state/mncs such as Niyamgiri[4].

The interplay between neoliberal, socialist and postmodern governmentality is fascinating as Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt in their most celebrated work 'Empire' has come up with an argument that neoliberalism successfully integrates and encompasses postmodern governmentality. The claim of postmodern thinkers about exclusiveness and force of opposition to neoliberalism is seen by the Marxist as quite obscure and futile. Thinker like zizek also questioned a position taken by postmodern thinkers. He acknowledges existence and importance of identity and exclusiveness but at the same time skeptical as market consciously uses such identity politics to fulfill its interest. Such assumptions raises fundamental questions.

[noitemsep,nolistsep,topsep=5pt]Are neoliberal governmentality and postmodern governmentality independent and function differently? Or is neoliberal governmentality a

broader paradigm within which postmodern peculiarities operate? If postmodern governmentality maximizes interests of the market governmentality then why are there clashes between ethnic tribes and market's developmental projects? If these are different then how postmodern governmentality emerge? What is the episteme of such development? How the notion of neoliberal development is different from postmodern development?

### What is Governmentality?

Foucault in his lecture on Security, territory and Population has used the term governmentality. Foucault says "by governmentality, I mean three things. First, by "governmentality" I understand the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatus of security as its essential technical instrument. Second, by "governmentality" I understand the tendency, the line of force, that for a long time, and throughout the west, has constantly led towards the pre-eminence over all other types of power-sovereignty, discipline and so on – of the type of power that we can call "government" and which has led to the development of a series of specific governmental apparatus on the one hand, [and, on the other] to the development of a series of knowledge. Finally, by "governmentality" I think we should understand the process, or rather, the result of the process by which the state of justice of the Middle Ages became the administrative state in the fifteenth and sixteenth century and was gradually governmentalized".

### Development as Governmentality

Though development as a term has multiple connotations in this case it is not based on dependency model as its influenced limited by the events of 1990s. It also does not refer to post development theoretical notion of "mental structure" (wolfgang sachs). It would rather be a juxtaposition of some elements of modernization and neoliberal strategies of development. When socialist economic system crumbled where it was adopted, neoliberalism as an alternative became inevitable. Economic approach of India since 1990s tell us clearly about such approach.

Changes in the role of state from regulator to facilitator of market with minimal intervention in the market mechanism (neoliberal governmentality) in developmental process. Since then such notion of development carried out by neoliberalism has been rampant and proliferated in the most part of the globe. In fact, government has been formed the nation has been governed on the basis of such principles. As stated before, postcolonial countries adopted it as inevitable in the nation building process; it also emerged as a fabric for keeping diverse county like India intact even after independence. Through the mask of development, pluralism and tolerance in this regard.

The developmental projects is taken collectively by state and market. Market and state from antithetical nexus started complementing each other in such processes. In nutshell as advocated by Karl Marx “neoliberal capitalism created 21<sup>st</sup> century society in its own image”. Development and proliferation of market equated with development of society, region. Neoliberal capitalism emerges as a broader paradigm within which many development takes place.

Even though neoliberal capitalism succeeded in creating society in its own image, within its society there had been plethora of instances in the past as well as at the present where there are conflicts. The initiative which was considered to be the harbinger of progress/development emerged as a bone of contention. As conflict arises when there is a difference both in terms of purpose and objective. Definitely movements against such signifies there is something different outside given frame of ideology, it announces the existence of other space with its own set of assumption and knowledge. When such paradoxical set of spaces meet, conflict arises as one could not easily succumb to another. One of such resistance among many basically emanates from identity movements for instance, LGBT and Tribal identity. In this case, focus is more on tribal identity as it has been more vigorous in countries like America and India, such as, Native American protest against construction of oil pipeline in 2017; frequent clashes between tribal people and government of India and manufacturing companies in northeast India. Movements like these can be seen as a protest against developmental governmentality. Such governmentality become redundant as it does not encompass tribes and races.

These events have raised question to overarching inclusiveness of development. It compels us to strive for a new set of mechanism which governs and people have their consent on it.

