

Abstract

Whether in colonial era or modern time, the creation of empires and states, business conglomerates and multinational corporations has only been made possible through dismantling the commons and harnessing the fragments to build up new economic structures that are responsive to the interests of a dominant few. Modern nation states have been built by stripping power and control from commons regime and creating new structures of authority from which the local peoples are excluded. By the same token, the market has expanded dramatically by enabling the state and commercial interests to gain control of the territory that has traditionally been used and controlled by the local peoples and by transforming that territory into expendable resources for exploitation.

By enclosing the forests, for instance, the state and private logging firms have torn the local communities out of fabrics of power and subsistence. Likewise, by stimulating demands for cash crops, the government has been able to replace traditional with modern agriculture. To achieve the condition of "economic progress" millions of farmers have been thrown into the unfathomable abyss of debt and bankruptcy as a calculated act of policy, their commons dismantled and degraded, their cultures devalued and denigrated. The processes that now go under the rubric of "growth", "economic progress", "development" and "nation-building" are more appropriately labelled as processes of "exploitation", "appropriation", "exclusion", "denial" and "dispossession." In a word, of enclosure.

Enclosure transforms the environment into a "resource" for

national or global production. It reorganizes society to meet the overriding demands of the market. It dictates that production and exchange conform to rules that reflect the exigencies of supply and demand, of competition and maximization of output, of growth and economic efficiency. Enclosure not only redefines the community but it also ushers in a new political order. It redefines how the environment is perceived and managed, by whom and for whose benefit.

Enclosure also opens the way for the bureaucratization and enclosure of knowledge itself. It creates a new language and accords power to new professionals. Enclosure is thus a change in the relations of power which enmesh the environment, production, distribution, the political process, knowledge and the law. The common people are forced into accepting a new role as a consumer and new sets of rules are imposed upon their lives. The way is thus cleared for ushering them into the mainstream.

Those who remain on the margins of the new mainstream, either by choice or because that is where the authority has pushed them, are not only deemed to have little value but are perceived as a threat. These people are the landless farmers and the poor who are accused of forest destruction, their protests are classed as subversive and a threat to political and economic stability. As such, they are objects to be further controlled, the legitimate subjects of yet further enclosure.

In recent years, people who have been marginalized and excluded from the corridors of power have begun to rise up and form waves after waves of new social movements. Stories of intense tussles over forest, water, and access to natural resources are erupting in every corner of the world.

This research is an attempt to understand and explain some of these social movements. It examines the adaptive process of a peasant community in Ayudhya province and their attempts to struggle against forced cultural change. The ability of this community to withstand external intrusion, their feeling of self-reliant and self-confident means that the true sense of community spirit has not yet been completely destroyed. Their unwillingness to feel inferior even in the presense of overwhelming industrial culture means that the community spirit can be reproduced and strengthened and the sense of self-determination can be restored. The "community" lives on albeit in an altered and ever-changing form.

