

A Comparative Narrative of the Land Acquisitions and Enclosures

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Abstract

The present paper aims at narration of the similarities of the processes and outcomes between the contemporary processes of land acquisition and displacement, on the one hand, and the historical occurrence of the land enclosures and expropriations, on the other. As observable, from the ongoing phenomena of the large-scale land acquisitions, land grabs, and the forced expropriation and exodus of native folks from their agricultural lands, forests, and the hitherto unclaimed lands etc., the forces of accumulation are let loose by the states that are hypnotised by the glittering charisma of the neo-liberal political economic ideology. Viewed in terms of inter-personal and inter-sectorial effects, the governments are playing a 'Reverse Robin Hood' role, in confiscating the lands and forests like resources of the poor for the purpose of handing the same over to the wealthy and rich capitalist class, in the name of economic growth and development. Assuming that this type of land redistribution is nothing short of the 'class robbery', the paper argues that, like the enclosures, the contemporary land grab, both by the official and the corporate routes is a dignified replay of the historically conditioned circumstances to facilitate the primitive accumulation as well as the accumulation proper; the former by means of expropriation and the latter through the designed exodus of the pauperised folks to the doorsteps of the stables of the capitalist appropriators.

Keywords: Economic Exclusion, Enclosures, Land Acquisition, Pauperization, Wage Labour Creation.

1. Introduction

The imperatives of the present process of land acquisition and displacement are driven by the neo-liberal economic ideology. Instead of the doctrine of the public purpose as the sole basis of land acquisition by the state, many novel variants of public interest have been invented by the national governments in favour of the rule of the capital. Thus, land acquisitions and displacements for economic growth, development, fiscal revenue, economies of scale, business confidence etc. have become the accepted norms of natural resource transfer, from the poor to the rich. The dilution of the pure public interest doctrine down to the proposition of facilitation of primitive accumulation and growth, however, replays the historicity of the expropriations, in its essence and accent. It does resemble the phenomena of historically observed European 'enclosures' of common and manorial lands by the landlords and mercantilist capitalists. The degree of resemblance is remarkable, especially with respect to (a) the primitive accumulation (b) facilitated by the state through (c) the organised exodus of subsistence peasant folks from their land holdings and (d) the creation of Have-Nots as helpless 'hands' in the buyers' market of labour.

The paper is divided into four sections in all. Apart from a brief introduction of the issue here, in this section (1), the other section (2-4) develop, describe, and discuss the theme of the paper. Section two makes a very brief perusal of the research literature. Section three discusses the historical context of land acquisition and expropriation as lying in the European enclosures of the mercantilist and industrial eras. Section four describes the comparative effects of the land acquisitions and enclosures which are found to assume a high degree of convergence with respect to the primitive accumulation, on the one hand, and the creation of the pauperised labour folks, on the other.

2. Land Acquisition: An Instrument of Regressive Land Distribution

Land acquisition takes a specific connotation of the process of takeover of land, in the name of bona fide national interest and public cause, from the erstwhile holders like the peasantry, forest dwellers, and other native people, by the state or state institutions, either on behalf of, or for the purpose of transfer to, public, public institutions, private individuals, associations of individuals, companies, corporations etc., through a procedure established by law. The underlying philosophy of land acquisition is twofold:

- a. Public interest in land is greater than the private interest; and
- b. Land-losers deserve compensation (GOI, 1958).

Land acquisition, however, involves dislocation and displacement of the land-loser communities in various ways (Boche & Anseeuw, 2013) and the more the area acquired the more the sum of displacement. Land acquisition and displacement have multiple debilitating effects on the land-loser people (Cernea M. M., 1999) and an inbuilt mechanism for proper compensation and rehabilitation is necessary (Cernea M. M., 2007). (Pranab, Kousik, & Shatadru, 2009; Cotula & Leonard, 2010; Chiaravalli, 2012; Ghatak & Mookherjee, 2014; Khan M. I., 2013, 2014, 2015a, 2015b), have been discussed various aspects of land acquisition and suggested meaningful alterations and alternative modes and models of acquisition. Bardhan (2011) treats the obstacles to land acquisition as obstacles to economic growth.

