

Environmental Protest Movements in Odisha: In the context of Livelihood

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Abstract

The People's movement against the establishment of mining industry in Odisha revolves around Jal, Jamin and Jangal (water land, and forests). These natural resources are the only source of the livelihood of the common people of the region. The people are losing their basic rights on social, cultural life due to the process of industrialization and development projects. This paper is based on my own involvement with the environmental movement in Odisha. The people of the state are now looking for alternative development where everyone can live happily and self-respect.

Key Words: People's Movements, Livelihood, Natural Resources, Tribal Rights

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I. INTRODUCTION:

Most of the rural poor people in India depend directly or indirectly on the land, water, forest and other natural resources for their livelihood. Anti-dam and anti-mining movements in India have a long history. They ask some basic questions:

Development at what cost? Development for whom? Is this development for society as a whole or is it confined to only a section? How far does this development justify displacement of people who have been residing at the location of hundreds of years? What are the responsibilities of the government and civil society towards such ecological refugees?

There are various situations under which loss of livelihood security leads to conflict. These situations are characterized by unequal access to natural resources and unsustainable or incompatible use of it leads to scarcity and vulnerability (India: 2005: 390). If development is the real issue behind the displacement of these indigenous people, we need to redefine the definition of development. Harris and Todaro- (1970), say that development means to increase the availability and widening the distribution of basic life-sustaining commodities such as food, cloth, shelter, health and protection. In their view, greater emphasis should be given to the humanistic and cultural values. Development means to expand the range of economic and social choices available to individuals and nations by freeing them from the forces of ignorance and human misery. Displacement leads to serious problems including uprooting of social and cultural life and livelihood and personality disorder.

Environmental Movements in Odisha:

Odisha is one of the poorest states in India. During the 10th plan, 66 per cent of its population was below poverty line and only 10 per cent of its cultivable lands were irrigated (India: 2005: 847). The modern 'temples' of independent India such as dams (Hirakud, Upper Kolab, Machhakund, Balimela, Upper Indravati and Rengali among others), mines-based industries like in Rourkela, companies like NALCO and BALCO, and defense projects such as HAL in Koraput, the Air Force base in Charbatia and the Naval Academy at Chilika, have still left the state poor. Rather, these projects have led to massive displacements, disrupting the pattern of life based on settled agriculture, loss of livelihood security and the destruction of environment. Against this exploitative and the development-oriented model, strong non-violent environmental movements have come up. These include Chilika Bachao Andolon, the Baliapal movement in Balasore District and the movements for protecting Gandhamardan Hill in Sambalpur district. The movement against the Gopalpur steel plant, the movement in Kshipur block of Rayagada district against Utkal Aluminum International Limited, movement against the Tata steel plant in Kalinganagar, the Niyamgirisurakshya movement against Vedanta and people's protest against POSCO in Jagatsingpur.

II. KASHIPUR PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT

Kashipur Block of Rayagada district, a Tribal Scheduled area, has 412 revenue villages and 109 hamlets divided into 20 Gram Panchayats. It covers an area of 1,505.90 sq. km. and has a population of 121,044 (as per the 2001 census); 61 per cent of them belong to scheduled tribes and 20 per cent to scheduled castes. The area is rich in bauxite. The UAIL plant is proposed to be set up at Doraguda village, about 12 km away from Tikri police station. The plant will directly affect 10,000 people of 24 villages of Kucheipadar, Hadiguda and Tikiri Panchayats, but the company claims that only 183 families of three villages will be affected. In the foothills of Baphilimali, 42 villages of Chandragiri, Maikanch, Munusogaon and Kodipari Panchayat of Kashipur block and Adri and Dandabad Panchayat of Thuamul Rampur block of Kalahandi district will be directly affected by the open-cast mining at Baphilimali, but the company claims that not a single village will be affected.

UAIL Company acquired 2155.46 acres of private lands from 2009 households from 26 villages. According to my study The UAIL project will directly affect more than 30,000 indigenous people from 66 villagers (24 villages are plant areas and 42 villages from around Baphilimali hills areas). According to a survey conducted by IDEA, a voluntary organization of Andhra Pradesh which is working in collaboration with NORAD of Norway, it has been estimated that as many as 43 villages will be (Samantara, 2000: 38). A Delhi based organization, TARU, has submitted a report suggesting that about 87 villages are likely to be displaced (ibid: 44). The company is compensating only twenty-four villages. On account of proposed alumina plant, over five thousands tribals and dalit household will lose their home, livelihood and socio-cultural relation with forests. About 3000 acres thousands of the agricultural land and forest area will be disappearing forever and the tribal and dalit farmer will become daily wage earners.

