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## **Imaginaries of development of Polavaram dam project**

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**Abstract**---In recent decades, there has been much discussion on the societal effects of large dams. The National River Linking Project (NRLP), the largest water project now under development in the world that would include the building of multiple dams, has been the subject of much discussion in India. The purpose of the \$168 billion project is to link most Indian rivers to a massive water system. As highlighted by Nehru's famous remark that huge dams are "the temples of contemporary India," substantial water infrastructure has historically been discursively tied to imaginaries of development and national progress in the subcontinent. The experiences of people impacted by the construction of dams. However, these visions clash with reality due to the fact that the displaced people are not only among the most disadvantaged in Indian society but also stand to benefit the least and lose the most from such programmes. Starting with a review of the media coverage given to the Polavaram Project, the first project to be undertaken under the NRLP programme, this paper examines the extent to which such imaginaries remain prevalent in modern political discourse. Second, it compares the findings to the experiences of persons who have been forcibly relocated as a result of the project's execution. This second section is based on information acquired from ethnographic research, particularly the qualitative interviews the author conducted in places impacted by the Polavaram project throughout the neighboring Indian states of Andhra Pradesh. The study makes the case that the discussion of big dam projects today still heavily relies on development imaginaries, which has devastating repercussions for displaced populations.

**Keywords**---imaginaries development, Polavaram dam project.

## Introduction

Large-scale dam building projects may be found in every region. The Belo Monte dam in Brazil has received a lot of media attention recently (cf. International Rivers 2012). However, there are large-scale dam projects being carried out all over the world, frequently with backing from international development agencies like the World Bank, in nations like Turkey, China, Egypt, South Korea, and Japan. 1 Since the 1990s, India's Sardar Sarovar Project along the Narmada River has drawn attention to large-scale dam infrastructure and its societal repercussions. In India today, there are more than 4,900 big dams; 4,600 of them were built after the country gained its independence in 1947, and 300 more are presently being developed. Dam building is accompanied with the expropriation of local residents. Since India's independence, estimates of the number of people who have been uprooted by large-scale infrastructure projects range widely, from 21 to 65 million (cf. Ray 2000, Stewart & Rao 2005, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre & Norwegian Refugee Council 2016). It is reasonable to wonder what kind of development these initiatives are meant to produce given the size of this relocation. Whom and what effects can be expected? Indeed, this development paradigm gives birth to exclusionary discourses and behaviors, and those who are already marginalized appear to suffer the most and gain the least from these initiatives. Large projects in India have an especially negative impact on adivasi populations. 2 Researchers have shown that at least 40% of individuals displaced by infrastructure development projects in India are indigenous communities, while making up just 8.6% of the overall population of India (cf. Fernandes 2007). Though there are notable exceptions, such as the Naxalite movements, their prospects of success are often low since they are marginalized. The majority of these projects, in India and elsewhere, have inadequate or nonexistent relocation strategies. 3 large dam is defined as a dam with a height of more than 15 meters. Currently more than 40,000 large dams exist worldwide (cf. International Rivers 2012). 2 'Adivasi' is an umbrella term for India's very diverse indigenous communities. I will be using the term in the paper, although I am aware of its limitations in describing very heterogeneous groups with heterogeneous experiences. The constitution of India lists more than 700 different so called 'Scheduled Tribes' which according to the Census of 2011 make up 8.6% of the total population (cf. Government of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs 2011). 3 See for example Vandergeest et al. (2007) for a variety of cases of displacements induced by 'development' sharing those features (for example projects in Sudan, Malaysia, Eastern Thailand, Colombia, Costa Rica, Honduras). The National River Link Project is a controversial water infrastructure plan in India (NRLP). The 168 billion dollar project involves building a number of dams and connecting most of India's rivers to a massive water infrastructure. It will be the biggest water infrastructure project in the world. The project has been in the works since the days of British colonial rule, when it was initially conceived of by British engineer Sir Arthur Cotton (cf. The Times of India 1878). The building process didn't start until 2004. Both the river development in the northern Himalayas and the southern peninsula are part of the NRLP. The former consists of 14 river connections, while the later has 16. Improvements in irrigation, hydropower generation, and drought and flood mitigation are just a few of the many advantages that proponents of the NRLP plan claim would result (cf. National Water Development Agency 2016b). Included in the NRLP programme is