P. Sainath minutely observed the working of land acquisition and displacement and its effects on affected persons and expressed dissatisfaction with the process which is unilaterally growth-oriented only at the cost of the land loser and displaced persons (Sainath, 1996). M. I. Khan (2013, 14) studied micro and macroeconomic effects of land acquisition and also tried to look into the relationship between economic growth and land acquisition, and between the capital base depreciation of affected persons and land acquisition, per se. Khan & Alam (2015) argued for an inclusive and participative approach of land acquisition. M. I. Khan (2015 a; 2015 b) looked into the process of land acquisition, peasants' dispossession, and compensation and found that the roles of the public servants and project authorities were more like those of the rent-seekers and opportunists, while the PPP concessionaire were able to dispossess the land-owners without payment of compensation. Johnson & Chakravarty (2013) studied land acquisition in the West Bengal and observed that the political and bureaucratic compensation matters more than the welfare of, and the justice to, the land losers and that the judiciary's role is not efficacious, and not always above the board.

As a matter of fact, the growth process has affected, i.e. dispossessed or displaced or both, around 600 million people in India since 1947 (Sainath: 1996). Not all of them have been provided compensation or been rehabilitated in any way, leave apart the adequacy of compensation and rehabilitation. In the post-economic-reforms period, there is a flood of land acquisition incidents. The land is needed for infrastructure, industry, smart cities, luxury resorts etc. The land is required by the public sector. It is demanded by the private wealthy class and multinational corporations. Real estate sector has been the most promising business since 1991. All said the land has become a promising business of making the billionaires overnight.

3. Historical Context of Land and Acquisitions: The Enclosures

The industrial revolution, accompanied by the increasing level of economic control over social means of production through the institutions of private property and market, is a phase of historical progression which has yet to come to terms with an order of stability and equilibrium or to attain a stage of, to say in the terminology of dialecticism, the synthesis beyond the turbulence of the antithesis to the erstwhile social stability of the feudal superstructures. The rise of merchandise capital, colonial finance, and nascent capitalism would not have attained the adolescence and the seemingly maturity but for the powers of the imperialism, economic exploitation, and transformation of property relationship, especially the labour and natural resource ownership.

To rise as an institutional mode of production, capitalism demanded a sort of social organization where productive powers belonged to one group of persons, say, the enterprising ventures or, in the later stage, the capitalists, and the process of appropriation and accumulation of the

means of production in their hands, and to the exclusion of the others the majority of whom would be collectively known as the hands or the labour. It was a sort of long-term transition though advocated in the interest of the society, yet, to the larger advantage of the social classes and people who were capable and entitled to take and execute decisions overruling the voiceless others.

Large scale social transformation, propelled by the capital oriented economic impulse of the time, occurred in England and other European nations in the years of industrial revolution and imperial expansion. The era is, often, also referred to as the 'enclosure era'. This was a long transition. The times were increasingly characterized, firstly, by mercantilist controls and imperial trade manipulation and, secondly, by the advocacy of natural liberalism culminating into the well-knit parable of an auto-guided and self-regulated mechanism, called the invisible hand, benevolently working hard in the interest of the whole society. The enclosure mechanism worked in two different but complementary ways.

On the one hand, the rising demand for an exchange value oriented production system required increasing occupation over land for market determined uses. The neo-capitalists and the old landlords, in unison, had got an opportunity for grab and pressed hard for the enclosure of the erstwhile manors, including the demesne, and the serf-lands. With every enclosure, a lot of the peasantry added to the number of those ousted from the manors. Earlier the serfs had to pay a hefty penalty to migrate from a manor. Now, they were encouraged to leave. At the same time when the numbers of land ousted were soaring the government of England, collaboratively, made some rules stipulating that wanderers and beggars will be punished with. Their ear limbs might be dissected as a criminal penalty. Those found stealing would also lose their limbs say, the hands.

Simultaneously, on the other hand, there was the trader-sailor-capitalist-manufacturer peremptorily waiting to offer wage employment at subsistence terms. It does not require any ingenuity to deduce that the land-ousted had either to join the army of the wanderers and get their ears cut in reward. Or they had to unite as bandits and lose physical limbs when caught. Alternatively, they had to work, in lieu of wages, as directed by the capitalist producers who could extract surplus value in multiples of the impugned wage payments. The system was increasingly believed to have been coordinated by the invisible hand. The edifice grand intellectual was deftly chiselled and eulogized, especially, among many others, by Adam Smith (1776). It was individual liberty and self-interest based competition guided, though, without caring a bit about the actual distribution of the liberty and capacity entitlements.

