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**EXAMINING THE CONTOURS OF POLITICS OF
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THE PRISM OF RIGHT TO FOOD IN INDIA**

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Examining the Contours of Politics of Development and Democracy through the Prism of Right to Food in India

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Abstract – Though there have been intense debates among academic community and policy makers in India regarding meaning and scope of development and how it is strengthening and transforming the public sphere of Indian democracy at the onslaught of globalization. But at the backdrop of these debates there are certain peculiar commonalities about methods of mapping; the meanings of development and envisaging the possibility of egalitarian democracy that might be more inclusive and substantive in nature so that it might cater to the needs of subaltern citizens on the one hand and create a dynamic and dialogical public sphere to sustain the egalitarian claims of Indian democracy which are being proclaimed in philosophical, socio-political and juridical texts of Indian Constitution on the other. In this research paper, the researcher would like to talk about a critical mapping of meaning of development and substantiate the claims of egalitarian democracy through a case study of "Right to Food" with in different regions of India and in the process of documenting this case study. An effort is made to unpack two predominant registers of democracy that narrate the nuanced aspects of development and its consequences to marginal and subaltern citizens of India. It's primarily inter-disciplinary in nature, therefore, it would involve analytical, descriptive and hermeneutical methods and will center on multiple narratives of different actors who have been playing active role in transforming the meaning and scope of Indian democracy.

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INTRODUCTION

In order to probe the rhetorical claims about efficacy of Indian Democracy that it is one of the biggest democracy[1] in the third world countries and its thriving on electoral and procedural mechanisms of governance coupled by rule of law and that it has deepened the sensibility of justice and concerns regarding democratic rights towards citizens of country. How far these claims can be justified and sustained at the surface and deep grammar of development[2] and democracy is one of the major concerns of the paper. Because, democracy and development[3] have always been in the centre of any debate related to nation building processes in colonial and post-colonial India. At the same time one is reminded of the peculiar nature of colonial structure of democracy and markers of development debate in post-independent India where structural texture of reality has not changed because of its hierarchical legitimacy on the one hand and socio-economic and gross inequalities on the other. Though Constitutional mechanisms against these sharpened inequalities and injustices are not only radical but full of promises and hope to liberate and emancipate subaltern masses and provide them a sense of dignity and meaningful self-[4]. Keeping in mind these broad contours of debate concerning meanings of development and

claims of egalitarian democracy, the paper endeavors a critical mapping through two registers of democracy to evaluate the efficacy of debate. Now let us elaborate the fundamental spirit of these arguments and to evaluate whether the 'right to food' is able to unpack the nuances of development and churning of democracy in India.

DEMOCRACY OF SYMBOLISM AND RESISTANCE

In above mentioned context one can explore two registers of democracy; the first is related with and is known as democracy of symbolism or electoral or procedural democracy. The logic of electoral democracy brings within its fold the constitutionalism, policies, planning, institutions and agencies of the state. It is through these processes of the electoral or procedural democracy the Indian state tries to cater the dreams of its citizens.

In India, the Constitution envisages to establish a society based on egalitarian norms. Constitution makes numerous kinds of promises which include the notion of justice, equality and liberty. Sometime these promises are dubbed as gestures of symbolism. While other agencies of the state make an effort to implement these promises on the ground

through the framework of governance and policies. Through this procedural democracy the state creates a perpetual mirage for development and the people on the periphery continues to be in the perpetual quest for this mirage of development that becomes curious paradox of Indian democracy.

But beneath these notions of developmental paradigm there is an attempt being made to have inclusive democracy through various kinds of rhetorical and polemical stances. The Constitution which is talking in the language of inclusion and promises of equality, liberty and justice[5], which have been made under it, are not being fulfilled. Rather when it comes at the level of implementation there is institutionalized and systematic erosion of those promises and set goals of utopian society. The impaired/blurred vision of development and democracy bring within its fold only the selected few but others remain in continuous search of the mirage of development through first register of the democracy. Even after more than sixty years of democracy the benefit of development has not percolated deep down and it has yet to reach to the most needy who are standing in long queue to get their share of democracy and development. Thus we call first register of democracy as an official mechanism of governance and it is full of contradictions and paradoxical in nature[6].

Let us describe and explain the second register of democracy which emerges as a reaction of failure[7] of the first register of the democracy to bring the desired fruits of development. Second register of democracy is emanating in the forms of resistance, struggles, mass public movements and their alternative politics. These struggles are a reaction to mal-governance and not keeping the promises of Constitutional goals. There are many kinds of movements which are emerging as a politics of resistance and struggles[8] The right to food campaign in India is one of such politics of resistance which has emerged on the initiatives taken by civil societies which are engaged in alternative politics of democracy and development.

