

SRSC Public Lecture Series No. 1 : April 2015

SR SANKARAN CHAIR

Research on Rural Labour Matters • Through the Prism Equity Matters

DEVELOPMENT BY DISPOSSESSION

Amit Bhaduri



S. R. Sankaran Chair (Rural Labour)

National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj

(Ministry of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Government of India)

Rajendranagar, Hyderabad - 500 030.

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- To focus on the policies and programme that benefit the rural poor, strive to energise the democratic decentralization processes, improve the operation and efficiency of rural development personnel, promote transfer of technology through its social laboratories, technology park and create environmental awareness.
- As a 'think-tank' for the Ministry of Rural Development, NIRD&PR while acting as a repository of knowledge on rural development would assist the Ministry in policy formulation and choice of options in rural development to usher in the change.

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- Undertake, aid, promote and coordinate research.
- Study functioning of the Panchayati Raj Institutions and Rural Development programmes across the States.
- Analyse and propose solutions to problems in planning and implementation of the programmes for rural development; and
- Develop content and disseminate information through periodicals, reports, e-modules and other publications.

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April, 2015

Published by **S. R. Sankaran Chair (Rural Labour)**
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND PANCHAYATI RAJ
Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India
Rajendranagar, Hyderabad - 500 030. India
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Printed at : VAISHNAVI LASER GRAPHICS, Ph. 040 - 27552178

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This is a Public Lecture, given by Professor Amit Bhaduri at S. R. Sankaran Chair (Rural Labour), National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRD&PR), Rajendranagar, Hyderabad on 15th April, 2015. We are grateful to Prof. Amit Bhaduri for accepting our invitation and agreeing to deliver the public lecture. We are thankful to Prof. S.K. Rao, (Ex. Director General, Administrative Staff College of India, Hyderabad) for presiding over the lecture. We are also thankful to NIRD&PR Authorities and Prof. R. Radhakrishna, Chairman, Advisory Committee, S.R.Sankaran Chair for facilitating in organising and publishing the lecture.

- S.R.Sankaran Chair

Note: A mathematical model with a more precise analysis is available for the interested reader by writing to the author and would soon be published in a standard journal.

DEVELOPMENT BY DISPOSSESSION*

Amit Bhaduri

One of the main reasons for my coming to National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRD&PR) is, of course, Kailash Sarap who is an old student of mine and we have kept in touch on and off, as also Shri Sankaran. When he said he was inviting from Sankaran Chair, I said I would definitely come. I did not know Shri S. R. Sankaran well personally, but it is quite clear that he was a very special kind of person. The second reason is, although Prof. Saraf said, I am mostly known for my rather formal academic work, this is not quite true in terms of my interest, because my interest always has been society, not even economics. Most of the time, I have tried to understand society's problems actually at ground level, travelling and talking to persons. And I have done it twice in my life, once in the context of rural credit and related problems during the 1970's and the other time recently, in the context of land acquisition particularly that is going on during last 10 to 12 years. Most of the real life problems are not problems in economics, not problems in politics, not problems in sociology; but

they are an intersection set of everything put together. Now this is the problem of land acquisition. This is a problem of how you deal with natural resources and growth in this country; how you deal with various marginalized groups in this country; how you deal with women's questions in this country; and how you deal with linguistic divisions in this country. But many of these dimensions I was not aware of. I don't think anybody would be aware of by reading books. I think you simply become aware of real life problems by travelling to different parts of the country. Some of this I originally thought I would try to put together in a short note/paper, a diary-like in my earlier book as well. I never thought of writing a paper, because my clarity was much less and now also I realize, in many ways, I am not very clear, but gradually I realize, a picture emerges in my mind, which many of us know, but many of us don't either know it fully or do not want to say it openly, I do know what it is. Either there is a conspiracy of silence about the obvious among academics or, there is a certain kind of vested interest. So, this is a paper on

* Public Lecture, given at S. R. Sankaran Chair (Rural Labour), National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRD&PR), Rajendranagar, Hyderabad.

development by dispossession, a term I have used. Development by dispossession is basically, as the term suggests, dispossessing the poor to develop the country in a certain way. It is a story with various links. It is not related to just one particular academic discipline, for it cannot be. Now let me start from something and this is the only part which might sound a little bit technical, but I think it is necessary.

