

Development, Displacement, and Differential Economic Futures: Aspirational Subalternism in Post-Movement Singur

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Abstract: This paper reconsiders development-induced displacement by examining how affected communities articulate economic futures that exceed the conventional opposition between resistance and development. Drawing on longitudinal ethnographic research in Singur, West Bengal, India, the study traces how agrarian households navigated the uncertainties of transition from land-based livelihoods toward incorporation into industrial and market economies. While collective mobilization publicly foregrounded dispossession, cultural rupture, and the defense of agriculture, parallel aspirations for wage employment, educational mobility, infrastructural improvement, and participation in wider circuits of growth persisted. These ambitions became more visible in the post-movement period, when the strategic demands of unity receded. Building on this evidence, the article advances the concept of ‘Aspirational Subalternism’ to theorize how marginalized actors pursue advancement through selective, pragmatic, and temporally shifting engagements with development. By foregrounding negotiation, risk, and future-oriented calculation, the study challenges static portrayals of subaltern politics and offers an empirically grounded alternative to binary frameworks. Recognizing these plural economic projects, it argues, is essential for scholarship and for policy designs seeking legitimacy among displaced populations.

Keywords: Aspirational Subalternism; Development-Induced Displacement; Subaltern Agency; Negotiated Modernity; Political Economy; Economic Futures; Singur

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