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CAN ANTHROPOLOGISTS REALLY SPEAK TRUTH ON DEVELOPMENT AND HOPE TO EARN A LIVING?

Development: The Contesting Domains

How should an anthropologist approach the discourses on development—as a process of enlarging people's choices which can change over time; or as an ideal notion of progress which entire mankind aspires to achieve and different institutions propagate; or following Escobarian (1995) cue, as a failed chapter in the history of Western modernity which can only cause irreparable damages to non-Western cultures; or, in Foucauldian vein, as a destructive and self-serving notion promoted by the neo-liberalist economists, bureaucrats and aid professionals which will only put the poor in a vicious circle of poverty? This question should be addressed in the backdrop of an overwhelming belief inculcated over the last few decades among the policy makers as well as in our society that development is a means to an end—an end which results in an overall improvement of well-being, standard of living and proliferation of opportunities in the non-Western milieu. The growth related models of development dominated this field of research and application for a long time. Lately, UNDP created HDI approach which was inspired by the scholars like Amartya Sen, combining health, life expectancy, literacy, formal education, political participation and access to resources (UNDP 2001:14) but could not effectively replace the dominant neo-classical notion of measuring development with the rate of GDP growth. Ironically, the official measurement of development in Sen's own country, is completely dependent on the growth related notion and the recent fracas on the measurement of 'poverty line' in India has opened up the Pandora's Box in this regard (see Vaidyanathan 2013).

The technical association of anthropologists with development which started in the 1960s when the stalwarts like Geertz (1963) in his work on the agricultural involution in Indonesia linked anthropological knowledge to technological change had experienced several transformations through the last four decades.[1] It was Geertz (1983) who elaborated the concept of local knowledge in anthropology "From the Native's Point of View" which became a

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pivot of anthropological association with development. In a more recent past, anthropologists mostly not working as development professionals, envisage a 'post-development' era where the local 'indigenous' knowledge becomes a repertoire to create alternatives to development (e.g. Esteva 1988; Escobar 1995; Rahnema 1997). This trend has abandoned the conventional epistemology of post-war development which keeps harping on the aspiration of 'progress' (Escobar 1991). Some other scholars prefer reforms within the conventional paradigm of development and they focus on the development alternatives rather than the radical stand of alternatives to development (Little and Painter 1995; Crewe and Harrison 1998; Nolan 2002). Scholars of both camps place maximum importance on the 'local' and the 'indigenous' knowledge. Except the supporters of alternatives to development all the scholars keep faith in the notion of 'progress' and believe that development brings progress. This faith has its root in the nineteenth century evolutionism which motivated the early development theories and practices. According to this notion, with growing progress, societies shift from kinship to contract, agriculture to industry, personalized to rational/bureaucratic rule; from subsistence to capital accumulation, tradition to modernity and most importantly from poverty to wealth. Majority of the development assessments are based on this notion of progress and the degree of these shifts actually determines the speed of development. But the question is whether all societies follow the same trajectory towards greater accumulation and well-being. Another related question that keeps on surfacing in the discourse of development particularly after the advent dependency and world system theories by the scholars like Cardoso, Faletto, Frank and Wallerstein[2], whether wealth in some places or among certain social groups is causally related to the poverty in other places or among other groups.

So the fault-lines deepened on the contesting domains of development and scholarship from all the camps could hardly converge to a common field. The situation has only complicated with the divisions between 'applied' and 'academic' anthropology. Applied anthropologists claim that one should not overburden the field of development with some 'self-serving' theoretical debates drawn from the academic aspects of the discipline. The discipline has grown up as the study of 'other'—'exotic others' to start with and now the 'adjacent others'—which mostly associated with the poor and vulnerable section of the population. Since its inception, anthropology has claimed itself to be the science of 'less developed people'. So there is always an uncomfortable relationship between the anthropologists and the 'progressive' notion of development (Malinowski 1929, 1930; Firth 1981; Vincent 1990; Rappaport 1993).

Nowadays, an imaginary division of labour has developed between the applied and the academic versions of anthropology. While the latter is engaged in the theoretical studies on the people less 'contaminated' by development, the former has claimed its expertise on development projects

on the vulnerable sections of the population. In fact, the number of anthropologists employed to solve 'practical' problems has increased dramatically in recent past. Instead of working in the traditional academic sector of teaching and research in a college or university, large numbers of anthropologists are working for organizations such as government agencies, non-government agencies, and firms in a wide range of content areas. While many work for government agencies, opportunities have also developed in not-for-profit private service agencies and profit-making firms, including those owned and operated by anthropologists. Some prefer to freelance through temporary contracts. These persons call themselves practicing anthropologists or applied anthropologists. In their work they take up many roles, including that of policy researcher, evaluator, impact assessor, needs assessor, planner, research analyst, advocate, trainer, culture broker, expert witness, public participation specialist, administrator/manager, change agent, and therapist.