Basically you can think of an economy as a very large system of interconnected production, that is not only market in terms of exchange, but also interconnected production. You require steel to produce coal; you require coal to produce steel. Some other product requires something else. You require bauxite to produce energy and, energy to produce bauxite. Thus, there is a tremendous amount of interconnected simultaneity. Now this, among economists, is known as input-output analysis and, can be expressed in simplified mathematical terms. When done, it becomes a very large simultaneous system, but this is where the story starts and though not discussed in this paper, it is there on the back of my mind.

If you think of an economy as coal producing steel, steel producing coal, railways taking transport, and put them all in a complex as a break form. Some two things do not fit in are what economists, and biologists and what everybody else call the primary input.

That is, the natural resources like land, labour, water and land based natural resources. I am leaving out the sky based natural resources, since they are too modern for me. All these natural resources including labour constitute the primary inputs. If you take out all the complexities of the internal system there still exists a relationship between the two primary input components i.e., land and labour. Capital is not one of them, because it is produced by the people.

Now let us come to the main part of the story. Suppose there is a natural part of the economy. Let me take a very simple arithmetical example where you do not have to be anything - economists, mathematicians, sociologists, historians - to talk about. Suppose there are 10 people employed in this natural economy as simple agricultural workers, earning their livelihood.

Suppose these 10 people produce two units of output each. That means 10 people produce 20 units of output. You decide to displace these people and now we have displaced them and destroyed their livelihood and, in turn, we destroy 20 units of output. Against this, you take these people out and, out of them you give employment to some in a modern industry. In simple terms, you call it the corporate sector, which is a large organized sector. You are taking away 10 people's livelihood and have employed only four people. We all know that some people will find employment when they are displaced and the rest will not. Now

comes the first thing which you may not have quite thought of it in this way. These four people, who are given employment in the corporate sector, have a much higher productivity. In some other papers, not only me, but also others, who have worked in this area, say about this. You see, if you take modern industry, it produces much more than what you produce in agriculture at current prices. TATAs, to give you one of my favourite examples, between 1993 and 2003, because I have studied the Singur case very closely. Tata steel increased its value of output by five times in a decade. This is not my statistics, but given by Financial Times, London statistics for a consultant. They reduced the number of workers by half. So, in effect, in 10 years, they have increased their output by 10 times i.e., 1000%. Now this kind of productivity growth is what you can achieve if you could transfer people from a very backward nature of agriculture with a low productivity to a highly organised modern sector. This is what Prime Ministers and many of state Chief Ministers would all say that, for growth, we require this kind of labour transfer, and it is not untrue because, this kind of labour transfer will increase output tremendously.

If we go back to the example, only with four people, you lose 20 units of output, but even if you are producing only 3 times more, which is much less than the average of the corporate sector,

in the whole organized industrial sector, you are producing six units of output. You employ four people now in the corporate sector, not 10. You are taking away 10 people's livelihood and have employed four people. What do you get? $4 \times 6 = 24$, so you lost 20 and got back 24, you get a growth rate of 20%. This is what the story of growth with unemployment in a nutshell is all about. I mean you can have an enormous statistics base, but unless you know the fundamentals, you do not know what you are looking for.

The story can be enriched with real statistics, but you have to know what the basic is. Basically, what you do is, you take out a number of people and give jobs to only a fraction of them, yet they produce much more. So you have a fair output growth, but there is a simultaneous deterioration in the employment situation, so far as only this example is concerned. And this is the story of jobless growth. This is not only the story of India but also of China and to some extent, of Brazil. This is the story also, to some extent, of Europe today, i.e. whether you have high or low growth rate, you witness some growth in output but virtually with no growth in jobs. The economic connection that economists are used to automatically think of does not exist any longer and it exists much less if you have displacement and taking away people from their original less productive occupations!