UAIL has also acquired 518.25 (24.04 per cent) acres government land in twenty-six villages. These lands belong to the village communities, and are used for cremations, Thakurani Mandir (temple of the village deity), Dhangadi Basaa and Dhangada Basaa (youth dormitories), community centre, school buildings etc. As a result of the land takeover, these institutions will disappear forever.

In Koraput district many big developmental projects were established, displacing millions of people. In the undivided Koraput district itself, there are many big projects such as the Upper Indravati Hydropower project which displaced 163 villages; not a single village among them has yet been properly rehabilitated. The Upper Kolab Hydropower project displaced 147 villages; only two villages have been rehabilitated. The Balimela-Machhakunda Hydropower project displaced 211 villages; NALCO project at Damonjodi displaced 15 villages; HAL at Sunabeda displaced about two dozens of villages. All the displeased people have now daily wage labourers.

Nature of the Movement

The movement was began by Pakrutika Sampada Surakshya Parishad (PSSP, natural resources protection committee), which is dominated by the indigenous tribal people led by Krushna Saunta, of Kucheipadar village. He was later joined by Laxman Majhi from the same village. Since 2003, Bhagaban Majhi of the same village has been leading the movement. He generally believes in the Gandhian strategy of non-violence. The movement has committed participation of the common people. Every family has composed songs highlighting its involvement in the protest movement.

The Baphilimali hill which is rich in bauxite, is situated near the Indravati Hydropower Project. The catchment of the Indravati covers the hills of Kashipur block. At a cost of more than 1000 crores this project has been constructed to irrigate the perpetually drought-affected areas. Mining in Baphilimali hills will drain out the water sources, silt up the river and dry up the dam. The effluents of the UAIL plant will pollute this river which is the lifeline of Rayagada district. Recently, Bagirijhola minor irrigation project was constructed for irrigation of the agricultural land, but it is going to be handed over to UAIL, depriving the local people of their right to use water for irrigation (Samantara: 2000: 45). The mining of Baphilimali, Sasubahumali or Kuturmali hills will turn more than a hundred villages into desert and dry up and polluted about 32 rivers. The temperature is also likely to be rise.

Social activists, some NGOs and academics have organized the marginalized people. Their focus is influenced by the sarvodaya movement, which is Gandhian movement aiming at the well-being of all. Left-wing extremists have also joined the movement calling for total revolution, which involves re-examination of not only unjust economic relationships but also unequal social relationships between the upper and lower castes, as well as between men and women. Workers, peasants, tribals, and students, both men and women, have organized mass protests demanding that the state should live up to its promise of eliminating poverty. The focus of the livelihood movement of Kashipur block has been a challenge to the development plans of the state, which had the agrarian self-sufficiency vision of Gandhi.

The movement was highlighted by songs, dances and poems sung by women as they work and protect the gate during the years of struggle. The school building in Kucheipadar village and the *haatapada* (weekly market place) in Tikiri village were the main centre for these activities. When a rally was organized, the

youngsters let it, dancing and singing. The performance started with traditional *sailodinacha* (local dances). The theme is about how the tribal people live together in the lap of nature since time immemorial, how they depend on each other for survival. The forest is their god; it provides them food, shelter and water; they depend on the forest for their livelihood and they are its watchmen and protectors. The young men enact the forest and ask questions: the young women enact the tribals.

The Kalinga Nagar Movement against TATA

The Government of Odisha mooted the idea of developing a major industrial complex in the mineral-rich region of Dangadi, Duburi and Sukinda located in the district of Jajpur. The complex includes about thirteen mineral-based industries such as iron and steel, stainless steel, sponge iron and ferrochrome etc. Iron ore and chromites are the main raw materials for these industries. The state government has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with nearly ten units spread over 13,000 hectares of land. Some companies such as the Tatas, Visa, Jindal, and Mesco have started their projects; a few others are nearing completion. The state government has undertaken to grant mining lease and land to the entrepreneurs after acquiring it from the local residents and also looking into all matters relating to displacement, rehabilitation, and resettlement. The tribal people inhabiting the region have repeatedly expressed their dissatisfaction over the payment of compensation, which ultimately resulted in the death of thirteen persons from the tribal community on January 2, 2006 in police firing on them.