The political economy in anthropology has also contributed significantly to this debate as after the World War II it has also shifted its focus from the market and consumption to property and labour which facilitated the entry of our discipline in the area exclusively colonized by the economists. Thus, the formalist-substantivist debate was transformed into the analysis of the impact of capitalism in the non-West and the critique of modernization theory. The paradigm of development and underdevelopment was challenged by the dependency theorists led by Cardoso and Faletto and the modern world-system model of Wallerstein (Frank 1966; Cardoso and Faletto 1969; Wallerstein 1974). Other scholars like Gough (1980, 1986), Worsley (1982), Asad (1973, 2008, 2011), Keith Hart (1985), Godelier (2010), Meillassoux (1994) and Terray (1985, 1989), highlighted the differential responses to market-economy and developmental activities in the non-Western societies. By the middle of 1990s political economy in anthropology was divided into two groups on a question: Who should take economic decisions – the free markets or the individual states? However, both the camps were unequivocally supportive to the preservation of indigenous knowledge and cultural difference (Apffel-Marglin and Marglin 1996, Grenier 1998, Tsing 2000; Copper 2001; Barth 2002, Graeber 2002, Kuper 2003, Pother *et al.* 2003; Sillitoe 2010). Some scholars retained the historical and ethnographic focus in the study of development by positioning the post-structuralist and post-colonial viewpoints in this study (Roseberry 1996; Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003). Laura Bear's recent work (2013) on the shipyard workers in Howrah, India, would be very interesting to note here as she relates Hindu ritual concepts of Shakti and multimodality of kinship in neoliberal working condition "associated with outsourced, deunionized, and informal work" as the workers conceptualise the body of the ship as their own body (*e shorir amar shorir* "This body is our body"). The pivotal role of biography, autobiography and ethnography have also been stressed by Veena Das in her works on violence, social suffering and subjectivity

when she addresses questions on the institutional processes of the production of violence and suffering, the relation of individuals to these processes in terms of testimony and the role of ethnographers in producing this knowledge when societies hide themselves from the pain it inflicts upon individuals. Das's works became more important in terms of development as it prefers importance of "local knowledge" over the neo-liberal logic of market-primacy over the cultures in periphery.[3] Lila Abu-Lughod's[4] works on the Muslim women also question that the validity and authenticity of Western perception of vulnerability of the 'abused' Muslim women as they, like other women of different faiths, should be viewed in their own social, cultural and ideological context. Anthropology of political economy, particularly in the periphery, now asserts the relative autonomy of local cultures and questions the validity of the neo-liberal grand-narrative of a universalistic notion of development smacked with Western teleology, economic reductionism and naïve empiricism. But it must be added here that a comprehensive trend of analysis from anthropological political economy is yet to emerge, which also included the critique of the role of the international organizations/institutes like Bretton Woods, GATT, WTO, ADB, etc. and other regional and national organizations involved in the development of non-Western countries. However, at the same time, anthropologists were quite steadfast on their studies of the issues like gender, civil society, NGOs, cultural differences, transnationalism, globalization, consumption associated with development and these studies primarily strive to incorporate these issues within the dominant discourses of development.[5] These studies often pose serious questions on the efficacy of the existing models of development and resist the efforts to separate the applied from the theoretical branches of our discipline as the former flows from the latter and thus is an inextricable part of the latter and any effort to separate these two traditions is actually seen as a political design to justify the failure of development projects to address the above mentioned issues.

But the core debates remained alive in our discipline. First, whether one should approach 'development' as a theoretical discourse, as a blueprint for policy, as a historical process, or as a culmination of the evolutionary process. Second, whether the boundaries between the applied and the other aspects of the discipline are permeable or not. Though the diverse ways of approaching development, with little or no communication bridge, act against resolving the debates, I believe that it is in the interest of the poor and vulnerable section of the population that these debates should never die down and the homogeneity of opinions would only act in favour of creating a self-serving logic in favour of a neo-classical position.

