
Challenges In 21st Century of India: Development Induced Displacement

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ABSTRACT

Peasant movements like Chipko (northern India) and peasant protests reveal how policies of economic „development“ or „modernization“ formulated at the top levels of states, corporations and international financial institutions are often experienced by peasants, rural women, and laborers- as exploitation. In the strategies of economic development, indigenous people, landless peasants, and women are expected to bear the brunt of industrialization, disease, food scarcity and land hunger testify to the impact of this process. (Ramchandra Guha, *The Unquiet Woods*, pp.195-196, 1990)

Addressing a huge tribal rally on 30 Jan, 2008 at Kashipur, Orissa, Mukta Jhodia, an adivasi woman activist, exhorted: “You Collector, you Government, you Tahasildar, have you given us this land, this forest and the treasure under the earth? We have got this gift of the nature and have been enjoying for thousands of years since our forefathers. Who are you and who gave you the right to snatch away these from us? We will continue to fight till death to save our mother earth than allow you to destroy these nature given river, land and jungle.” (Cited in Prafulla Samantray, *Binasha Batara Bikashara Rajaniti* (Oriya), p.30,2008)

INTRODUCTION

The paper primarily intends to explore the politics of social movements waged by people in relation to „development project“. Beginning with a brief review of the features underlying such movements in Orissa during the last two decades of 20th century, it goes on to examine the broader context, trajectory and nature of people’s resistance vis-a vis such development projects as it shaped up specifically in the context of post-1991 neo liberalization of Indian economy. Drawing on the history of displacement and rehabilitation of the state since independence, the paper undertakes an attempt to understand the critiques of the people on „development project“ and the perspectives and dynamics of people’s movement challenging the ideas associated with what can be called the agenda of the „corporatist state-market-civil society“ combine to implant „compulsory modernization“. This is done particularly to bring out the alternative and contesting voices that potentially stand to subvert the much hyped discourse on development.

The three major movements namely, Baliapal movement in Balasore district against the missile range, the Gandhamardhan movement against the Bharat Aluminum Company (Balco) project and the Chilika movement against the Tata and government of Orissa combine shrimp project which many ways mark the genesis of „people’s movement“ in post-colonial Orissa can be traced back to mid-80s and early-90s. All the three projects were either public sector projects or a public-private project like Chilika. The movement against the proposed aluminum project by an MNC called Utkal Alumina which surfaced in Kashipur was the lone movement against a private sector enterprise during the said period.

On the basis of critical observations made by the leaders of these movements of the period, it has been rather aptly reasoned out that local people in Baliapal and Chilika had got organized spontaneously into a movement due to a perceived threat to livelihood and environment, given the traditions of movements in these localities. People from outside however later joined to bolster the movement. But in the absence of a tradition of such movement in Gandhamardan, local people started the movement

only after youth from outside made them aware of the dangers of the upcoming project and they (the locals) became victims of the project.

Second, wherever local people have voluntarily organized themselves and started a movement, the leaders have been upset at attempts by outside people to join the movement and belittle the local leadership. The resultant conflict between the local leaders and outsiders has often adversely impacted upon the people's movement, as it weakened the movement in Chilika.

Third, despite differing political loyalties among people, people have not shied away from getting united and involved in the movement even though the role of the political leaders has been vacillating, controversial and suspect. The same party that opposed the project while in opposition thrusts it upon the people after coming to power; similarly, the same party that has tried to impose the project on people while in power opposes it when it becomes the opposition.

Fourth, the role of local/regional media has not been that encouraging for the movements; it is rather the national newspapers that have brought the movements to public gaze. Similarly, excepting few occasions (support of academics, students and staff of Sambalpur University for Gandhamardan movement) intellectuals at the regional plane have largely remained quite apathetic to these movements, while support of intellectuals from outside the region particularly from Delhi have been rather encouraging.

Fifth, there has been an attempt by the local leadership to keep the movements confined to the local area out of fear of losing their grip if they spread outside. But, interestingly, the state and local leaders who provoked the local people against the projects they were opposing, also did not want the movement to break the local barriers, though for entirely different reasons. They were afraid that if people's movements in general became widespread, they would pose some fundamental questions that would threaten the foundations of the establishment, to which actually both the ruling parties and opposition belong.