According to the compensation package announced in 1994, a land oustee was to be paid Rs 35000 per acre through the Industrial Development Corporation (IDCO) of the state government. Mediating between the state government and the displaced people, the IDCO sold the land to the industries at a rate of Rs 3, 50,000 per acre. The compensation package was enhanced later to Rs 50,000 per acre.

The unfortunate incident of January 2, 2006 not only united the tribal communities of the state but also attracted the sympathy and support of the tribal people from outside the state, completely stalling the construction work of the industrial unit.

Since that day, the tribals of Kalinga Nagar have launched an indefinite economic blockade on National Highway 200 at Madhuban Chhak. The place where the victims were cremated has been named as Bir Bhumi. On May 23, about 5000 women from Odisha, Chhatisgarh, Jharkhand and Andhra Pradesh took out a rally and resolved not to lift the road blockade. The seven-point charter of demands of the Bistapan Birodhi Janamanch includes a complete halt to displacement in the area. The judiciary has issued direction to the state government to take suitable steps to lift the economic blockade as early as possible.

The unprecedented unity among the tribes of the state and the neighboring states has emerged as a strong political force. The Tata Steel Company has announced a package according to which, every displaced family would be considered as a family of the Tata Steel and the Company would look into their all-round development. The Company would take stock of the social and economic conditions of the displaced families every month and all the families numbering about 700 would be provided with identity cards and their progress in matters of rehabilitation and resettlement would be monitored regularly. Further, the Company would give employment to all the displaced families and also revise the compensation package after negotiation with the people. The Company has formed a task force, which includes seven tribal members, to look into all matters relating to displacement and resettlement. The company claims that the package is the best in the country; but according to the Odiya daily *Sambad* (17 May 2006) so far there has been no response to it. :

The anti-POSCO Movement:

The *Pohang Steel Company* (POSCO) of South Korean and the Government of Odisha signed a MoU for establishment of a steel plant and construction of captive port for the company near Paradeep of Jagatsinghpur district on 22nd November 2005. The total land requirements for the plant are 4004 Acres

The land issue has given rise to a dispute between local villagers and governments, both central and state. The land concerned is very fertile and double-cropped. Apart from rice and vegetables, the villagers cultivate betel (*Paan*) leaves on it. The betel cultivation, which is very profitable, is also land-specific: it requires specific soil, climatic conditions and expertise labour.

The fishing community of the area is another group that will be affected. The Bay of Bengal is hardly 2 km from the villages. This fishermen community wants to be resettled in a place where they can maintain their traditional craft.

The Mining activity for about 600 million tons of iron ore over 1,200 hectares in the Khandadhar forests of Sundergarh will also destroy the forest-based livelihoods of several villages of the Paudi Bhuiyan Primitive Tribal Group. Madhumita Roy of Action Aid, Bhubaneswar, says, "Families who have been living in Kandadhar's forests for generations, don't have alternative livelihood. POSCO factories will be highly mechanized".

Three gram panchayats affected by the POSCO project namely, Dhinkia, Nuaga and Godokujong of Kujanga Tahasil of Jagatsinghpur District have formed the POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti (PPSS) to oppose

the project in their locality. The Odisha government arrested the president of the PPSS, Abhay Sahu, on 12 October 2008. But the villagers and their supporters have stood their ground and have further intensified the protest. Over 20,000 people from around 15 villages in the vicinity have opposed the project, saying that it would take away their homes and livelihood: POSCO says that the plant would affect only 500 families but would create thousands of jobs.

The villagers have blocked all the entry roads to their villages, thus foiling any police action. Check gates have been erected, and there is round-the-clock patrolling. Support for the movement has come from several quarters, including the Mahamumbai Shetkari Sangharsha Samiti leading the struggle against Reliance Company's Raigadh SEZ (special economic zone) project and from Lokshashan.

Movement against Vedanta

Niyamgiri or Niyam Dongar is a hill range, about 250 sq. km. in area. Socio-cultural, anthropological and geographical it is a single hilly: but administratively, it currently comes under three districts of Kalahandi, Rayagada and Koraput. Members of Dongaria Kandha tribe (Dongaria means hill people) depend on Niyamgiri for sustenance. A Dongaria Kandha, must reside in Niyamgiri and possess land there. Dongaria Kandha have a distinctive heritage, with their dress style, mode of living, indigenous skills, cultural pattern and social relation with nature and forest.