### **Postmodern Governmentality**

Postmodern governmentality refers to diffracted and flexible set of rules and principles which may not fit within universal objective claim of modernity and an ideas of civilizational progress that emerge out of it. It is a different set of belief altogether that shapes perception and gives new narratives. It encompasses wide range of issues such as culture, language, ethnicity, gender identity which have dominated the discourse of contemporary social world. This unique set of principles may not be understood through conventional set of theoretical framework and require new intellectual endeavor to explore and unravel it. Since 1980s it has been dominant force both socially and intellectually. In nutshell it has become political as well as intellectual technology to govern people. The idiosyncratic feature of postmodern governmentality is the absence rather displacement of centrality as many elements would be playing the role of centrality at the same time. Notwithstanding change and displacement of centrality, in recent times, culture has emerged as important marker of identity.

### **Postmodern Identity**

The notion of identity has been significant to humans as society often categorised into multiple rungs based on affiliation to identities. Human beings have multiple layers of identities. First, identity as human and then gender based identity, group/ cultural identity and national identity. Together with identity entices recognition as Hegel says “human being always strives for recognition”. History of civilization had been history of struggle for quest of recognition. Such notion of identity has had always been there but it became more glaring with increase in the popularity of postmodernism.

Quest for identity became popular in late 20<sup>th</sup> century as people started relating oneself more to its traditional past rather than modernity derived identities. People started finding it difficult to familiarize with modernity socially but politically it had been in practice in the form of state. Such wondering of the people culminated into reinvigoration of particular identities which enabled an altercation

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between modern state and postmodern people, state trying to propagate its governance through different instruments but such initiatives often meet with resistance. People questioning such objective of the state, consider it as a threat to their existence. Here epistemological question gets translated into ontological question, such interpretation nullifies developmental claims which has been governing people since 19<sup>th</sup> century. It has become inadequate to encompass new space created by different epistemology altogether. The claim of neoliberal market/state and their notion of development is unintelligible. Such narrative compels us to ponder on how such knowledge gets constructed at what time under what circumstances. To unravel this, one needs to dig deep as such kind of engagement has been taking place mostly in country side and the rural areas where government along with MNCs is coming up with developmental projects such as construction of roads and building, establishment of factories which have most of the time resulted into expropriation of tribal land and the place of sentiments. As these lands are so sacred to these people that they cannot welcome such initiative of the government. Further, it also results into displacement and rehabilitation (most of the times which are incomplete) to undesired places where it becomes difficult for them to adjust. Hence, they perceive it as a security threat as existence in the place come first rather than development and so on. Development at the cost of displacement make no sense to them as they consider it a futile discriminatory endeavour. Such discourse between these can be seen through the lens of Habermass's 'strategic rationality'[5] (rationality of state capitalism) and contextual rationality (rationality of natives or tribes)[6] which sees irreconcilable. In the context of identity, economy seems to be inadequate to give meaningful lives. Such assertion of identity based movements brings cultural Marxist debate transcending orthodox economic determinism, the ideational aspect of it is integral, to individual or group as they often derive ontological genesis of it. Threat to identity can be seen as ontological crisis.

### Affected Citizens of Teesta (ACT)

Affected Citizens of Teesta is one of the biggest popular movement in the post 1975 history of Himalayan state of Sikkim. The movement started as a protest against construction of dams for power generation

from ecologically fragile and sacred land of the indigenous lepcha tribe. Notwithstanding lepchas of Dzongu and surrounding regions such as Darjeeling, Kalimpong spearheaded the movement but it would be wrong to assume that it was entirely carried out by lepchas alone. It was the conflation of dissent voices, environment activists and people displaced by it. With each act of resistance related to it added intensity and influenced people beyond the epicentre of the movement. Such collected resistance exerted enough pressure on the constructing company to withheld its projects.