Although many questions arise, I will deal here only with two questions. One is what happens to those people who do not find jobs after they are displaced. And the second is to increase productivity, you not only need people to be employed in modern industry, but also you require various other inputs for production which you do not require in simple agriculture. Even to produce a cup of coffee, if you go to a Mall, with coffee comes air conditioning, filtered water, plastic cup, electricity. And this you can calculate its economics. One of the great achievements of Leontief as an economist, was precisely producing a computable scheme for explaining directly and indirectly how much of various inputs are going into the production of such a cup of coffee. And this is how we make a cup of coffee so much more expensive in a Mall with various indirect inputs as compared to what we have in a street side dhaba in terms of input use. And when you have it in country side or village dhaba/shop, it can cost you much less, because it is mostly from nature. So you not only have unemployment, but also a second problem. And this is a problem on the implications of which, I have been working on with a biologist, Madhav Gadgil, for the last few years. We together have tried to see how much of economics and biology, i.e. artificial production and its support from nature can fit in a story of sustainable growth. Thus you have the other problem i.e. you have to have the required natural

resources to support the corporate sector's enormous productivity. From this arise two basic problems which the Indian economy may have to grapple with in various forms and I hasten to add here, I would say very soon, Indian politics and ordinary Indians would face. And these two problems are: first you create output, but you do not create enough employment. But actually in this particular example, in the context of displacement, you create unemployment because, only a few people can get absorbed again. Others have to find employment in some other way. The second thing is, they produce more output that requires more natural resources, the reason being that they are highly natural resource-intensive industries and so on. And, very often, superficially, you cannot see much deeper. For example, once I was asked to give a lecture to an audience constituting of industrial workers. I was asked how are you saying this professor? This is not true. Look at these high rise apartments, they occupy so little space and so little land is needed, yet they accommodate so many people. On the other hand, look at villages, places where there are mines, or the place I (i.e. the concerned industrial worker) come from that is, Bihar, so much space is required to accommodate a few people. What one forgets here is that each high rise building requires electricity, water, steel, iron and other inputs. If you calculate the chain of costs, you will see that it works out to much more. I do not know if

anybody has calculated it for Indian Cities. I have only one calculation done for one city, that is, New York and the calculation says that for each unit of land New York City takes on an average, in different parts, close to 15000 units of land in United State of America. That land has to be acquired. Now, New York is a much more mechanized city than any typical Indian city, but really not very much more mechanized than cities like Hyderabad and others. So to develop each acre of Hyderabad City properly, you can imagine what its impact can be on the countryside in terms of land acquired. This is the natural resource problem we create. But there is a much more serious source of the natural resource problem that we create in the context of developing cities. For instance, as part of transport service, Delhi has Metro Rail. Just imagine its natural resource content that makes it work. So you are confronted with these two imbalances. One is unemployment and the other is pressure on natural resources related to the inter-related problems of development and urbanization. Here, what we need to do is to see whether it is possible to put these two together and find a situation in which there is a natural resource balance (not a long term ecological balance) rather a simple natural resource balance in terms of demand and supply. This is my simpler way of dealing with the problem. Also employment balance in that what happens to those people who do not find employment post-

displacement and what happens to the natural resource imbalance. Now, whether an equilibrium of this sort can necessarily exist or not is a slightly formal question, so we leave that out.

Basically, what one can see and what one might not have seen based on one's common sense is that there is an obvious connection between natural resource balance and employment balance. But we do not always see it. Those who do not find employment in an organized industry, if you look at Indian statistics must find employment in two ways. Some find employment in the broader category of informal sector. If you travel in countryside in India, particularly outside the big cities, you can see something that has changed. One of the dramatic changes which you will see as I have seen while travelling to Jharkhand, West Bengal and other parts of Odisha over many years, is that emergence of non-agricultural livelihood options. This is in the context of agricultural sector. People who cannot leave their villages make a living on the margin because, they cannot do anything else. They have lost their land and/or the land cannot be improved because, the land has been taken away either for real estate, industry, infrastructure or something else. And you see them selling tickets in the black market near Cinema halls, but these cinema halls and the paraphernalia provide them some employment. Some people sell peanuts or something else in

the morning. Many of them used to have land. All these examples which I am giving are real life examples. And in the worst cases, they are seen just breaking stones for laying roads which itself facilitates exploitation of natural resources, something which I saw especially in Kalinganagar in Odisha. So everywhere you have people engaged in all kinds of employment in villages and also in cities. In cities, the informal employment, becomes very central to our politics.

