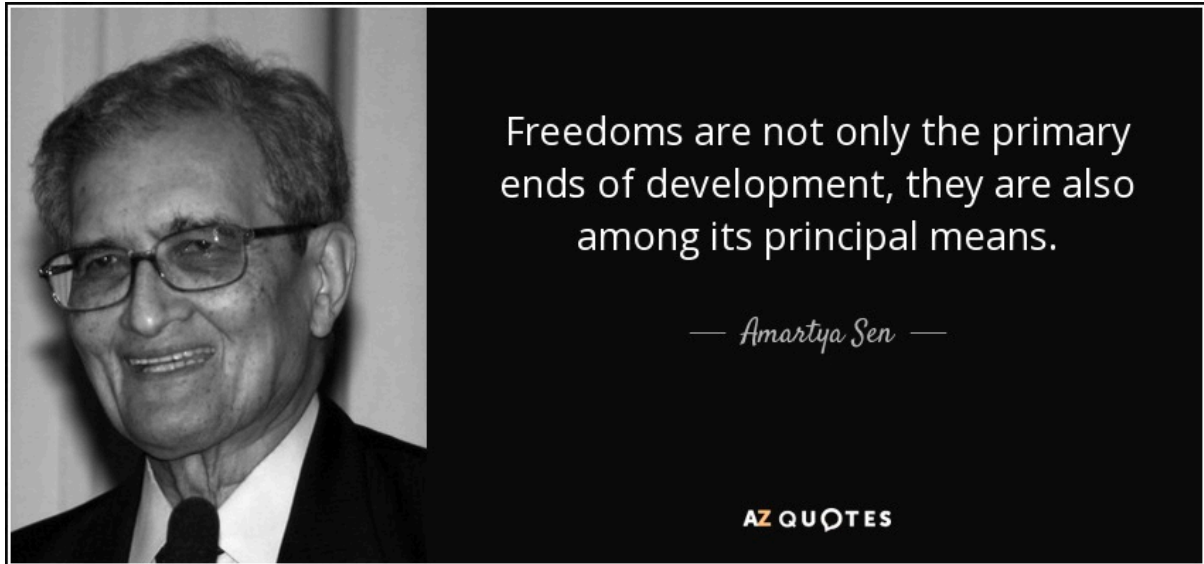


Analysing the model of development in Rourkela



Studying the ecological and social drift of Rourkela

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Analysing the development model of Rourkela, Orissa

Rajkishor Meher attempts to study the development of Rourkela in independent India and the consequences of planned urbanisation. Rourkela was the first planned steel town to have been built after independence. It was located in a dense forest area and was conceived as a 'growth centre' due to abundance of natural resources and rich deposits of iron. It was seen as **an opportunity for development** with rapid industrialisation. Keeping this objective in mind, the government decided to set up a steel plant there, hoping that it would bring in urbanisation and radiate impulses of economic development all over the country. And so, **an industrial steel plant was set up in Rourkela** in the early 1950s that triggered off industrialisation.

The reason it was seen as an opportunity for development was because it would lead to a growth in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country and an increase in the per capita income. Setting up a steel plant would ensure economic development of the city.

Alas, this move **wasn't able to meet the objective** of development and rather led to social crisis and massive ecological imbalance. When the steel plant was completed, there was a massive immigration into Rourkela from different parts of the country due to numerous employment opportunities. The city had a 'masterplan' for the Steel Township, which was the residential area to house all employees of the steel plant. The masterplan had a vision for over fourteen thousand houses with modern amenities. But urbanisation spilled beyond the steel township due to **massive increase in the number of immigrants**, and so the government came up with a second 'masterplan' for the civil town, to develop residential areas for the common people.

However, this increase in urbanisation generated by the establishment of the steel plant could not be contained by any of the masterplans. The population level exceeded the projections of the master plans for both, the steel township and the civil town. **The two masterplans had not anticipated these**

trends in immigration. Illegal constructions came up in both residential and industrial areas leading to **overcrowding** and **congestion**. With the increase in number of migrants, the civil town became very congested. The poor migrants squatted on public lands and many slums came up in the city, including in the steel township! The civic amenities and urban infrastructure that had been built **could not cope up with the huge inflow of migrants**. Congestion couldn't be reduced, urban degradation swept the city and **slums proliferated everywhere**.

But this wasn't the only problem that arose when the steel plant was set up. It also led to an immense **social unrest**. The immigrants who occupied the positions in the steel plant were labelled as '**outsiders**' by the local community and tribes. These so called 'outsiders' had prominent positions and jobs in the city, and the **local tribes resented them** because they felt that they had been robbed of their job opportunities. Moreover, the local tribals were uprooted from their habitats due to construction and extensive mining, causing indignation. The second generation tribals realised that the job opportunities were blocked by the outsiders, causing social tensions. The tribals feel that they have **suffered injustice at the hands of the outsiders**.