Enclosures were a drastic phenomenon serving as the basic instrument of change in the technology as well as the mode and relations of production. It was through the means of large-scale enclosures that the feudalism in Europe receded and gave way to capitalism. Nay, the enclosures were the booty of capitalism! Enclosures were facilitated by other institutions as well. It is a matter of fact that the transition, spanned over many centuries, was immensely crucial for a progressive transformation increasingly leading to political-economic liberalism and creation of what is now known as the capitalism. In between the beginning and obliteration of this phase of transition in Europe, the social and economic scenario was conspicuously characterized by:

- a. The presence of segregated (social and economic) classes says the heads and the hands.
- b. The support of the state (policy support and flagship power) to the earners of exchange value and treasure i.e. the traders and capitalists.
- c. Institutional creation of business environment whereby the manufacturers and traders could get every assistance from the state and the 'hands' in their own interest could never remain idle. Wanderers, beggars, and bandits were declared legal offenders in the fashion the Roman Slaves were proclaimed fugitives of the state if they dared to abscond from their masters.

Enclosures had definite consequences with durable irreversibility. It was the institutionalization of utilitarian materialism. It was an economic change towards capitalism. It was a political change for the imperialism. It was a social transformation for the creation of human classes on the basis of private ownership of the means of production and property. The descendants of the land-ousted had to serve greatly sacrosanct duty of nation building and national pride in competing with the mechanical power in obeying the commandments of the nationalist wealth creator and

accumulator. Their needs had been enumerated by the wise men of the time and the same were to be provided to the 'hands' in such a generous amount that the family of the labour class, say the husband, wife and their children, had to walk along the earthen roads to the workplace leaving the birds chirping in the trees before sunrise, enjoy the task of working for the whole day, and return to their earthen beds after the silence of birds in their nests. Anybody could afford the luxury of not to avail such a beautiful routine and deft style of living, however, at a fate that was comparable to the fugitive Roman Slave: stand, alone, before the hungry lion of the burning belly!

Enclosures brought value, treasure, power, repute, and a whole empire to the British and other European nation states. Land-ousted gave them a system of production and appropriation. After a couple of centuries, land-ousted was no more required. They were the reminiscent of economic justice and virtue dear to the state and denied to the hands. The blot was destined to be effaced only through the flying fighters in the game of which was orchestrated by the economic and political imperial powers and which is awfully remembered as the World Wars.

Enclosures proved crucial for economic progress, industrial and commercial expansion and social transformation. The process established precedence and an exemplary towards the new frontiers of development. It determined the future course of action on a trajectory of a market led, capitalist-profit guided, and institutionally imposed situation of the massive transformation of land-use and ownership patterns in favour of the rich as a pre-requisite for capital accumulation and capitalist superstructure of production and distribution. No doubt, the economic wealth increased massively. The empires flourished superbly. The technology became a buzzword. Affluence flowed around. The comforts concentrated, however, only around the wealthy ones i.e. those who aroused to reap the status of those who had 'have'. Those who could not 'have' been destined to work as labour at wage rates equivalent of bare subsistence. The labour had to learn and to adapt to the new ways of social organization, ironically, which was anti-thesis of their survival, in order to survive. The dominant class had had to pacify the anger of the suffering people who formed a numerical majority, but an existential minority. The amount of solarium paid to the impoverished people in exchange for economic peace was appropriated from the other colonized people across the globe. So the perceived affluence and glitter of the historically developed nations, which were also the colonizers of the world, came from the occupation of land and other natural resources as well as the labour power.

There arises a valid concern. Why did not the enclosures occur elsewhere in the colonies? The comfort may be that once the whole of a nation of colonized people was occupied what was the need for enclosures on Zamindari parishes in other parts of the world? The stronghold of the Zamindars on behalf of the British, for instance in India, was by in itself serving the very purposes of enclosures that were the appropriation of the exchange value and treasure by means of an excessive burden on the peasantry. Be it the Ryotwari, Mahalwari, or the permanent settlement system of revenue administration the British capitalist empire was never in loss anywhere.