People come to cities because their land has been lost or for other reasons, like population growth etc. Most of them do not have proper places to stay, do not have jobs to do, so where do they stay? They stay in shanty towns. Now, what is this shanty town? They are illegal. If you visit slums in our cities, you will usually not find proper connection to water and electricity. But there are many of them have illegal connections of water and electricity. And if they are planning to set up some small factory, for that too they have to have illegal connections. From their point of view, this is how they earn their livelihood and, of course, they have to earn their livelihood. However, from our point of view, this is a continuous deterioration in the quality of city life. But there is something deeper involved in this. We are creating a whole class of illegal citizens who live on the border between legality and illegality. And they have to do it because they cannot do anything

else, as they do not have jobs and if they were to pay for water, electricity etc., they would not survive. And every time you see political parties come to power, a promise they make is legalization these facilities. This is a standard thing and here comes the first generation of political change. It is not very advisable to mention names here, but actually you can mention by name politicians who become service providers. Some of them who are in some government jobs, high or low, and many of them are with corporations either in job or sitting outside the corporation to help these people get water or electricity connections regularized. And if they do it successfully, they themselves become political leaders. There is one Maharashtra Chief Minister who rose to fame and I know his career exactly, this was the process he went through. And this process is seen in many other states including Delhi irrespective of the particular party colour. This 'illegal' population emerges when you take away their land without providing them proper employment and what is more disturbing is the politics involved in it.

There is one question at least which might arise in your mind that if in the above example 10 people are displaced, then why are only 4 people employed? And if you go to any big American university, they would say that resources move from one sector to another seamlessly and as a result, all people find employment in the

corporate sector. Many politicians also say the same thing. However, what they forget is the obvious thing that why only four people are able to find employment, and not all 10. If 10 people could find employment they would have produced 60 units of output in the above example, and then you would have been able to manage natural resources for 60 units through land acquisition, but even that resource problem is a secondary matter. The binding constraint usually is, you would not have been able to sell your product. I once tried to explain this some years ago to Montek Singh Alhwalia, Vice Chairman, Planning Commission, Government of India. He told me that you can sell it abroad. If you look at the statistics, it becomes clear that India buys foreign product continuously more from outside than it sells. So imports are more than exports. The result is that external market does not work to create demand. It does not work sufficiently for even China these days. And India is the last place where one can expect to sell enough products for full employment through export surplus in foreseeable future.

Second and perhaps more important is the lack of a sense of history in claiming that full employment is obtainable quickly through corporate expansion. Think of the number of years it took for England to industrialize collecting resources from colonies. That is, almost 100 years on a conservative estimate, plus-minus 10 years while in

the case of America, it was about 80 years. You have similar kind of time span taken by Germany which was an industrialized country before it was destroyed during the World Wars. The reallocation of labour even in the most successful cases takes a lot of time. And in a country like India, if you take people out of agriculture and put them in industry, it will certainly take several decades if not a century. Now two questions are very important. First, how do these people or generations live in the meantime? They live as an illegal section of marginalised population as I have already pointed out. But more importantly even if they somehow manage to live, many of them actually die out a slow death in poorer places like Odisha. Here you have the other side, the dark side of industrialization which is equally important. How the dispossessed people manage during this interim period when we are in the process of industrialization, when they could find no employment or be absorbed in the industry. Going by my experience related to Singur, Nandigram, Posco and Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh and many others in India in recent years, it simply does not work. I do not know what the government has been inflicting a version of state terrorism consciously or unconsciously. Yet they have options seldom talked about by any political party. One of the things they could do or could have used as a guide line for strategy is something very simple. You see, this country does