In India wave of neoliberal development penetrated quite vehemently in the early 2000. Prospect of economic development could not achieve with power deficiency. In fact, In course of development, supply of energy is indispensable. India being an energy deficit country required energy to meet its demand which resulted into quest for an alternative. Power generation through Hydel projects as renewal source of energy became go to option for a country. The government encouraged private actors to make use of these options, start a project and construct dams to generate energy from free-flowing rivers. Such endeavour reaches Himalayan state of Sikkim and receives consent and clearances from government and MoFE (Ministry of Forest and Environment). Overseeing its ramifications on ecologically fragile region, people affected and displaced by it expresses their resentment against state and company. Soon it takes the form of ACT mobilising local residents (affected ones), activists and the environmentalists. In the beginning displacement and environmental degradation were twin pillars of the movement. As genesis of controversy is Dzongu a region mainly inhabited by indigenous minority Lepcha tribe which consider the region as sacred and has a close affinity with their culture, tradition and oral history. The lepchas from Dzongu took the leadership supported by the lepchas from adjoining Darjeeling and Kalimpong made it struggle of the Lepchas and portrayed it as a threat to their culture and ancestral history. On 20 June 2007, one of the largest movements against hydropower projects in Sikkim was launched under the banner of Affected Citizens of Teesta (ACT) — which was supported by the Concerned Lepcha of Sikkim (CLOS) and the Sangha of Dzongu (SOD). They started satyagraha and went on

hunger strikes. Demonstrations were conducted in the heart of the country (Delhi), and the matter was also raised before UNO. Finally Iepchas who sat for hunger strike withdrew it after more than two years on September 27, 2009.

The movement was quite successful and eight projects were scrapped— four inside Dzongu and four outside the region. After seven years, since the hunger strike was called off, in mid-June 2016 ACT reactivated its movement and they have since, conducted workshops and several interactions and public meetings in different villages within the Dzongu area. In nutshell, ACT Movement added another success story of indigenous minority tribe over self-consenting market mechanisms.

### **Niyamgiri Movement**

Niyamgiri is a mountain forest region in the state of Orissa, it is inhabited by Dongaria Kondha Tribe which consider the Hill as the sacred land, place of worship and main source of livelihood. Their identity is inherently embedded to the place. A century ago, rich deposits of bauxite was discovered by British geologist who called it “Khondalite” in tribute to the people who guided him there. Discovery of bauxite reserve led to the tussle between indigenous tribe and mining company in the region.

In 2003, the Government of Odisha signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with private mining company Vedanta Aluminum Limited (VAL) to extract bauxite from the hills. Soon the indigenous Dongaria Tribe rose against the company and government as it would have resulted into displacement of the tribe from their sacred land. They perceived it as an attack upon identity, culture and place of Worship. Though Company promised to provide compensation and rehabilitation to the displaced ones but people were reluctant and denied because Niyamgiri Forest which encompasses their culture is something which is more fundamental to them. The movement acquired further impetus when environmental activist supported the tribe and submitted litigation to the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF). When the issue reached Supreme Court, it released a verdict that the dispute could be resolved through a dialogue with local village panchayat or head of the tribe. The consent of the tribal head was being sought as the court verdict was based on forest right

act 2006 which makes consent of the tribe residing at the place indispensable. The government suggested them to give their land on lease but they disagreed. Since then there has been a constant tussle between company and indigenous people, till now they have been successful in preventing company’s penetration but they fear that money along with muscle power might triumph over them in future. Notwithstanding future trajectories and outcome of the movement no one would deny struggle and existence of small indigenous tribe with distinct epistemological orientation against collective market force.

### **Equation between Two Governmentalities**

The resurgence of tribes across the planet on ethnic and cultural foundations proves that Neoliberal governmentality and postmodern governmentality are not same but emerged out of two paradigms. At the core of neoliberal governmentality lies market and state that constantly play complementary role ensuring that there is fertile space for its proliferation. Neoliberal governmentality is also about withdrawing of state from economic sphere, decentralization of economic activities (privatization) but more centralization of political power. Old maxim of invisible market mechanism has become redundant as political power turn out to be prerequisite for market. The rise of china as an economic power also raises fundamental question to the old liberal thesis that democracy is indispensable for market (capitalism).