With the advent of the New Economic Policy since early 1990s, the Indian state has declared its high-voltage war against poverty through its strategy of rapid „industrialization“. Based on this logic, the panacea for alleviating poverty of Orissa, one of the underdeveloped states of Indian republic, has been attributed to the establishment of mining based industries, given the huge mineral resources that the state possess (90% India's chrome ore and nickel reserves; 70% of bauxite; and 24% of coal reserves). The understanding has led to the process of leasing out mines to private investment, and to put on offer land with adequate infrastructure for industrial houses, so as to usher in prosperity replacing poverty in no time.

This has led to the opening up mineral resources to private capital, both national and foreign; moreover the campaign for development of the state has been so intense that in no time it has caught the imagination of the global companies. The mantra that „industrialization“ would herald immense employment opportunities for the educated unemployed as well as the unskilled poor, while helping the cash-strapped state to tide over its perpetual revenue deficit through taxes, royalties, land-sales etc. have been vociferously voiced by the government, the corporate media, the international aid agencies, and the World-bank etc. in no uncertain terms.

The new buzzwords like "foreign investments", "export promotion" and "privatization", and „SEZ“ remain central to the discourse of development. Given the rich mineral resources of the state, the road-map to this neo-liberal industrialization is principally geared towards „harnessing Orissa's vast natural resources“. No doubt, the unique potential of the state in terms of endowment of minerals have made the profiteering multinational companies look at Orissa as their hot destination. This has further boosted the image of Orissa as the mineral hotspot of the Indian subcontinent with foreign investors queuing up for investment in the state. The state has appeared on the investment map of India with a long list of investment proposals, largely backed by foreign investors.

Majority of the new projects are solely attracted by the mineral resources of the state and therefore, are located in only mineral-rich regions which are also inhabited by the tribals. The state government

has offered exceptionally huge subsidies to investors, in the form of guarantees, tax concessions and investment subsidy. The abundance of cheap labour has further made it an investor-friendly state. Orissa has so far attracted private investments of over Rs 4,00,000 crore for setting up mineral-based industries such as steel mills, power plants, and alumina refineries. In the steel sector, 43 MoUs have been signed for the production of 58 million tonnes of steel annually at a total investment of around Rs.1, 40,000 crore.

The rush to make steel gained momentum towards the last quarter of 2004 after officials of the Korean steel major, Posco, announced plans to set up a 12-million-tonne steel plant at an investment of Rs 51,000 crore, the highest ever FDI in the country. In the energy sector, apart from Reliance Energy, major companies that have come forward to set up power plants include NLC, Tata Power Company, Sterlite Energy, KBK Nilachal, and Monnet Ispat. With regard to aluminum, Vedanta Alumina is tied up with a one million-tonne refinery in Kalahandi at an investment of Rs 4,500 crore. So also, Utkal Alumina is with a one-million tonne refinery in Rayagada district at an investment of Rs 4,000 crore.

The Aditya Birla Group has signed MoU to set up a three million-tonne alumina complex with an investment of Rs 12,000 crore. Development of ports has also been taken up by private parties. In the IT sector, Infosys and Satyam are already operating in the State. Wipro, TCS, Hexaware, and MindTree have inked MoUs to set up facilities. Education and tourism have also been seen as other potential sectors attracting investments.

The Anil Agarwal Foundation (a part of the Vedanta group) has also announced the setting up of a ambitious multi-disciplinary University at an investment of Rs 15,000 crore with a projected student strength of 100,000. However, against the background of the brutal killing of 14 tribal people in Kalinga Nagar in 2 Jan 2006, the need to locate the broad features of Orissan economy in relation to agriculture and industry has assumed critical importance. It is important to remember that the congregation of tribal people leading to the tragic murder through perpetration of state violence was simply not a protest over the attempt by Tata company to build boundary wall for its proposed steel plant project but rather alarmingly, a massive resistance against a kind of development associated with industrialization and displacement. Often cited as a region for starvation death, Orissa houses 3.58% of the country's population spread over 30 Districts and 57,000 villages.