Indian Experiences

Let us now try to move further and take cues from the experiences of development of the two Indian states, West Bengal and Kerala. Both the states

have passed through the experiences of leftist rules for long period(s) and have been studied by stalwarts from economics, political science, geography, sociology as well as anthropology.[6] These two states are also known as the hotbeds of a different kind of development initiatives as a part of the leftist agenda supposed to be divorced from the market logic. These initiatives have important implications for our discipline as these are meant to offer alternatives to the relentless market pressure on productivity and growth as well as focus on the wellbeing of poor and vulnerable section of the population which is nearer to the anthropological concern about the vulnerable others and alternatives *in* development. This section will study the political economy of these developmental initiatives taken up by these two states and would try to find out the differences in these initiatives leading to the different outcomes of alternative developmental initiatives in different locales and how an anthropological perspective can actually explicate the things from a bottom-up approach.

West Bengal Model

During the time of independence, the Indian state of West Bengal witnessed the traumatic event of the partition of the subcontinent when nearly two thirds of Bengal became a part of Pakistan. Along with the huge streams of Hindu refugees rushing in from the other side of the border, the state had to face apathy of the central government in tackling the burning problems arising out of the circumstances. These problems were compounded by massive de-industrialization of the economy and outflow of capital due to various reasons like the lack of supply of raw materials like jute as the major jute growing zones fell on the other side of the border, apathetic attitude of the central government showing little or no interest on the new investment to the state and giving very licenses to form new industry, disincentives for entrepreneurs interested in investing in the state etc.[7] The situation was further aggravated by the equalization of prices of coal and steel that took away the natural advantages of the entire eastern region including West Bengal. During 1970s, 73 per cent population of West Bengal living in the rural areas were struggling under the poverty line compared to the all-India figure of about 56 per cent. In West Bengal the total population living below the poverty line was about 63 per cent while the all-India figure was 55 per cent. This appalling economic condition of the state also affected the literacy and health of its citizens. West Bengal which held the second position in terms of literacy rate in 1951 slipped to a much lower position in 1970s. A marginal improvement in the literacy rate happened during the first two decades after independence from 24.03 per cent to 29.45 per cent. The infant mortality rate (IMR) was 95 in West Bengal in 1961 while the all-India figure was 115.[8] In 1977, the Leftist government was voted to power in West Bengal which initiated many pro-poor policies like extensive land reform, steps to increase the purchasing power of the common people by expanding the opportunities of

gainful employment, and improving the infrastructure on health and education. From the beginning it had to face various problems. The semi-feudal nature of the society had created a huge difference in distribution of wealth along the caste line. Nearly 50 per cent population comprising of Muslim minority, Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) were deprived of material wealth as well as the other facilities like education, health and subsidized food grains. Another problem for the state was its neighbouring states with even poorer economic conditions and its porous international boundary with Bangladesh. As a result, the state had become a steady destination for the unskilled migrant labourers adding to its already swelling jobless individuals both in the rural and the urban areas. The high population density of the state compounded the problem of joblessness, lack of infrastructure and dismal education and health scenario. Two additional problems were the dilapidated industrial scenario with obsolete technology and the 'license raj' system. Under this system it was mandatory for all new industries to obtain license from the central government, which was hostile to the state government and directed the willing industrialists to other states like Gujarat, Maharashtra, Haryana, etc.

The Leftist government, after assuming power, emphasised on the proper functioning of the three-tier Panchayati Raj system for decentralization of administrative power. It also emphasised on extensive land reforms by seizing surplus lands from the landlords and modifying the tenancy reform laws (*barga*) to give the rights on the crop to sharecroppers. Results were eminent. By the middle of 1980s, the state experienced highest agricultural growth in India. The state could boast to have nearly 3 million beneficiaries of land distribution and nearly half of them were from the minority, SC and ST population. But the state lagged behind many other states in education, health and job opportunities particularly in rural areas. NSSO 59th Round Survey in 2003 (NSSO 2003) revealed that more than 90 per cent of the farmers in West Bengal having land-holding less than 1 hectare to 4 hectares could not meet their consumption needs from their agricultural produce alone. This was due to various reasons like deregulating the prices of fertilizers and seeds resulting in a steep increase in prices of both the items which contributed to the decline in profit of the agricultural produce. The state government made various attempts to support the peasants in West Bengal like extending minor irrigation facilities, activating self-help groups in procuring and processing of food and government-initiated procurement of paddy through Food Corporation of India.