the Polavaram Project. The first of two canals built as part of this project links the Godavari and Krishna rivers and has been in use since 2015. The KenBetwa connection, which would build a canal from the Madhya Pradesh section of the river Ken to the Uttar Pradesh section of the river Betwa, is the next NRLP project on the docket (in Uttar Pradesh). The NRLP has been criticized for the economic, social, and ecological costs it will impose, despite the advantages it promises (cf. Alley 2008, Rao 2005 & 2012, Rao 2006, Rajlakshmi 2012, Maheswari 2007a & 2007b, Vira 2016). Water sharing plans among neighboring Indian states that may be impacted by the programme have also come under fire. In India's federal structure, each state is responsible for matters pertaining to its own resources, including water. While critics of the NRLP scheme have advocated in favour of smaller projects which achieve similar or better results with minimal social cost, the current Modi government is strongly in favour of the project and has pushed ahead with its implementation. The project is also supported by the Supreme Court which in a judgement of 2012 ruled: In addition to our sincere wish for a prompt execution of this decision, we today issue a mandamus to the Central and State Governments involved, ordering them to carry out the judgment's directives in a timely, efficient, and lawful manner. This is an issue of great importance to the welfare and development of the country. We don't see why any state shouldn't do its part to make the Interlinking Rivers Program a reality and save the lives of people in drought-prone regions and the property of those in flood-prone areas (Supreme Court of India 2012: 62).

The national importance of the project is emphasized in the judgement through the following words: We have no wavering in seeing that the public interest should overshadow the interest of the singular States. The State Legislatures are supposed to see public issues with a more prominent objectivity, sanity and soul of administration to the country and not well established protests might bring about more noteworthy mischief, not exclusively to the adjoining States yet additionally to the country in general (High Court of India 2012:47).

### **State of the Art, Research Question and Method**

There has already been extensive social science research conducted on large dams (cf. Nüsser 2014, Baghel 2014, Klingensmith 2007, McCully 2001, D'Souza 2006).<sup>5</sup> These publications are united by the assumption that "big dams are not only tangible artefacts of massive engineering and infrastructural projects, or essential components in the alteration of fluvial landscapes and energy production; they are also manifestations of dominant development ideologies." (Nüsser 2014: 6). Further interest in the investigation of big dam infrastructure was sparked by the publication of the report by the World Commission on Dams in the year 2000. The paper brought attention to the social and environmental costs associated with building major dams and stated, "The rights and risks approach we suggest will increase the relevance of social and environmental elements of dams to a level hitherto reserved for the economic component" (World Commission on Dams 2000: 320). With regards to the NRLP in particular, the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) has published a series of papers providing in-depth analyses of the ecological and social consequences of the scheme (cf. Amarasinghe, Shah & Malik 2008, Amarasinghe & Sharma 2008, Saleth 2009, Kumar & Amarasinghe 2009, IWMI 2009). The Economic and