Orissa is the poorest amongst the states with 47.15% people Below Poverty Line as per the 1999-2000 estimates of the Planning Commission. The rural poverty is 48.01% while that in the urban it is 42.83%. The overall poverty ratio has remained stagnant since 1993-94 preceded by its steady decline during the phase of 1978-94. Moreover, the incidence of poverty has increased both in south and northern regions whereas a perceptible decline has been experienced in coastal Orissa. The occupational classification reveals that total workers in the State constitute 38.7% of the total population and out of which cultivators account for 35.8% of the main workers with

With the introduction of planned development, Orissa saw the launching of notable projects like Rourkela Steel Plant and Hirakud Multipurpose Dam in the 1950s; Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), Talcher Thermal Power Station (TTPS), and Balimela Hydroelectric Project in the 1960s; Rengali, Upper Kolab, Upper Indravati Multipurpose Dam and Subarnarekha Major Irrigation Dam in the 1970s; IB Thermal Power Project, Talcher Super Thermal Power Station and National Aluminium Company (Nalco) at two locations in the 1980s. Besides these mega projects, open cast coal mining also started in the state in the 1960s resulting in large land acquisition - mainly agricultural lands for mining operations. These projects were executed in resource-rich regions, traditionally inhabited by tribal people.

Along with their benefits to the state, the development projects have resulted in large-scale deforestation not only for raw material exploitation, but also for acquisition of vast areas of land under cultivation for the establishment of factories, reservoirs and required residential complexes. The unintended consequence of such projects has not only meant loss of habitat for the rural tribal poor,

but also of their means of livelihood, which had been mainly agriculture, and utilization and sale of forest produce. The groups displaced have been invariably the weaker sections of the society mostly belonging to the tribal people and lower castes.

The rehabilitation and resettlement scenario of the project oustees indicate high backlog even in the official estimates. Of the total oustees of Hirakud Dam numbering 22,144 families, only 4,744 families have been rehabilitated; of which 3,098 families are yet to receive full compensation. Out of 10,897 families displaced in Rengali project, only 2,986 have been either resettled in colonies or allotted land, and cash grant was given to 7,901 families. Similarly, with 2,364 families getting displaced by Rourkela Steel Plant, only 1,721 families were allotted house plots. Likewise, Nalco Damanjodi which displaced 610 families for mining and alumina plants could only resettle 462 families in colonies. More unfortunate is the fate of the thousands of Adivasi families displaced from HAL, Naval Armament Depot, central cattle breeding farms at Sunabeda in Koraput district; and the Adivasi oustees of Macchkund Kolab and Indravati dams.

The tragedy of displacement has been intensely traumatic for certain groups of people who have undergone multiple displacements. The case of the oustees of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and Hirakud Dam project in Orissa is illustrative of this human tragedy. Most of the oustees of HAL in Koraput district, who were displaced in the 1960s for the first time, faced the trauma of a second displacement in the 1980s due to the construction of the Upper Kolab Multipurpose Dam Project, and were again displaced for the third time because of the establishment of the Naval Armament Depot and agricultural farms. Similarly, the oustees of Hirakud Multipurpose Dam project, who were displaced in the mid 1950s and resettled in Brajarajnagar area of Jharsuguda district, faced displacement for the second time due to the construction of the IB.

Thermal Power Station in the late 1980s and some others because of the IB valley coal mining project in the 1980-90 project. The above account of rehabilitation and resettlement in official estimates suggests a large-scale backlog going back to the period as early as 1950s and it is extremely difficult to even trace out these families. The burden of displacement and the trauma associated with it is borne mainly by the underprivileged, such as tribal people and other vulnerable sections of the population, who have to make a highly disproportionate sacrifice for being the involuntary victims of displacement from their habitat, society and culture. Almost all „development“ projects have been initiated mostly on the tribal hinterlands of Orissa.

It is worth noting that the resettlement policies mostly have failed to take into account the aspects of environment and common property resources in the pre-displacement economy; and the qualities of life that are threatened by resettlement process, such as family ties and community participation which perhaps provide the context for stimulating vibrancy to resistance process by the displaced people. Further, it has also been argued that people tend to organize themselves by actively affirming local identity, culture and systems of knowledge as integral parts of their resistance.