However, all these efforts could not bring desired results in terms of the overall economic growth of the province as well as steady flow of job creation and the huge number of peasants continued to reel under chronic poverty in the state.[9] Thus, the Leftist government opted for an all-out effort to industrialize the state with the private sector participation, as neither the

state nor the central government was in a position to set up big industries following the neo-liberal trend taking advantage of the end of the licence raj[10] in India. Many in the left as well as other observers were extremely critical over this attitude of the government as they were of the view that rapid and random industrialization would not bring prosperity to the poor and the vulnerable section of population in West Bengal. These critics seemed to prefer other alternatives *in* development to bring the 'all-round development' in the state which could be more 'inclusive' in nature. Others advocated for the economic growth model as advocated by the neoclassical economists and the state became the fastest growing state during the turn of the millennium despite the generally indifferent attitude of the Central Government.[11]

For industrialization land acquisition became the primary requirement. This meant that the peasants in West Bengal had to give away their tiny pieces of lands which they had acquired after decades of struggle supported by the same leftist parties. From 2006 onwards various MOUs were signed with the big industrial houses including TATA Motors who were willing to setup industries in West Bengal. The efforts to acquire lands for industries in different parts of West Bengal resulted in tumultuous situation where we found intense peasant movements against the acquisition of land for setting up of industry. The Leftist regime, which was ruling the province for over three decades, has been known for its pro-poor programs like land reform, subsidized public distribution system, etc., now was branded as anti-peasant and anti-poor. The government failed to convince its own people that this shift in policy was the result of an effort to catch up with the unprecedented pace of industrialization and modernization witnessed by other states in India after the liberalization of economy. With the escalation of these peasant movements many new industries and investments started leaving the state and the movements catapulted into a series of major turmoil contributing to the ouster of a three-decade old Left regime. It opened up a discursive space for the anthropologists to embark on ethnographic studies on the importance of understanding 'local' knowledge and aspirations which the conventional notion of development ignored. From the peasants' point of view, secure access to land provides a valuable safety net as a source of shelter, food and income in times of hardship, and a family's land can be the last available resort in an instance of disaster. In rural areas, land ownership can be a vital source of capital, which opens personal credit markets, leads to investments in the land, provides a social safety net, and transfers wealth to the next generation. It is also important for their identity as peasant. Without secure land rights, individuals and communities live under the constant threat of eviction and it is this fear of eviction which leads to collective action of social movement. It was interesting to understand how social movements against land acquisition in West Bengal in the recent past have been intensified which ultimately led to the end of a three decade-old leftist rule in the state. We have seen such tumultuous situations in different parts of India when the government in

power tried to initiate developmental projects without properly considering local dynamics and sentiments against the project. Thus we find the proverbial struggles of Singur[12] and Nandigram[13]—the harbingers of change of 34 years of left regime in West Bengal. Such incidents also took place in some other states like Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana.[14]

Kerala Model

Another Indian state Kerala, which was created after Independence did not experience the influx of refugees. The state has also been ruled by the Left parties for long period (although in intervals) but reveals a different picture. The province boasts to have highest adult literacy and life expectancy, lowest infant mortality and birth rates in India which show the impact of social and economic development spread to large section of the population.[15] Benefits of better quality of life are fairly equally distributed in Kerala among men and women, urban and rural areas, and high and low castes. But as per the traditional measures of development like GNP/GDP growth, big-ticket investments including FDI in industry and other sectors, etc., the state is lagging far behind many other Indian states. While most Third World countries seek to advance primarily through boosting production and investing in expensive technology, Kerala has implemented a program of radical social reforms, with land reform at the centre. Although it suffers from massive paucity of material and resources and is one of the world's most densely populated regions, Kerala has achieved higher scores compared to other Third World countries or other Indian states on the important indicators of development in health, education, and access and distribution of resources, etc.[16]

To discuss the Kerala success story we need to address the basic debate between growth and redistribution first. Experiences throughout the world have revealed that higher income does not result in better life expectancy, higher literacy rate and lower infant mortality rate if that income is not distributed throughout the population and is not sustained over a long period of time. In addition, that income has to be substantially large in quantity to support all these changes, which most Third World countries cannot achieve. As an alternative way the governments can redistribute the already existing wealth to its population which will increase the purchasing power of the population and then sponsor growth. Instances from high-income countries in Europe show that the countries which concentrated more on redistribution produced better results in education, life expectancy and infant mortality than the countries which concentrated only on the growth-centred development models. But observers believe that the two paths do not meet though Taiwan and Korea have recorded substantial growth and redistribution of resources among its citizens. On the other hand, some Latin American countries, the oil-rich Middle East and the Southeast Asian countries had astounding growth till 1980s but these countries never concentrated on redistribution while

countries like Sri Lanka, Korea, Tanzania and the Indian state of Kerala have chosen redistribution.