As far as postmodern governmentality is concerned it is not wholly oriented to economy, in fact, it is more about diversity and propagation of peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of groups, tribes, gender and social phenomenon. It is the technology of governance and management of people on the ground of identity (cultural), sexual identity (LGBT+) and so on. It differs with neoliberal governmentality both in terms of epistemology (social reality) and ontology. Notwithstanding epistemological differences neoliberal governmentality being a dominant paradigm has entered into postmodern discourse. The ramification of such intervention can be found everywhere for instance, advent of market into an issue of identity. Triumph of market capitalism over tribes and indigenous people. But based on few such instances one cannot make sweeping generalisation that neoliberal and postmodern governmentality are same or one has won over another, what we have been witness-

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ing is coexistence and co-optation of two paradigms. The conflation of paradigm may not be spontaneous. Such interplay transcends Kuhn argument of incommensurability of paradigm to somewhere closer to analytic eclecticism.

As far as question of postmodern entities maximizing the interest of market is concerned it has interest in identity politics which is referred to as postmodern governmentality. In essence, market promote identity and culture based assertions as it deviates focus from market mechanism to issues of gender, cultures and so on. But problem arises when such entities come to the way of market's objectives. As long as interests of the market is secured, identity does not emanate any serious threat to it. Neoliberal capitalism as such has no problem with ethnic assertions/identity politics. In fact, multiculturalism has been huge market for it. Capitalism thrives on multiculturalism, it enables market to manifest into many forms. As Fredric Jameson in his 'postmodernism or, the cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' rightly enumerates how postmodernism of late has become a medium in the manifestation and propagation of capitalism. The notion of pluralism and multiculturalism also signify plurality or division of resistance as it tend to bifurcate unified dissent voice into particular distinctive voices. Such segmentation occur with conscious and strategic entry of market into the realm of culture. Through promotion and propagation of pre-modern roots and affinities it creates a new sense of belonging, indispensability of cultural identity sometimes inculcating negative perceptions for instance, deprivation of culture, relative backwardness of sub-culture thereby making it ontological issue of utmost importance which require immediate solution. Such culture based notion deviates people from center of exploitation to peripheries, displacement of priorities from general to specific. In each act of assertion market act as a harbinger and find space for fulfilment of its interests. In short, bonhomie between market and ethnic groups and tribes are quite intimate. But such nexus between two does not dilute significance of cultural, sub-cultural assertions, it is only that market uses and manipulates it for its own benefits, for instance, commercialization of "Black Lives Matter". An issue of racial discrimination is pertinent in the west, Black people have been discriminated but here too capital-

ism finds space for its promotion or in other words resentment against such racial discrimination takes place through manufacturing of T shirts with a content of Black lives matter.

As far as antagonism between market and identity politics is concerned there is a very fine line. The zone of agreement could become zone of disagreement. As highlighted before, long as interests of the market is being secured and fulfilled it continues propagating identity politics but when interests of the culture come into contact with the objectives of market and hinder its growth and when such nexus becomes relative one, conflict become inevitable. To illustrate more, since the establishment of UNO western hegemonic power have been advocating for protection and promotion of indigenous Tribes, their livelihood, cultures and protection of their land across the globe. Tribes and indigenous culture remain exotic but paradox gets revealed in an instances where state and the company with its genesis in the west and Europe appropriates tribal land in the name of development for construction of Dams and extraction of minerals takes away their livelihood and displaces them from their sacred lands (Niyamgiri and Dzongu). Multi-national corporations backed by facilitative state project such endeavor in terms of consequentialist reasoning as well as outcome and makes it a need of the hour, paths towards change. When such mechanism proven insufficient alternative effort takes many forms. Notwithstanding use and misuse of culture and identity by the big corporations the significance of all these tribal assertions cannot be denied by simply generalizing it as newly manifested form of capitalism or the tool of capitalism. It has its own epistemology which differentiate it from neoliberal epistemology.