Political Weekly (EPW), an Indian peer reviewed academic journal, has also become an important source on the debates surrounding the NRLP and its social and ecological consequences in academia (cf. i.e. Iyer 2012 & 2014, Mishra 2012, Islam 2006). These publications provide information regarding the status of the scheme's implementation, and question its technical feasibility and use, as well as its impact and consequences. However, the specific case of the Polavaram Project has so far attracted limited academic interest. Mariotti (2012) conducted fieldwork in the area of resettlement to analyse possible flaws in the resettlement policies from an economical perspective. As early as 1994, Bushan and Murali provided a comprehensive study on the communities affected by displacement (Bushan & Murali 1994). In an article in EPW, Rao (2006) presented a critique on the Polavaram Project. However, an analysis of the development imaginaries used to legitimize the project, as well as the consequences for affected communities has so far been overlooked in academic discussion surrounding the project. This paper therefore takes an explorative approach to answer the following research questions: What are the prominent imaginaries in the political discourse with regard to the Polavaram Project, and how do these imaginaries differ from the reality experienced by those affected by the project? To answer these questions, the paper uses a mixed-method design. It first conducts a content analysis of newspaper and magazine articles, in order to trace the political discourse. The data was collected from English speaking publications reporting on the Polavaram Project, thereby excluding the Telugu speaking media in Andhra Pradesh. As the NRLP scheme is nation-wide, this was a deliberate choice in order to select sources that appeal to a wider Indian audience across different states. Publications were chosen according to the highest readership (cf. Media Research Users Council 2014). The environment fortnightly magazine *Down to Earth* was further added as a well-known and reputable magazine addressing environmental concerns in India. The selected articles were taken from the three Indian English speaking newspapers with the largest readership, *The Times of India* (32 articles), *The Hindustan Times* (25 articles), and *The Hindu* (130 articles), as well as the magazines *India Today* (52 articles), as India's English speaking magazine with the largest readership, and *Down to Earth* (8 articles) (cf. Fig. 1). The data covers articles from 2006 until 2016. However, of the total 247 articles selected, 219 were published in the years 2014, 2015 and 2016, at a time when the project's implementation had already started. The articles were collected through online archives of the respective magazines and newspapers and through the online database LexisNexis.

|                 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | Total |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Hindustan Times | 1    | 1    | 0    | 1    | 10   | 4    | 1    | 0    | 5    | 1    | 1    | 25    |
| Down to Earth   | 0    | 0    | 1    | 0    | 0    | 1    | 0    | 1    | 2    | 3    | 0    | 8     |
| India Today     | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 2    | 0    | 2    | 0    | 4    | 12   | 32   | 52    |
| Times of India  | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 1    | 2    | 4    | 25   | 32    |
| The Hindu       | 0    | 1    | 0    | 0    | 1    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 24   | 32   | 72   | 130   |

Fig. 1. Publications and numbers of articles per year on the Polavaram Project.

The second part of the analysis relies on interviews conducted during field-work in 2012 in the areas directly affected by the Polavaram Project, as well as in the state's capital Hyderabad. In contrast to the data derived from the newspapers, the aim of the interviews was to gain insight into the perspectives of those affected by the construction. The interviews were guide-line based interviews as described by Kromrey (1986).



Fig. 2. East Godavari District is highlighted. Khammam, the capital of Khammam district of Telangana is found in the centre of the map (Google Maps 2017).

Geographically the interviews took place in Hyderabad, in Khammam District, now part of Telangana state, in the areas bordering the states of Chhattisgarh and Odisha on the Sabari river, which will be affected by the backlog of water once it is dammed, in the Chhattisgarh town of Konta, and in East Godavari District, where the author had the chance to see the model colonies and to talk to people that have already been displaced (cf. Fig. 2 & Fig. 3). In East and in West Godavari the author also visited the dam construction site and the canal works. The interviews sometimes took place with a single person, and occasionally with a larger group of village residents. Interviews were conducted in English, Telugu, Koya and Konda Reddy languages. For the interviews in Telugu, Koya and Konda Reddy languages, the author worked with translators.