Now let us come back to the Kerala model. In Kerala equality in distribution of resources created a kind of evenness in the pattern of settlement which made the delivery of health and educational services simpler. In addition Kerala has got a huge working class population due to the fact that it has been a major international trade centre since last 5000 years and many British plantations and factories were established during the colonial rule. But the most important aspect of Kerala's redistributive attitude is its long tradition of having people's organizations. Rulers with progressive bent of mind and Christian missionaries in Kerala had established a tradition of public school system, libraries, girls' education, education for backward sections. Kerala witnessed several social movements like Sree Narayana Movement during 1880s which struggled to empower people through organization and enlighten them through education. It called for 'one caste, one religion, and one god for mankind'. In the twentieth century Kerala witnessed intense political resistance from the peasants, workers, and dalits against the British rulers as they envisaged that independence from the British rulers would result in emancipation from the vicious cycle of poverty and indignity.[17] Left political parties started spreading their organization among the landless, labourers and small farmers and started fighting against feudalism from the 1930s. World's first democratically elected leftist government was elected in Kerala in 1957, which was toppled by the rightist central government. But that could not prevent the people of Kerala to re-elect leftist parties five more times.[18]

The leftist government initiated many pro-people policies which have not been discontinued by the succeeding anti-left governments. Prominent among these were land reforms which benefited majority of the landless poor farmers and provided food security both to the small landowners and tenants dependent on those lands without any fear of eviction. The other pro-people programme in Kerala is 'food for all'. Kerala provided subsidized food through school-lunch programs to the children, opened nursery centres for infants, pregnant and lactating women, and opened fair-price shops for common citizens. Today, the nutritional level of all sections of population in Kerala is better than the all-India level and in the rural areas people consider it their right to get low-cost rice and other staples. Alternative view exists which contested the claim of economy of plenty in Kerala.[19] Another pro-people policy in Kerala is the 'right to health' for its people. The health scenario in the state has vastly improved by improving basic amenities like housing, sanitation, water and immunization. Over the years the successive governments (both left and non-left) have developed most extensive medical facilities with more hospitals and hospital beds which is four times the Indian average, lowest doctor-to-patient ratio in India and spending highest amount per capita on health care which is highest in India. Basic medical services are available

throughout Kerala. In this connection it must be mentioned that a large part of Kerala is water-locked and medical services are sometimes extended there with the help of country-boats. Doctors and other medical staff are dedicated and directly responsible to the citizens who are sensitive to any kind of laxity in the system. They often stage demonstrations and gather public opinion through local newspapers, local unions and civic groups if any negligences in the services are found. Education has always been Kerala's strongest point that has helped in ameliorating the rigid caste-community-based social stratification. The education system imparts training to acquire necessary skills, teaches political activism and upholding the self-esteem of the oppressed. In Kerala education has reached to the poorest of the poor and become a major tool for creating consciousness among the workers and lower caste people. The primary focus of education in Kerala is on spreading basic literacy and primary education. Various NGOs have played important roles in spreading education in Kerala among all classes and castes. Women played a key role in these inclusive developmental activities. In India, ordinarily girl children are seen as liabilities and there is a rampant practice of female infanticide/foeticide resulting in a declining sex ratio in many states. Even where the female infanticide is not practiced, families tend to spend their limited resources on the education and medical care of boys which results in an increased mortality of girl children.[20] In Kerala, widely available heath care services and decentralized education with extensive distribution of foods through the schools have made a more equitable valorisation of the girls and the boys. Moreover, half of the college students are girls who get jobs in teaching, nursing, social work and other related fields. Protecting pregnant and lactating women as well as feeding children in the schools during the daytime has helped safeguard women's interests as they now can concentrate more on the jobs other than on household chores.[21]

As mentioned earlier, according to the traditional measures of development the state of Kerala lags far behind many states in India. But when it comes to the measures of basic services like all-weather roads, secondary schools, health dispensaries, etc., within two to five kilometres of villages Kerala ranks first in 15 of these measures and very high on five others.[22] Thus, the entire discourse is boiling down to the central debate—growth or redistribution? Neo-liberal discourses on development favour growth-centred development models advocating higher levels of income leading to better life expectancy, higher literacy, lower infant mortality and the like which many Western countries also favoured. On the other hand, the countries with lower per capita incomes (mostly socialist countries) favour redistribution. They believe that redistribution of the existing scarce resources can provide better education, lower infant mortality rate, and higher life expectancy to its citizen. Countries in Latin America, Middle East and Southeast Asia flourished following growth-centred development model. The countries in Africa and South Asia including India could neither achieve a high growth rate nor could redistribute resources among its citizens.