### Question of Episteme

Coexistence of multiple governmentality such as Environment, culture act as harbinger of identity. Of course brutal transgression and threat to sacred land was perceived by indigenous tribe as it would have created sense of insecurity and impurity amongst tribes. It started as an environmental movement activists from across the region came to the forefront protesting against such project, they even questioned consent given by the ministry of environment for construction of dams in ecologically fragile land-

scape. Though movement attracted media attention but it emerges as a significant phenomenon when it takes cultural turn. With such shifting of locus from environment to culture the movement becomes popular movement'. ACT has two significant connotations and determined course of movement first with its notion of physical impact on surrounding environment (which often result into displacement and misplacement of people) which somehow unable to transcend affected region except environmental activists. Second, through cultural manifestation it transcend narrow limited confine of particular region and becomes Trans regional.

It is intellectually misleading to argue that the episteme of such discourses is based on one reason as many elements are involved in it. As the subject enables space for subjectivity and subjective interpretations. At the outer layer one can see common pillars in both movements, i.e. Environment, Economy and Culture (EEC). The issue of environment is pertinent as such initiative often jeopardizes ecologically fragile region and disturb normal regional ecosystem. Such repercussion of State Market endeavor emerge as a vantage point which often manifests into environment movement spearheaded by the activists. We have plethora of such instances in developing countries like India, Narmada Bachao Andolan, Chipko movement where people vehemently protested against modern developmental project initiated by state with the help of market and vice versa on the ground of environment and sustainability. The discourse of environment attracted intellectual attention in the post 1960, publication of Carlson 'Silent Spring' and 'Our Synthetic Environment' emerged as the harbinger of global environment politics. In nutshell, environment emerged as a stumbling block on the way of modernization especially in the second half of the twentieth century. Modernization for developing countries and profit maximization for developed countries, since then international organization such as UNO, regional organizations and International Non-governmental organizations have been quite vocal against such developments. Concepts such as 'Our Common Future' Kyoto Protocols are the outcome of environment conferences. In recent times environment is the biggest discourse which influences global, regional and local politics, ACT

and Niyamgiri are the perfect examples of environmental ideological interpellations. In both Niyamgiri Hills and Dzongu (Teesta) mining of Bauxite and construction of Dams would have resulted into wanted destruction of forests and annihilation of Aquatic lives and disturbances to regional ecosystem hence resent and movement against such forces becomes indispensable.

As far as development is concerned world have been embracing western notion of development. As the modernization Theory clearly enumerates development in terms of economy, construction of infrastructure emerged as the marker of development thereby suggesting postcolonial countries to follow same trajectories and go through phases so as to ensure development. But initiatives based on such ground have often resulted into displacement and discrimination of local. Relative gain of such projects, development at the cost of displacement problematizes such narrative.

The binary division between nature and culture drawn by Structuralists in this case work as a common cause as environment and Tribal Community notwithstanding resemblance in terms of outcome they differ in term of reason. The fact that indigenous community derive its meaning to their lives from nature and source of subsistence ancestral history and genesis makes land sacred and protection of it a fundamental obligation.

Unlike traditional technology of governance EEC are the new technologies of governance which govern the people. There is a nuanced distinction among such governmentalities as one might overlap another. It is flexible and difficult to locate its centrality. A temporal centrality of each governmentality is based on a context, time and space. Though assertion is an amalgamation of various elements culture epitomizes the rest and the rest perform auxiliary functions. In short, governmentality is the conflation of self-consenting elements which makes people to embrace it out of free will. As far as question of episteme of these governmentalities are concerned as per Foucault's categorization of episteme it falls under the classical episteme which characterized by representation, identity and difference.

#### Footnote

[1] Infrastructural and economic Development.

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[2] Affected Citizens of Teesta.

[3] Dzongu, small village located in North Sikkim is the holy place for lepchas.

[4] Niyamgiri is hill a hill range situated in the districts of Kalahandi and Rayagada in the south-west of Odisha, India. This hills are home to Dongaria Kondh indigenous people.

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