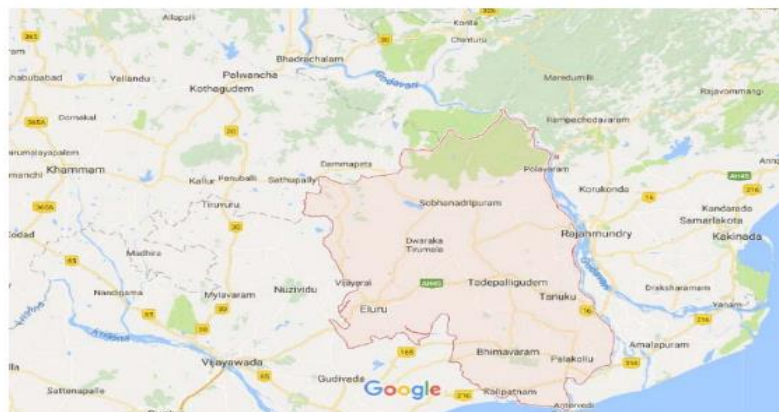


Fig. 3. West Godavari District is highlighted

The town of Polavaram, which is near the dam construction side, can be found north of the city of Rajahmundry along the Godavari river. The first canal that is already operated connects Godavari to Krishna river (bottom left). On the top of the map the two border towns of Chinturu (Andhra Pradesh) and Konta (Chhattisgarh), affected by the dam construction through backlash of water along the Saberi river, are indicated (Google Maps 2017).

### **The Polavaram Project**

According to official projections, the plan will result in the loss of 276 human habitations. However, campaigners dispute this number, claiming that more than 323 communities would be flooded. At least 38,000 hectares will be impacted, of which at least 4,000 hectares are forested. Between two hundred thousand and four hundred thousand people might be uprooted due to the project, depending on who you ask (cf. Down to Earth 2011).

The Polavaram Project was a key point of discussion during the discussions that led to the separation of Andhra Pradesh and the creation of Telangana in 2013 and 2014. The state of Andhra Pradesh made Telangana's acceptance of the Polavaram Project a precondition for talks to begin. Through this procedure, the Polavaram Project gained the status of a national project and became eligible for federal funding. The project is now (May 2017) still being overseen by the Andhra Pradesh government, with the federal government's role being confined to money supply.

### **Political Imaginaries**

The president of a YSR Congress jagan district adds: 'The Cabinet is discussing the issue of rate revision to the contractors time and again, but it has not even discussed once about the evacuees' (The Hindu 2016f). Similarly a former Member of Parliament from Rajamahendravaram takes the same line: 'the State government is giving step-motherly treatment to the evacuees of the Polavaram Project. Interestingly, it is trying its best to protect the interests of the contractors, for whom it has taken the responsibility of the project execution' (ibid.). The issue of displacement is also raised by tribal leaders, activists and spokespersons of Adivasi organizations, as illustrated by the following example on the occasion of the United Nations International Day of the World's Indigenous People:

For Khammam-based P Buchaiah, state general secretary of Adivasi Naikpod Sangam, one of the groups likely to be affected by the Polavaram dam, celebrating the World Tribal Day is the last thing on his mind. 'Our people are worried about the impending dark future. Out of the soon-to-be-oustees in seven mandals of Khammam, only 30% have pattas [record of land ownership] while the rest have lands assigned by the government in the past. There is now talk that those owning assigned lands would not get compensation but would be given non-forest land in plain areas' (The Times of India 2014).

Similarly, Down to Earth published an article in 2011 that includes a deeper investigation in the affected villages and gives a voice to its residents. It quotes for

example Rajakrishna Reddy of Kurturu village: 'If one knows only how to fish and gather forest produce for a living, there is no other place where one can survive' (Mahapatra 2011). The Hindu later published two articles giving voice to the affected population (Sridhar 2014, Bhaskar 2015). However, the politicians in power barely refer to the issue of displacement, as visible in the example of Jagan praising only the farmers as opposed to the displaced, for their contribution to development.

The newspaper and magazine exploratory analysis showed that Jagan, as the major political figure within the Polavaram Project discourse, uses images such as the creation of a drought-free state and of a state 'lifeline' to convey a message of positive change and development that will be obtained through the project. He also highlights the technological innovations used in the construction. However, Naidu refrains from commenting on the human costs of the project, and when he does so, it is only non-tribal farmers with large scale cultivation who are losing their agricultural land that he refers to, and not the people that are being displaced.

Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy said his government was struggling to get the revised cost of Polavaram project (roughly ₹55,560 crore) sanctioned by the Centre because his predecessor N. Chandrababu Naidu had agreed to construct it at 2010-11 price level. Obviously, the project cost has since gone up steeply and convincing the Centre that the revised cost estimate was justified proved to be difficult. The TDP government had undertaken the construction of the project in spite of it being a national project supposed to be entirely funded by the Centre, to award the contract to Navayuga Engineering Company Limited, which it did for kickbacks.

Intervening during the question hour when Water Resources Minister Ambati Rambabu was confronted by TDP MLA Gorantla Butchaiah Chowdary on the issue of compensation payable to the evacuees of Polavaram project, Jagan Mohan Reddy said another historic blunder was constructing the diaphragm wall without completing the cofferdams. Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy said his government was struggling to get the revised cost of Polavaram project (roughly 55,560 crore) sanctioned by the Centre because his predecessor N. Chandrababu Naidu had agreed to construct it at 2010-11 price level. Obviously, the project cost has since gone up steeply and convincing the Centre that the revised cost estimate was justified proved to be difficult.

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Jagan Mohan Reddy pointed out that the Centre was due to reimburse 2,900 crore spent by the State on Polavaram even after several representations by him. Also, Mr. Reddy reiterated the government's resolve to build the Polavaram dam to a height of 41.15 metres in the initial stage and raise it to 45.72 metres subsequently. As far as the Relief & Rehabilitation (R&R) package was concerned, he said the government was committed to giving 10 lakh to each one of the beneficiaries, for which a G.O was also issued. The R&R package given by the TDP government was approximately 6.90 lakh

### **Displacing Adivasi Communities and Imaginaries of Development**

The Polavaram Project could result in the largest displacement caused by dam construction in India's history. And with that many problems arise, including that of resettlement. With regards to Adivasi communities in particular, the numbers are alarming. For every five evacuees, three are reported to be Adivasis. In the villages barely any non-Adivasis can be found. In larger settlements non-Adivasis work in government or non-government agencies or as traders, but mostly not in permanent positions (cf. Bhushan & Murali 1994). It is therefore Adivasi communities in particular that are negatively affected by the Polavaram Project. Before moving towards the findings of the fieldwork, the following segment will provide background information on the position of Adivasi communities in Indian society, as well as the legal framework under which the resettlement takes place. The dominant portrayal of Adivasi communities in India often focuses on rituals, dances, and handicrafts, as opposed to citizens with complex histories or in relation to oppressions faced and adjustments made. One such example of this portrayal is the representation of Adivasis in museum spaces in India. As Sebastian points out, Adivasi are often presented 'as the exotic cultural other' (Sebastian 2015: 35). He further adds: 'There is a serious need to rethink about the representational practices of museum anthropology which see the Adivasis merely as cultural subjects to the exclusion of them as historical agents' (ibid.: 43). Another prominent example is the Adivasi Mela, an exhibition of Adivasi culture, which regularly takes place in Odisha. At the Mela, Adivasi communities are shown sitting in traditional clothing in traditional housing behind fences, producing handicrafts and performing dances within an exhibition hall. A strong resemblance to *Völkerschauen*, where 'exotic' human beings often from the colonies were exhibited in Europe, can be found in these melas.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, this mindset is visible on the homepage of the Adivasi Mela, which reads: Orissa's tribal residents are "not very evolved" and "rather bashful," therefore they tend to keep to themselves and avoid contact with strangers. It's interesting to see how satisfied the tribal people are despite their lack of access to the modern conveniences that others take for granted in cities. (Odisha Adivasi Mela, 2016). The portrayal of Adivasi communities is therefore set up in opposition to modern society. This is because, as Bergmann explains, "tribal groups are scheduled not just to bring them interaction with mainstream culture, but also to maintain their cultural distinctness" (Bergmann 2016: 82). The way this is done is well illustrated in the Odisha Mela example. The extent to which this discourse affects the self-representation of these communities, or the NGOs working for the welfare of Adivasi communities, are questions to be kept in mind with regards to the fieldwork. Concerning the legal framework under which resettlement takes place, it should be noted that most of those affected by the Polavaram Project live in