RIGHT TO FOOD MOVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT AND CLAIMS OF EGALITARIAN DEMOCRACY

The right to food movement[9] itself reflects the pitfalls of the traditional approach of the notion of development and the failure of the first register of the democracy. A close reading of the language of protests of civil societies against hunger deaths[10] can be helpful to understand that how over the years it has created a space for political society to ensure minimum sense of social justice[11] to the people who have been living in the margins of Indian society[12]. And to probe these issues one has to catalogue the multiple debates those emerged out of legal interventions from NGO's and various democratic rights groups such as PUCL (Peoples Union for Civil Liberty) and PUDR (Peoples Union for Democratic Rights)[13] and also other social and political

campaigns carried out civil society groups in broadest sense of term. The right to food movement is story of improper distribution of food and hunger deaths in country where the food grains are decaying due to negligent storage. The present status of food security is a palpable story of abject failure[14] of state as an institution to harness the social justice. And it shows the real picture of much hyped great story of Indian development and democracy. There is a contrasting story of shining and starving India and so many India within India which again probe the point that in the electoral democracy only selected few are included in the process of development. Position of India in world hunger index reflects the cruel but true picture of its ever growing GDP. Because of these paradoxical situations the resistance is growing stronger and stronger. The right to food campaign constitutes an important part of struggles for development and democracy for those people who have always been on the periphery of development and democracy. The right to food is not just about getting two squares of meals in a day but food security is very much in the centre of any debate regarding development and democracy.

Ideological base for these protests are provided in the form of various theories of justice and development. For instance one uses the theoretical insights of John Rawls[15] and specifically Amartya Sen's[16] body of work respectively examining the question of food security on the basis of basic need and of capability approach that is the freedom of choice theory respectively. Therefore these movements draw strength from these liberal pluralistic distributive justice oriented ethos not as a derivative discourses and assert that it constitute the base of democracy as well as the ethos of development. The right to food has close link with entitlement patterns in society and their gendered nature, the disabling effects of persistent hunger, presence or absence of social safety like employment guarantee, nutrition scheme for children, degree of importance given to propriety or land rights, hunger deaths, forceful dislocation, right over natural resources and social exclusion. All these have close relation with the quality of available social justice.

Among all the above mentioned principles, the basic right principle is the fundamental principle of social justice, which demands the minimum level of material well-being, it includes basic needs i.e. those needs which must be met in order to remain a normally functioning human being and a socially responsible citizen. It is in this context that food security or freedom from hunger is important. If hungry people are not provided with this basic need i.e. right to have access to food, and then it is considered as gross violation of social justice. Rawls talks about the conception of minimal justice i.e. also the part of distributive justice. Here one has to understand how two sets of theoretical problems of hunger and food security dealing with the readdresses of distributive justice and the recognition of gross inequality as basic denominators of substantive rights to the people of a

particular state. The very concept of basic right principle which includes security and subsistence right is the prerequisite of social security. In other words, even in a highly capitalized and market oriented society there should be guarantee of having two meals with dignity. If the policy and ultimately laws of any state fails to provide this basic subsistence right which is the fundamental principle of social justice, then that system fails even in the basic test of social justice. The principle of distributive justice advocates the allocation of equal material goods to all the members of a society, but Rawls alternative distributive justice system to which he calls 'difference principle' allows allocation that does not follow to strict equality. He says that as long as the inequality has the effect that the least concern advantage in the society is materially better off than they would be under a strict equality. It is here that distributive justice ensures at least minimal rights to the citizen of a state. Every state must respect, protect and fulfill (it includes two steps i.e. facilitate and provide) right to food.

Although The agents of procedural democracy have taken steps like mid-day meals for school going children and making available food grains at very low cost through public distribution system but these initiatives have fallen flat on the ground and nowhere near the constitutional promises of establishing a social order where development will be the obvious goal of every government. These initiatives in the form of politics of appropriation appear to be just as a mechanism for resisting the politics of resistance from the players of second register of democracy and development. The right to food Act, which has recently become subject matter of debate within institutional framework of Indian governance, after long drawn struggles of civil and political society and specifically after Supreme Court's intervention in form of interim orders to ensure food-security to poverty stricken citizens in India, is latest addition in this saga of politics of resistance. Thus I juxtapose second resister of democracy to critically evaluate the claims of egalitarian democracy in the light of emergent resistance movements and various sites of protests and dissents with in broad working and experiences of Indian developmental agendas in post globalization era in India. However a case study of right to food[17] is an illustrative one and it does not exhaust the other possibilities of explorations within the realm of Indian democracy.

We have to also examine about strengths and weaknesses of two projected registers of democracy and political economy of development programs in Indian subcontinent. The first one is regarding limits of derivative discourses in articulating the matrix of social, political and cultural transformations in India. How far these are valid and legitimate theoretical mechanisms to capture the nuances of surface and deep grammar of experiences of democracy in India. Another relates with a possibility of indigenous or alternative method for critical evaluation about the

language of resistance and promise of social and political transformations towards marginalized and subaltern sections of Indian masses, those have yet to become full-fledged citizens and may become self-sovereign to legislate their own human freedom.

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