Different groups endow „space“ and its accompanying resources with multiple meanings, uses and values. Such multiplicities of interpretation become the basis for tension and conflicts within society over the „use and control of space“ for individual and social purposes. Consequently, particular places frequently become „sites of conflict“ between various groups within society, which reflects concerns about ecology (resistance and movement against deforestation and pollution), economy (tribal movements to secure land and livelihood), politics (struggles for local autonomy). Given the developments in the political economy of the state in the wake of neo-liberalization of economy and the traumatic history of development dislocation since independence, it is crucial to explore the perspectives of these social movements being taken up at multiple locations of Orissa in the last decades or so.

Some of these movements have powerfully engaged with the repressive mechanism represented by state-corporate combine in the latter's attempt at land grab mostly legitimized invoking the „myth of public/national interest“. Since a detailed discussion of these movements are beyond the scope of this

paper, suffice it to observe here that in Kashipur, adivasis like Kondh, Penga, Paraja, and Jhodia along with dalits have formed an association called Prakrutik Sampad Surakshya Parishad and engaged in a decade long protracted opposition to a billion dollar open-pit bauxite mine proposed by Utkal Alumina International Ltd. In Lanjigarh, the Dongria Kondh adivasis have resisted the British mining giant, Vedanta's venture for an open-cast bauxite mining at Niyamagiri hills, which is of primordial religious significance to the Dongria adivasis. Similarly, adivasis and dalits have teamed up in Kalinganagar through an association named Visthapan Virodhi Jana Manch (VVJM) to protest the proposed steel plant by Tata and the move to displace people. Adivasi and dalits have also formed yet another front called POSCO Pratirodh Manch and along with the betel leaf farmers of coastal Orissa are holding up a 12 billion dollar project by South Korean steel giant, Pohang Steel Corporation (POSCO) that has inked a MOU with the state government to exploit the best coal iron ore of the state for export market for a period of 30 years.

The underlying reasons behind people's resistance to these projects and their perceptions of nature, community, state, market, industrialization and development are best illustrated in what can be called as the people's manifesto (statement) of a front called Lok Adhikar Manch (LAM). It mentions: We are communities dependent on natural resources like land, forest and water, which are more than resources for us – our life system depends on them. Our way of life, beliefs, knowledge and values have historically and as it is today revolve around our natural surroundings. More than at any other point of time in our lives as traditional communities, today we feel pressurized and pushed hard to give up our ways and systems and give way to unjust intrusions by commercial, political and religious interests for their development and domination [shemano koro prabhavo abom unathi].

We have been made to sacrifice; we have been thrown out throughout history by these dominant groups and forces for their own comfort and for extending their way of life while we have been made slaves, servants and subordinates [tolualoko]. Our natural systems have taught us that each of us is important, each of our communities are important and we are an integrated part of the natural order we live in. At this critical juncture, we resolve to work together to protect ourselves, our interests, our natural bases [prakrutik adhar] and fight against any unjust appropriation of our natural habitations by commercial and state developmental interests. The manner in which industrialization is taking place [especially mining and dam projects], displacing the sons and daughters of the soil, destroying our resource and life base, we collectively oppose it and resolve to stand together to oppose it in the future.

We have nothing to gain from liberalization [mukto bojarol] privatization [ghoroi korono] and globalization [jagothi korono], which are talked about today. We want to live the way we know how to live among our forests, streams, hills and mountains and water bodies with our culture, traditions and whatever that is good in our society intact. We want to define change and development for ourselves [amo unathi abom parivarthanoro songhya ame nirupono koribako chaho]. We are nature's friends [prakruthi bandhu], so our main concern is preserving nature and enhancing its influence in our lives.

The manifesto clearly brings out the voices of the people who see development as a process of exploitation, dispossession and conclude with a firm resolve to assert their own rights to decide about their development and change. While highlighting the close and inviolable affinity of the people with nature, it also points to a resolute determination to fight the enemies in the shape of industrialization, liberalization, privatization and globalization. In other words, the idea of „disciplining“ the subalterns by promoting market access for them and make them confirm to the needs of the evolving market and thereby eliminating poverty is squarely contested by the people. What further merits attention that people in their own understanding continue to interrogate the elitist understanding

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