not have a tremendous external market. You know 70% of the people in this country live with, according to one set of statistics, with less than Rs. 20 per day or around that figure. You have a large number of people, but you do not have such a vast market. And even less, you do not have a market which can cater to corporate goods, which are sophisticated ones, because the poor people will rather have a bicycle or a motor bike than a car because it is still quite far away for most people in terms of purchasing power. So, how do you manage a country like this? And there is a little bit of comparative economics here. You give subsidy to industry, which all countries have done and small countries like Singapore, have successfully done it while big countries like Brazil, have not been so successful in their earlier history. But in India, you give, very approximately speaking, various lavish tax breaks and subsidies. On the whole, industry has received, over a period of last 15-18 years, an average of 2.2 million crore rupees. What you give, roughly speaking, as subsidies to the poor, including the National Employment Guarantee Scheme, taken together amount to 2.1 million crore. This is the traditional Indian way and even radical economists say that the government gives too much subsidy to the corporate sector, which is true.

Actually the game has changed dramatically from about early or mid 1990s. The official line became very clear

that not only this subsidy to corporate sector, internationalization of market will do the trick. However soon it was decided that we can give a much stronger and different kind of subsidy with land and natural resources. And I must add this has little to do with Indian version of capitalism. Actually China did it more effectively because it has a one party system.

But India actually started on the subsidy regime of natural resources for corporations rather recently, but without disciplining the subsidised corporations. Although statistics are not available, I have only one set of statistics with me given by a person who travelled with me in the Narmada area. He has published some statistics on which he was working and he says it is something like 45-60% of the total area acquired actually used ever by industry. My own impression of Jharkhand is similar. The land has been acquired but almost nothing has been used from the time of Mr. Madhu Koda. Similarly, if you forget about POSCO and think of the interior regions in respect of Odisha, almost nothing concrete has emerged though the land has been acquired. You see, there is something peculiar going on here. You acquire land, but you realize that you cannot set up an industry, because there is not enough demand at home (as only 4 people can be employed and not 10 in the above example). So what do you do? You say we will give you everything you want, that is, we will give you land, free

electricity, free water etc., to set up an industry. And now the latest thing is that you make states compete one against the other in a race to the bottom. If you go to the Chamber of Commerce and you will hear that they will go to a state only if they have the best facilities, tax breaks, water, free land, free electricity etc. to set up industry. Now, on the other hand, whether the industry will be set up or not will depend on whether they find it worthwhile in terms of the absorptive capacity of the market. We can take example of bauxite industry in Odisha; most of the bauxites blocks were sold on auction, i.e. on lease to exploit the resource. You know the bauxite price is rising mildly, and if some sort of little war breaks out, its price will shoot up because, it is the lightest material for manufacturing weapons. So you do not take bauxite out of the ground. You just sell it on paper. There are certain financial instruments like call option where you sell it for some future delivery. And this was the same when the recent Coal allocation scandal came to light. When they started finding out how many have been actually exploited, of all the blocks which have been allotted from 2006, only three have been really operative on the ground, actually exploited for coal. But they have all been acquired. This is the name of the game. The government said you need it to set up or feed industry, but it somehow back fired with hoarding not using it for production. However something else actually did happen in the process. And

the government was not doing it so innocently which also probably many of you know, because it was a quid pro quo exercise. You gave the land and, in return, as a political party, you get money for yourself or for your party. The distinction between the two is less important because even if you do not take bribe personally your position in the party depends on it. In case of Singur, I saw it myself. I got an opportunity. Gopal Krishna Gandhi was the Governor at that time. Thousand acres of land was given to TATAs, one of the best companies in the sense that they try to use their land properly and treat their workers well to the extent of the rules of the game permit. When the TATA's representative was asked, he actually explained that only 600 acres will be needed, including the factory site, playground, staff quarters, ancillary industries and roads that will come up. The remaining 400 acres i.e. 40%, was not explained. But the interesting thing is, soon after that when I talked about it, I found out that it was a deal between CPM cadres and that the TATAs who would get it and then hand over a part of it to these people connected with the party and perhaps together they will have real estate development. And this happened also in the Hyderabad Airport land acquisition case. I know so many people, NRIs sitting in America who speculated on this land; people were very unhappy when the Telangana-Andhra issue came up, because it would affect the investment climate but not with respect to industry,