It will be foolish to say that the state is not facing any problem. Poverty exists in the state but not to an unbearable extent. The biggest problem of the state is unemployment which hovers around 12 per cent. Some analysts believe that the unemployment in Kerala is a consequence of reforms as the welfare mentality developed in the state over the period of the last 60 years has developed a sense of contentment among the Keralites who lost the eagerness to work hard. Others believe that high wages in Kerala has created this high rate of unemployment. However, reforms in Kerala have softened the fall-out of unemployment. Higher wages give the unemployed a breathing space during the period of hardship. Various welfare programs like unemployment insurance, agricultural labourer's pensions, subsidies in schools help the unemployed to survive, and the food security from their plots, which they got from land reforms, work in favour of the unemployed person in Kerala to survive through the period of unemployment. Notwithstanding all the cushions for the unemployed people, the Kerala government will have to take it as the biggest challenge in their redistributive form of governance.[23]

In this debate Kerala model occupies a unique position where we find two contesting domains at the same discursive space. First the Union of India is officially pursuing neo-classical mode of laissez-faire economy since early 1990s and the states within the Union are working towards increasing per capita income and other ways to increase economic growth. Kerala is the only state within India apart from West Bengal, which has continued to trudge along the path of redistribution in spite of the change of power from the left to the centrist coalition. Second, despite the low growth rate, less industrialization, low per capita income and most importantly with no socialist revolution and radical seizure of private assets the state has proved that redistributive model can transform the lives of the millions of common people. This indeed can be a pivot for the advocates of alternatives *in* development. Kerala model gives us this option that land reform, subsidy and control in food prices and other necessities, subsidized public housing, inexpensive and easily accessible medical care, free and comprehensive educational services for the people (particularly the primary education) and other such welfare programs can uplift the poorest section of the population even under the constant pressure from the neo-classical market forces. If a government opts for these alternatives the people will live longer, get better education and health care and will not die out of hunger. To follow this path neither sovereignty nor a socialist revolution is needed—even a province within a country can try to materialize this alternative model challenging the concept of TINA[24] and giving anthropologists a chance to present their case of alternatives *in* development.

The Discourses and the Discordance

Here comes the million dollars/billion rupee question—can anthropologists really speak the truth on development to the governments,

organizations, and institutions of power and still earn a living as a development professional in the era of neo-classical economy? The question leads us to the basic debates in our discipline i.e. why the lack of 'local' knowledge is considered as the principal reason behind the failure of development projects and how the anthropologists as development professionals can use their knowledge in development projects. Even when the people in power completely ignore the anthropologists in their development initiatives, like what we saw in West Bengal and Kerala or in the other Indian states, these debates will continue to haunt our discipline as we put those initiatives under our scanner.

Anthropologists never agreed on the economistic measures of assessing the degree of development like GDP growth and vice versa as the economists cannot accept anthropologists' 'obsession' on the development narratives.[25] But our discipline does acknowledge the comprehensiveness of capability approach and HDI to assess development as it combines indicators of health, life expectancy, literacy, political participation and access to resources. There is no denial of the fact that these are important parameters of assessing human development as Sarkar *et al.* (2006) showed through the study of HDI and HPI that both the indices for the Scheduled Tribes in India are 30 per cent lower than the all-India figures and somewhat nearer to the poorer countries in the sub-Saharan Africa. But the lack of proper focus on the 'local' knowledge in the capability approach—believed to be the principal cause of failure of most of the development projects—makes it less effective than expected. The terms in the contemporary development discourses like 'participation', 'partnership', 'sustainability', 'good governance' have so far been proved to be mostly rhetorical in nature as all these terms lack a proper focus on the 'local' knowledge.