Hence, the large scale immigration created considerable social unrest. These disputes have led to formation of different organisations for the tribes and for the migrants. The author says that **the politics of 'insiders vs outsiders' dominates the social discourse of the city**.

Not only did this industrialisation cause social unrest, it also led to massive **ecological degradation** of the city. The steel plants and industries have caused a tremendous **increase in the pollution levels** of Rourkela. Exhausts from the furnaces containing high levels of harmful and poisonous gases are freely released into the atmosphere. Effluents are discharged into the water and the mining activities have caused extensive deforestation. Some parts of the city have even experienced acid rain! Moreover, the social crisis and drifts have actually contributed to the ecological crisis and degradation of Rourkela. The author says that there is a general apathy to environmental issues in town and most of the authorities are indifferent to them.

We can see that **the setting up of the steel plant in Rourkela actually caused more harm than benefit.** It led to massive migration and industrialisation which in turn led to congestion, social unrest and environmental degradation. The objective of the steel plant was to bring in development and it has clearly failed, and it is because the planners looked at the setting up of the steel plant as the **‘ends’ of development**, and not the ‘means’.

Amartya Sen says that great GDP does not necessarily imply that the country is developed. Yes, a high per capita income is a way to reach development, that is, it is the ‘means’ to reach development. **But it is not the ‘end’ itself!** We often think of per capita income and industrialisation as the ‘ends’ of development. But **they are only the means to reach the ends.**

Amartya Sen wanted to rethink the very definition of development. He said **development is freedom**, and his theory focuses on the ‘ends’ rather than the ‘means’ of development. One must have access to education, healthcare and drinking water. There must be freedom in the civil and political rights of the people. It is the lack of freedom that actually leads to poverty. These are the ‘direct indicators’ that really define the ‘ends’ of development. Yes, GDP is an important means to reach development, but along with that, we also need entitlements and capabilities **so that the means can lead to the ends.** GDP is only a proxy indicator which is one of the means that would lead to the ‘ends’ like good education and healthcare. But GDP is not the end itself!

Hence, the setting up of the steel plant was only the ‘means’ of development in Rourkela. Moreover, **the ‘ends’ depend not only on the means, but also on social and economic factors.** But as we’ve seen, the steel plant led to massive social unrest and poor economic conditions in the civil township. These are also the means of development and only setting up the steel plant would not be sufficient for the economic development of Rourkela.

The author also says that there is a feeling of insecurity which confines the minorities to live in congested areas. Locked in a grim struggle for livelihood, the poor prefer to just ignore the environmental problems. They are afraid that

if environmental issues are raised, the industries would close leading to depletion in jobs. This is an example of the first stage in Walt Rostow's theory of modernization. Rostow takes the analogy of an airplane and in the first stage, the airplane is on the runway, but not able to take off.

Rostow says that there is a lack of development because there is a cultural propensity to not let go of tradition. The cultural baggage does not allow people to develop. Tradition often entails that hardships are a part of life and that **we must simply accept it and face the problems**. Similarly, the poor people in Rourkela just accept their deteriorating living conditions and health. "They have to survive and this is the price they have to pay for their survival."

According to Rostow, **they are not moving away from the shackles of tradition** due to which the airplane is stuck on the ground and is not moving.

The setting up of the steel plant also caused cultural change in Rourkela due to migration of many people from across the country. Durkheim, who was a structural functionalist, would describe the society in Rourkela prior to the 1950s as **unsegmented and homogeneous**. In the pre-industrialist society of Rourkela, the people of the clan and tribes shared a collective conscience. Durkheim calls this **mechanical solidarity**, and it breaks down with the advent of industrialisation. The setting up of the plant led to an increase in individualism and so, there was more heterogeneity in society. Durkheim calls this **organic solidarity**, as people no longer shared a common world view.

We could also use the 'dual society thesis' to understand the development model of Rourkela. There are two kinds of societies where one is developed and the other is 'isolated' from development. For development to take place, we must increase exposure to the developed areas. The steel plant being set up serves as an example of increasing exposure to the isolated area of Rourkela. The backward areas would benefit from this exposure. But this certainly is not the case because it only causes social unrest and bad economic conditions for the poor in the city. This theory fails to explain the failure of development in Rourkela.

Hence, Rajkishor Meher is successfully study the interconnection between urbanisation and the **social and ecological drift** of the society. The

masterplans for the steel plant in Rourkela didn't really bring about development. They generated **social unrest and ecological imbalance**. The local groups and communities were displaced from their homes and suffered due to poor economic condition and environmental destruction. The development model failed, simply because setting up a steel plant is only one of the means of development, and not the end itself.