but in real estate land price. They are worried as to what will happen to this land price after the division into Andhra and Telangana as most of them have bought land here and in the airport area. This is what the government does. The government takes away the land and the industry makes a kill of this because it is not so much for the development of industry that they will use, but because it is land for real estate speculation. And this is true also for the land based natural resources like mineral deposits, water, forests, mountains, coastlines, you name it any. When they get it they hold a significant fraction for capital gains. What does the government get in return? They have to return the favour to some extent. This is where I think the corruption argument is a little bit off the point because, individual corruption, though very detrimental, is a small fraction of it. And it exists in many other countries at various levels. It is not only that politicians make money personally and suddenly become very rich overnight, but also what is more important is that what they do with the rest of the money. The rest of the money goes to the political party. Mr. or Mrs. X gets a lot of money for the political party. Say some 30% is kept for personal use and the rest goes to the party. And what goes to the party affects policies in different ways. Earlier, I told you about service providers who might become Chief Ministers, now you have another class of people who enter the picture of

Indian politics. In a recent study published, on an average, big political parties like Congress or BJP, in the last election, spent 30-40 crores of rupees per seat, while smaller parties like CPM spent something around 8-10 crores. Now, where do they get this money from? I am not talking of corruption, but of the fact that much of this money they get it is from these land deals through, may be, legal changes in land acquisition laws.

When it goes to the party fund, why do I care as an ordinary citizen? What is its effect on democracy? If you compare Indian democracy of 30 years ago with that of today's, you will see that there are many more rich people now and actually somebody has counted it for me as 322 multi-millionaires in the current parliament. In the process, you raise the bar, i.e. you cannot join this wonderful democracy in elections and have any chance of winning unless you have this kind of money. And this is a different kind of corruption. Getting rid of two or four politicians by putting them in jail would not be even worthwhile because that is not systemic corruption. What happens in the system is what you see in the case of coal gate, what you see in respect of 2G, or what you see in the case of many other corruptions. In each of these cases, what is corrupt is the policy, policy loaded against the poor. And you know all these in cases of privatized water, privatized electricity. Whether privatization is good or bad is

altogether a different issue, but the reason why you do it is that, there is a fee you would get it return if you as a policy maker do it the way they want, that this should be done in this way and not that way even if it helps the majority. And most obviously this would influence land policy, that we are discussing today. The reason why all political parties and I say all political parties from BJP to CPM act in the same way while in power, but preach differently while in opposition. Electoral funds depend largely on how you deal with natural resources for corporate development. The colour of the party hardly matters.

You see them all agreeing to two things in the recent years. One, there should not be any kind of right to information or openness about party funding. Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi, when it was not in power and was campaigning during elections earlier, used to say 'yes' but it also says 'no' now. So, you should not be surprised about mysteries of election funding. And the second thing which they all agree is what in Marxist jargon amounts to 'Negation of Negation' i.e. when in opposition, oppose land acquisition and when in power, indulge in a more vicious land acquisition policy. This is not just hypocrisy. There must be a method built

in the system and that is what we are trying to explain. The method in the system is, in this democracy, once you are in electoral politics and electoral political race to win at any cost you cannot do it without having a substantial amount of electoral funds. And that substantial amount of electoral fund comes not as a contribution from poor people, say Rs. 1 to 10, but it comes from what corporations give them. And this is where Indian democracy stands corrupted most today. And what you do in the process is, you disconnect people's representation from democracy. You have democracy which acts as a club for the richer people to decide. I mean, we have seen it in many places of the world, and all democracies, to some extent, have become this, but it is doubly tragic in a poor country when it happens. Because it takes away livelihoods of the poor to keep the spectacular show of a vibrant democracy going. And this is why land acquisition is so important for all political parties in the game of democracy. If you agree with much of what I am saying, it is also important for us to say so not in this way. There are other ways to a less hollow democracy. We must have the courage to try alternatives.