Even if we recognize the fault line within anthropology between the development practitioner (designing, implementing or evaluating development programs) and their theoretical cousins who are mostly engaged in the radical critique of development programs, we must add that both the camps laid maximum emphasis on the incorporation of 'local' knowledge in their works. Some of them from the second camp even envisage a 'post-development' era where 'local'/'indigenous' knowledge becomes a repository in creating alternative discourses on development—alternatives to development and alternative *in* development. The former rejects the entire philosophy of development initiated after the World War II while the latter looks for reforms within the existing forms of development. The problem faced by development institutions/agencies which recruit anthropologists must also be addressed here. The kind of 'local'/'indigenous' knowledge that the anthropologists advocate may prove to be incompatible with the policy design and could be very difficult to execute within a particular time frame–often tightly laid down by the funding agencies and/or approving authorities. On the other hand, anthropologists recruited in different development institutions find it

extremely hard to persuade their employers to go through the live-experiences of people for two reasons—one, these narrations sometimes are too lengthy to read before framing the policy design and two, these lived-experiences are not backed by 'solid' statistics to prove its utility in development discourses. Development agencies have another reason for not emphasizing on the 'local' knowledge. Such projects require changes in project design and they need to be managed directly from the field of operation, which in turn means that the projects cannot be managed and monitored from the comfort of sitting in a distant city.

There is another issue that goes against the anthropologists as it is branded as a 'soft' science in comparison to other 'hard' or 'harder' sciences like economics, engineering, statistics, agronomy, geography, financial planning and management which normally dominate the development institutes. These 'hard' scientists, equipped with various quantitative methods, mostly lack the understanding of the importance of 'local' or 'indigenous' knowledge and the skill of an anthropologist to make these knowledge relevant in the development projects[26]. Thus, we find that Cernea (1995:341), formerly a senior sociologist at the World Bank, referring to "structural difficulties and sleep-robbing questions that we have confronted in introducing anthropological knowledge within an economic fortress." While Cernea was more honest in admitting this difficulty, many other specialists from different disciplines think that ethnographic field data can be obtained without any training in anthropology and some even ridicule the anthropological data when it comes to the issues of development. Trostle (2010) has highlighted how the *World Development Report 2010: Development and Climate Change* by the World Bank failed to harmonize neoliberal development rhetoric with new climate change imperative due to its lack of anthropological concern of incorporating social context and local knowledge particularly in the context of health. Anthropologists face an uphill task to explain their methods and demonstrate the usefulness of their data to the development institutes, which are stacked with the 'hard' scientists. Another very interesting fact is that no anthropologist till date has been placed at the highest position in an international development institute—their role is limited to consultants, evaluators, field investigators, cultural-agents and the like. However, anthropologists have helped in many development projects to formulate a multidisciplinary field-based research approaches like rapid assessment procedures (RAP) and participatory rural appraisal (PRA) to evaluate projects where the 'local' would come in a somewhat diminutive way as 'stakeholders'. Nevertheless there are better stories on the association of anthropologists in developmental projects and research. The Rockefeller Foundation program on agriculture from 1970s to 1990s regularly recruited anthropologists (which was very uncommon during that period) particularly in the prestigious project of 'green revolution' where scientists from different disciplines collaborated to develop better technologies and other agronomic innovations which dramatically improved crop production

particularly in the poverty-stricken areas of the world and promoted better management of natural resources, which were plundered mainly due to poverty-related issues. Association of anthropologists in these interdisciplinary studies have so far made important intellectual contribution on several aspects associated with agriculture like food security, effects of development-related displacements (like the construction of dams), participatory breeding of plants, agro-forestry, changing gender relations and position of women due to agricultural development, crop storage, effect of new technologies on the small farmers, challenges of biotechnology and intellectual property rights in seed provision system, protection of small farmers during disasters, child nutrition, intra-household income control, benefits of land reform, tenancy reform and other various forms of democratic movements (Scudder and Colson 1979; Mangin 1979; Lynch 1981; Rhoades 1984; Babb 1985; Doughty 1987; Groenfeldt and Moock 1989; Carney and Watts 1991; Moock and Rhoades 1992; Rubin 1992; Cernea and Guggenheim 1993; Dvorak 1993; Cernea 1995; Pottier 1999; Koenig and Diarra 1998; Tripp 2001; Sperling and Longley 2002; Worby et al. 2002; Wolford 2004; Dasgupta and Lorenzo 2009, Razsa and Kurnik 2012).

These ethnographies firmly entrenched the role of anthropologists in landmark development projects. But, as anthropologists like Nolan (2002) pointed out, apart from creating ethnographies on development, anthropologists remained as outsiders in several stages of a development project such as during the formulation of a project and often during negotiation with stakeholders at various levels on the meanings and outcomes of the project. However, the role 'development narratives' (where 'local' gets privilege over the 'global') in the success and failure of a development project particularly in the traditional society has been established by the anthropologists working on development (Ferguson 1990; Hill 1986). Nevertheless, the critiques of this approach complain about the complexity and tentativeness of this narrative approach from the anthropologists and offer, in comparison, a general universalistic approach which is more simple, familiar and explicit to the development agencies (Gow 2002). These development agencies always prefer non-anthropologists as key consultants simply because non-anthropologists can offer development blueprints which justify status quo in the formulation of the development projects and these projects can be monitored from a distance.