There was a strong possibility of enclosure type occupation at the time of the end of colonial controls. But the rise of the socialist and communist ideology and states came across. However, when the socialist block stumbled the situation improved in favour of the market and the Washington Consensus opened a whole new vista of neo-liberal economic ideology, now, more vehemently dominated by the trans-border and multinational corporations, giant business houses, crony capital, and primitive accumulators going well beyond the lessons and propaganda of competition taught by the classical and neoclassical forefathers. Now, the Biblical commandment of capitalism is not the competition. Rather, their Gayatri Mantra is efficiency and affluence. Their logic is the removal of poverty from the globe though the same is achieved in the rich societies only on the cost of exploitation of the poor people. They know once the poor people stop serving them their richness will shatter! But they, instead, say: the developing countries or the impugned Third World is impoverished and filthy. It needs glitter. Giant MNC capital knows how to produce glitter. So, the trans-border capital deserves invitation and red carpet welcome. But the glitter has to disassociate itself from the filth. Though, the filth may be a good source of exchange value, yet, the Shudras and Mlecchas must be kept at a distance.

Enclosures did not occur sizable elsewhere when they were occurring in Europe. But when the process is no more live there it has majestically become prevalent in India, and everywhere across the developing world.

4. Land and Acquisition and Displacement the Enclosures

A critical comparison between land enclosures and acquisitions reveals the startling similarities of substance and nonchalant differences of forms. Apparently, the nomenclatures sound incongruent and so do the laymen conception of the two. Thus, enclosures were the specific acts of enclosing or fencing of their estates by the manor lords to ascertain improved productivity, safety, and security. Enclosures removed the serfs who did not master but cultivated the lords' lands and remained tied to it like in a semi-autonomous slave status. The enclosure occurred many centuries ago when the economic organization and technology were relatively not so complex. The enclosures were allowed by the monarchies while the land acquisition is done her by the state. The absolute number of affected persons was lesser compared to the acquisition and displacements. These are a few differences between enclosures and acquisitions. However, alas, these facial dissimilarities fail to affect the substantial outcomes and the substance of the two processes to any meaningful dimensions.

We will try parsimony of words and show the process and effects of land enclosures through a step-down analogy. Assuming that the enclosure effects flow from the enclosures of estates to the expropriation of the serfs and their conversion have changed into pauperized wage labour destined to social and existential oblivion. The step-down analogy is shown ahead as figure 1.

Figure 1: Step-Down process of Enclosure Effects on the Displaced People

The enclosure of a manor estate removes the cultivator-peasants called the serfs from the place they were tied to. They do no more belong, now, to the land as settlers and cultivators. They are expropriated of the land. Their umbilical cord has been dissected. Land expropriation leaves nothing in their possession to depend upon for subsistence. Bereft of any means to engage them productively, the ousted people start wandering, searching, and seeking productive engagement. They are, as expelled, homeless and means less. What are the alternatives before them? Set upon a business? Start begging? Join the bandits? Let they annihilate? Let the family annihilate itself? Let the children die of hunger, illness, and direct exposure to the extreme weathers of the Northern Hemisphere? Whom to go? Whom to reach? The Jesus of Heavens! Or the gods of the Kingdom!

Yes, they have a great but the only opportunity, the only option, to keep their flesh alive. This is to let their hands work for the angels of prosperity who are peremptorily waiting since long to welcome the Hands- the labouring and toiling persona. They are known as the mill owners, traders, sailors, financiers, capitalists, the old and new estate lords, and what not. They have machines. They hope to complement them with the Hands. The bare Hands! , Perfectly unable to fall back on anything dependable. So that the cycle of progress, affluence and wealth is never disturb. Richness ever pours itself on those who know how to make it rain torrentially. What a marvellous combination. Hunters make the prey tiredly vulnerable to fall into the lap of the predators. An emptied belly does not choose. It does not know how to differentiate one eatable from the other. It only knows that flesh needs flesh! No matter green or grey. No concern red or rot. Cultural luxuries are not the business of any destitute. Hands cannot choose, likewise, the machines. But the machines and implements know how to choose the Hands, and how long.

So, the erstwhile cultivators have, now, no alternative other than join the reserves of their ilk raising the battalions of the wage labour required by the business units like wool factories,

textiles, shipbuilding, coal mining etc. They have, by definition, no control over wage level or over the work because the servile and menial skills do not gather the power of bargain, circumstantially and intellectually. By adding themselves to the pool of toiling hands they further add to a fall in the wage sacks. The wages at the equivalents of a bare subsistence superbly kill any chances of material improvement in their status and keep them constantly as paupers ever squeezing the space of existence for their lot! Till then to now toilers wages are exceptionally rigid at lower ends!