Thank You

About the Author

Amit Bhaduri educated in Presidency College, Calcutta, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, U.S.A and Cambridge University, U.K. He received his Ph.D. from Cambridge in 1967. He has taught in various universities around the world as professor / visiting professor including Presidency College, and Institute of Management, Calcutta, Delhi school of Economics and Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, and Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum, El Colegio de Mexico, Stanford University, U.S.A., Vienna and Linz University, Austria, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Bremen University, Germany, Bologna and Pavia University, Italy. He has also been a Fellow of various Institutes of Advanced Studies in Austria, Sweden, Germany and Italy, worked on various expert bodies of the United Nations, and served as member on some national and international commissions.

He has published more than sixty papers in standard international journals and is currently on the editorial boards of five. He has written six books: the Economic Structure of Backward Agriculture (1982 Academic Press, London), Macroeconomics: the Dynamics of Commodity Production (1986, Macmillan, London), Unconventional Economic Essays (1993, Oxford University Press, Delhi), An Intelligent Person's Guide to Liberalisation (coauthored with Deepak Nayyar, 1996, Penguin, India), On The Border of Economic Theory and History (1999, Oxford University Press, Delhi) and Development with Dignity (2006, National Book Trust, India). Some of his books and articles have been translated into several European and Asian languages.

Prof. Amit Bhadri is awarded with Leontief Prize (shared with Diane Elson), for the year 2016, for Advancing the Frontiers of Economic Thought on 'Development and Equity' recognizing the contributions he has made to economic understandings of development, power and human rights.

Amit Bhaduri is Professor Emeritus of Centre for Economic Studies and Planning (CESP), Jawarlal Nehru University, Delhi and visiting Chair Professor at Goa University, Goa. He has served as Professor (of 'clear fame') in Pavia University, Italy and also visiting professor in the Council for Social Development, Delhi.

About S.R. Sankaran

Shri S. R. Sankaran, a Civil Servant, is known for his commitments and actions for the upliftment of the poor and the marginalized. The seamless integrity between his life, ideas and work was the unique dimension of his personality. As a Civil Servant he took Constitution as a mandate and made every opportunity to put in practice the fundamental principles of equality, non-discrimination, justice and affirmative action in favour of the economically backward sections. He believed that his true vocation as a civil servant was to serve the people where the poor occupied the primacy of position. Within the poor his concern was about SCs and STs as they have been at the lowest rung of the social hierarchy, wallowing in chronic misery and deprivation and subjected to daily acts of injustice and indignity.

The transformative role that Shri. Sankaran as a Civil Servant, played in the lives of the poor is exemplary to date. His deep understanding of the social environment of the poor is remarkable. In his view, the poor are typically unorganized, hard to reach, inarticulate, often invisible by residing in periphery. Along with lack of access to land and other natural resources, lack of access to education makes them vulnerable to manipulation by adversaries they suffer leading them to internalize the ideology of dependence and submission. The conditions of poor can be compressed into five disabilities such as lack of access to land and employment; unfree labour; low wages; institutionalized discrimination; and deprivation in social services. His work during his career and after retirement devoted to uplifting the poor by relieving them from such adversaries and organizing them. While working for the poor he had not only used his professional skill but also brought to bear on the problem of human touch and his moral values.

Shri. Sankaran was a legendary civil servant, a crusader for social justice, a civil rights activist, a perceptive critic of development and public policy with extraordinary sensitivity, clarity, and above all, an epitome of compassion. A single social goal of his entire life's work was the reduction of contradiction between political and socio-economic inequality.

S.R. Sankaran Chair

S. R. Sankaran Chair (Rural Labour) is instituted at the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj (NIRD&PR), Hyderabad by the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Govt. of India with the objective of promoting research on issues that would enhance understanding and help in improving the world of work and the life worlds of the rural labour. Collaborative research, seminars, workshops and policy dialogues involving institutions, organizations, policy makers and other stakeholders with similar objectives, and placing the results in the larger public domain through working papers, articles in learned journals, books and policy briefs are part of the activities set out for the Chair.



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