Thus, our discipline has failed to make a lasting impression in the field of development—much to the peril of the future of development. On the one hand, the institutions of power considered anthropologists as a group of professionals who 'distract' the focus of development project as they insist on the incorporating 'local' instead of 'global' knowledge in the project blueprint. Sometimes it means sifting through numerous pages of 'development narratives' without any scope of generalization. On the other hand, anthropological logic of the primacy of 'local' sometimes become incompatible

with the basic logic of neo-classical economy—the inevitability of market throughout the world. Anthropologists' endeavour to look beyond the primacy of market choices in all cultures and denial of the images of people of all cultures as 'market citizens' in pursuit of more economic opportunities made them more vulnerable as this endeavour is seen as a deterrent in most of the development projects funded by different national and international institutions and various governments. So the choice is either 'adapt or perish'—either the anthropologists have to leave their obsession on narratives of 'local' and make themselves more relevant in the development projects, or they can go back to the academy and get engaged in the critique of development and find alternatives *of* (instead of *in*) development which will remain mainly in academic discourse. This logic of adaptation may also threaten the basic concern of anthropology—the study and the wellbeing of the vulnerable 'other', particularly the poor in the Third World countries like India.

NOTES

1. See Lewis (2005) for a comprehensive account of the changing relationship between development and anthropology over the years.
2. See later in this article.
3. See Das (2000)
4. See Abu-Lughod (2002, 2013)
5. See Sivaramakrishnan 2000, Doane 2007, Michelutt 2007, Baugh 2008, Babb 2010, Sharman 2010, Venkatesan 2010, Kockelman 2011.
6. See Sen (2006), Dreze and Sen (2013), Bardhan (1984), Nag (1983, 1984, 1989), Mallick (1997), Nossiter (1982, 1988), Lieten (1977, 1979, 1990, 1992, 1994, 2002) , Gough (1980) and Mencher (1978a, 1978b, 1980), Ghatak and Ghatak (2002), Desai (2003), Saradamoni (1987), Dasgupta (1987)
7. See Bagchi (1998)
8. Source: Economic Survey (2001-2002), Planning Commission and NSSO data.
9. See Banerjee, Bardhan, Basu, Datta Chaudhuri, Ghatak, Guha, Majumdar, Mookherjee and Ray (2002)
10. Since independence until early 1990s industrialization in India had to go through an elaborate process of obtaining licenses from the Central Government which was indifferent on the eastern Indian provinces like West Bengal. This period is known as license raj in India.
11. See Guruswamy 2005 and West Bengal Human Development Report 2004.
12. Bannerjee 2006; Sen 2006; Bannerjee 2006; Fernandes 2006; Mohanty 2007; Sau 2008; Bandyopadhyay 2008.
13. Patnaik 2007; Ray 2008; Sarkar and Chowdhury 2009.
14. Kapoor (2011) on subaltern social movement groups in Odisha, Dasgupta and Pellegrini (2009) on the impact of tenancy reform in West Bengal on consumption expenditure of tenants, Steur and Das (2009) on the land struggles and rural unrest in West Bengal, Vietnam and China as peasant land is cleared for Special Economic Zones and other

capitalist investments, Sarkar (2007) on the need of land acquisition for industrialisation, Guha (2007) on the peasant resistances in West Bengal in 1990s, Bannerjee and Roy (2007) on the reasons of present peasant unrest in West Bengal Custers (1986) on Tebhaga peasant movement in West Bengal and Balagopal (2007) on the land unrest in Andhra Pradesh.

15. Nag (1983, 1989), Lieten (1977, 1978, 2002).

16. See Desai (2003).

17. See Osella and Osella (2006).

18. See Nossiter (1982, 1988).

19. See below.

20. Jussy (2005).

21. See Sharma (2003), Chakraborty (2005), Osella and Osella (2006).

22. See Lieten (2002), Jeromi (2003).

23. See Kannan 1999, Balakrishnan 2008.

24. There is no alternative.

25. See the collections of Bardhan (1989) and Bardhan and Ray (1989) on the methodological differences and possible convergences between the economists and the anthropologists who specialize on development.

26. See Srivastava 1999.

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