so-called Scheduled Areas which guarantee special protection and rights to the Adivasi populations. Scheduled Areas are defined in Article 244 (1) of the Indian Constitution, and their creation is governed by the Fifth Scheduled Areas Act, Provisions relating to the Administration and Control of Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes (cf. Government of India, Ministry of Law and Justice 2011). The government of Andhra Pradesh, India, based the Land Transfer Regulation Act of 1970 (also known as the 1/70 Act) on the information presented in this article. In these Scheduled Areas, tribal land transfers to non-tribal members are prohibited. In the 1980s however, the Andhra Pradesh government tried to make amendments to the law so that the prohibition excluded the transfer of land to the state. This was prevented by the Union Government. In 2000, the same situation occurred again, when the state government was in favour of allowing an aluminium company to mine for bauxite in an Adivasi area. However, protest by opposition parties and civil society once again prevented an amendment. "the experience revealed how a state's tribal welfare system may be manipulated to not only operate against tribal interests but also actively undermine the democratic mechanisms that might safeguard such interests," the authors write. (2003 film "Down to Earth"). While the legal situation has not changed and the 1/70s Act remains in force, the Polavaram Project is now being constructed in such Scheduled Areas. Existing legal provisions have been sidelined in order to proceed with the project's implementation. The state has therefore unlawfully acquired Adivasi land in order to implement the Polavaram Project. As Bondla and Rao point out:

One elderly man from the village of Paragasani Padhu, who today lives in the colony and with whom the author met during a visit to the colony, shared his perspective on how the resettlement was executed. He reported that the first time government officials approached the village and offered new houses in the newly constructed colony to the villagers, they promised that the village would only need to move once the construction of the dam was realised. Yet once the houses were completed, the government officials urged them to move in directly, otherwise they threatened to hand over the houses to another village and to disqualify the villagers from any further compensation. The villagers and the government officials agreed on a compromise: They would move into the houses pro forma, but continue living in the old village until the dam construction was to be finished. Once the moving rituals were completed and some objects were placed into the houses in order to fulfil the agreement, the government declared the village to be 'officially shifted' (cf. interview #8). As a consequence, the local school as well as the health station in the old village closed down and the ration cards for food supply were only valid in the new settlement. Out of necessity, the people were then forced to move to the new colony.



Photograph 2. One of the two rooms of a house in the New Polavaram Model Colony (Photograph by Klara Feldes, September 2012).

### **Industrial and Commercial Interests**

To what end, and who will it benefit, are the ruling classes pushing forward with the dam's construction, which will ruin the lives of some 3 lakh Adivasis and dalits, wipe out large swaths of forest and wildlife, harm biodiversity, deprive Telangana of its fair share of Godavari waters, and waste enormous sums of money? Who do these rulers think they're serving by rushing to complete this project at any cost, even breaking the same rules they enacted? Do you intend for it to just help the rural poor? Is it to prevent further destabilisation of the Krishna delta and to provide more water to the drought-stricken Rayalaseema area of the state? This project's primary goal is to provide river and canal navigation and meet the water needs of the envisioned Visakhapatnam-Kakinada-Vijayawada Industrial Corridor, as will be shown in the following sections.

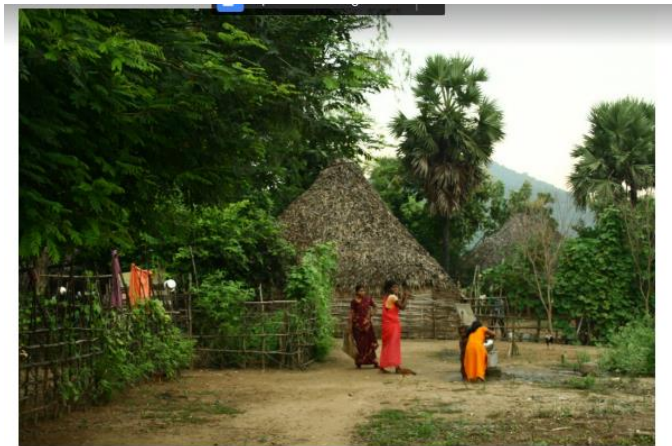
Initially, the site of the Polavaram project itself. Polavaram is in the far eastern end of the immense Dandakaranya region, which is rich in a wide variety of wood and bamboo species and has significant quantities of different sorts of minerals. The upper crust has already started a civil war to eliminate the Maoists and open the way for unrestricted exploitation of the country's natural resources. For decades, the Godavari River has served as the primary route for the transfer of wood to the paper mills located downstream. There are abundant coal and mineral reserves, including limestone, in the Godavari basin regions of Telangana State.