Pauperization, in turn, is not accustomed to any downward limits. The family- all adults and minors, husbands and wives, and kids and teens - struggles from dawn to dusk, relentlessly, to meet both ends of the ever emptied belly to keep it going. Having left their society and social chores long back, they now stand to have no society at all. Factory slums are not living spaces; they are the recess pavilions where human limbs can be put at some rest so as to energise courage for tomorrows' work. The industrial routine of strict subordination expropriates them of the social space, one day or the other.

What is the natural direction of a downward journey? Is not it the valley of vanishing when everything is lost? When, society is gone. Culture has entered the belly. Life is ruined. The present is a blot. The future is blank. When, nothing is worth treasure. The existence is torn apart, then ...! This is a journey receding inward and leading to the expropriation of the existence itself.

Let us a little see the winners' fortunes also. A cursory look at figure 2 reveals that the enclosure created a regressive resource, especially land resource, redistribution from the poor to the rich. Thus, Have-Nots are produced in the process while their conversion into wage labour becomes, on the one hand, a prized source of surplus value appropriation for the accumulative class while on the other, a curse of pauperization. Pauperization, in turn, gives more powers of manipulation to the producers. Resultantly, Have-Nots stand to lose their social space while the wealth of the rich concentrates intensively. Poverty turning into destitution results into existential loss and triviality for the losers and dominate space for the winners. In the case of rebellion by the Have-Nots, it is a matter of strategic co-opting and damage control by the wealthy to protect their position till they fail to do so. And they rarely fail to do so.



Figure 2: Enclosure Effects for the Losers and Gainers

This is not a parable. It is the historical travesty lived by innumerable people. The unfortunate ones who fell prey to the traps of the organized predators' designs like enclosures, industrialization, liberalism, capitalism, and so on. Those who sold the dreams of prosperity devoured their clients. The factory slums, the products of a proud and progressive civilization, crowded by the enclosure ousted families remained like blots on the face of Europe for hundreds of years. These slum blots were effaced by the air strike bombards of the World War II.

Let us not exaggerate anyhow. Modern land acquisitions are not the centuries old enclosures. No doubt, they are not. They are, nonetheless, the able progenies and, thereby, the heir apparent of the enclosures' clan. The legacy goes on literally. As far as the continuity is concerned, the abovementioned description of enclosure consequences bears an astonishing congruence with the consequential outcomes, for the displaced folks, of the contemporary land acquisitions. Put a developing country e.g. India in place of Europe of the enclosure era. Substitute land acquisitions for enclosures. Liberalism is for liberalism. Capitalism is for capitalism. The land acquisition acts for

enclosure acts. And the state for the state! The differences are only of magnitudes and absolute numbers. Otherwise, the normalised description is equally applicable and equally true outcome in India or any other poor country amazed by the dreams of economic growth and all out prosperity by means of forces of primitive accumulation set at large.

Does, for example, India care about the present and future of the displace peoples and folks? Does India compensate in character equivalence terms? Does it restore their social and economic capital and productive base? Does she look back upon after acquiring their lands? Does she make them partners in progress? Partners in the value added on the land that once belonged to them?

Is not India effacing wage labour rights? Is not India favouring and enforcing a capitalist regime? Is not India helping the poor's vulnerability? Is not India using her armed constabularies against land losers? Is not India firing at non-acquiescing land losers? Is not India physically eliminating any resistance to land acquisition and primitive accumulation?

Land acquisition expropriates and displaces a large number of people who, invariably, happen to be the people in the lowest economic rungs. The majority of them become permanently resource-less, vulnerable, and helpless to join the ranks of destitute and manual labour. The economic gains, in bulk, from the acquisition, go to the people in echelons. Productive structure and output composition undergo an elitist flavour. Mode of production changes and so change the relations of production. Various stakeholders sprout up all on the cost of the land-loser. Social justice becomes a great casualty. Distributive concerns creep deep into the soil. Not only the number of poor but the nature of poverty also worsens. The state which poses as the sole repository of wisdom and takes away land in the name of development and national interest forgets in its developmental expediency the true interest of the land-losers, ousted ones, and displaces lots. Naturally, there is a danger of rebuttal and dissatisfaction. So, the need for enforcement agencies like police, paramilitary forces, and intermediaries increases. Everything, as mentioned herein, is observable in the land acquisition process as witnessed contemporarily.

As far as the manor lords and capitalists were concerned land enclosures multiplied their prosperity outward. So is doing the land acquisition for the present capitalists and emerging neo-estate lords. Also, the distance between the Haves and Have-Nots is going out of antecedent proportions.

We may not have to wait too long to see the replay of the act. The stage is ready!

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