### **Need for a Powerful Democratic Movement**

It is time for the democratic and progressive forces to unite in order to expose the sham of irrigation and development behind which the AP rulers are continuing this heinous crime of destroying the lives and livelihoods of three lakhs Adivasis and permanently depriving Telangana State of its fair share of Godavari waters. This will allow for the beginning of a powerful movement of people from all walks of life, especially of the people of Telangana, to demand that the AP rulers stop. longer accessible in the old village. An initiative led by a local NGO set up a school in the old village after the government school closed down, but in a crackdown by the government this was later closed down and declared illegal (cf. interviews #4, #5, #6, #7, more on the Polavaram New Colony also in Feldes 2013).



Photograph 3. Houses in the New Polavaram Model Colony (Photograph by Klara Feldes, September 2012).



Photograph 4. Traditional houses in a village affected by submergence (Photograph by Klara Feldes, September 2012)

According to this account from the field, government officials spread misinformation and threatened the communities in order to implement the resettlement. Public hearings, which are legally required, and should serve as an information platform for affected communities in relation to the Polavaram Project and resettlement plans, were seldom organised. On the occasions where meetings took place, the affected communities were largely excluded from them. One interview partner, an NGO worker affected by displacement, had tried to attend a meeting and described the situation as follows:

Actually the affected people were not allowed to participate in this meeting. The police did not allow them to enter the meeting. The police was beating activists and people. Instead government was bringing people from non-submergence areas to this meeting that would be pro-dam. Government wanted to make a prodam impression (interview #1) the paper outlined how the Indian constitution and subsequent laws provide legal protection to the Adivasi communities affected by such projects. However, the findings from the field research have demonstrated that these laws are largely ignored or circumvented in practice. The ways in which

these legal provisions are bypassed demonstrates that the notion of development for the benefit of the country excludes the most vulnerable populations.

### **Conclusion**

In answer to the initial research questions, it can be said that the reality experienced by those affected by the Polavaram Project's construction is, as established by the media analysis, not one that appears in the mainstream discourse, which is dominated by political figures and notably by Andhra Pradesh's Chief Minister. Using the imaginary of a lifeline, and the promise of a drought-free state, the discourse evokes the benefits of the project for the state and its whole population. The potency of the developmental imagination, and the idea of leveraging technological solutions to tackle social problems, remains evident. A closer look at the actual circumstances of people who have been impacted by the Polavaram Project reveals a completely different truth. Communities suffer the loss of arable land and a primary source of income with little to no recompense in return. They had previously lived mostly on their own, subsisting off of farming for subsistence, but now they must compete with other people for day jobs. The development promises made are, therefore, promises that may be fulfilled for some sectors of society, in this instance perhaps people of bigger cities who would benefit from an enhanced water supply and large-scale farmers who will profit from better irrigation. In contrast, the findings of this article demonstrate that the most vulnerable groups are bearing the brunt of the project's negative effects while receiving the fewest positive ones. While the underprivileged should benefit from development initiatives like this, that is not happening here. The issue of who exactly is supposed to gain from progress is therefore raised. As the case study has shown, ideas of development continue to be prominent in the legitimization of large scale water projects in contemporary India. Nehru, while an initial advocate of large scale dams as the temples of modern India, later spoke of large dams as a 'disease of gigantism' (Ray 2008). This change of mindset has not yet resulted in a change of politics.

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