Niyamgiri is simply vibrant both culturally and ecologically. The rivers Vansadhara and Nagavali Spring here; It has a dense and teeming forest area; it is home to a number of vulnerable wildlife species including tiger, leopards, sloth bear, pangolin, palm civet, giant squirrel, mouse deer, langur, sambhar; It is also the migration corridor of elephants. The Kalahandi Forest Division has proposed it as a wildlife sanctuary; the state wildlife organization wants to be declared as South Odisha Elephant Reserve. More than 36 streams flow from the Niyamgiri hills and most of them are perennial. Niyamgiri hills receive heavy rainfall every year and drought is unheard of in this area.

The proposed mining spot is somewhere between Niyamgiri Reserve Forest of Kalahandi (South) Forest Division-Khambesi and Niyamgiri PRF (Proposed Reserve Forest)- and Jungle Block (Protected Forest) of Rayagada Forest Division. The proposed mining operation requires 672.018 hectares of forest area. The estimated lifespan of the project is 23 years. IDCOL, Odisha (Odisha Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited) has already acquired 775.5 acres of land from six villages (Kinari, Borbhatta, Bandhaguda, Kothadwar, Bundla and Sindhabhal).

Vedanta has commenced work on a plant at Lanjigarh and mining of bauxite from Niyamgiri against the vigorous opposition of people from the region. On 7 April 2004 the Niyamgiri Suraksha Samiti was formed to protect the forest, land water and their livelihood in the area. The Niyamgiri has a number of perennial hill streams. These are used for agriculture and as a source of drinking water for people living in the foothills. They are also the source of the river Bansadhara that flows through Andhra Pradesh. The hill is a place of worship for the Dongaria Kandha.

The people of villages Kinari and Bolbhata have been displaced and resettled in the foothill of Niyamgiri. They are unhappy about the use of groundwater by the company in the drought-prone area. They have also sought the participation of political leaders of the neighboring Andhra Pradesh in their cause. The local Congress leaders and the CPM are active in the movement. According to the *Sambad*, the agitating masses point out that the company has a plan of giving employment benefit to only 286 persons. The people's causes have been taken up by the Green Kalahandi movement led by Bhakta Das. The protestors have been addressed several times by Prof. T.K. Oommen and Prof. Anand Kumar from the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. While the supporters of the ruling Biju Janata Dal (BJD) claim that the project will not only bring development in the area but will also generate employment, the opposition Congress Party points out the possible adverse impact on Niyamgiri's bio-diversity and loss of livelihood of Dongaria Kandha. On 2 October 2006, led by Bhakta Charan Das, people from all over Kalahandi district observed a two minute silent and then shouted slogans against Vedanta for five minutes. Green Kalahandi activists were moving from village to village in Lanjigarh block, making people aware of the threat posed by Vedanta. The organization was set up in each panchayat in Lanjigarh to spread the agitation. In 2008 Rahul Gandhi visited Lanjigarh and assured the local people that he would take up their demands with the Union government. Again On 26 August, 2010 Rahul Gandhi visited the area and underlined that "development was meaningless if it uprooted the locals and deprives them of their livelihood" and he congratulated them for their achieving success through non-violent way. The indigenous tribes in Niyamgiri believe themselves to be descendants of Niyam Raja; wage labour is derogatory to their culture. They do work for other members of the community either in exchange of a nominal wage or labour; the employee-employer relationship does not exist and they treat others as their equals. The Dongarias believe that the right to cultivate hill slopes has been conferred to them by Niyam Raja and that a dongar plot is haunted by an ancestor spirit who helps in bumper growth of crops (Daspatnaik: 1984:26). The Dongaria Kandha depend upon the Niyamgiri Forests for their livelihood selling part of their collection of forest produce at nearby *haats* (weekly market). The Dongaria Kandhas are one of Odisha's most distinctive and

primitive tribes. With this project, they will lose their precious home, livelihood, culture and heritage and ultimately would be left without identity.

Usurpation of the forests and lands in the region for mining will also destroy this socio-economic and ecological tradition. The proposed mining area is located atop of Niyamgiri hill and the alumina refinery is situated at the footstep, near Lanjigarh. The approach road to the top and conveyors belt used for transporting of ore from the mining site to the refinery passes through very dense and rich forests. The open cast mining will also generate high levels of noise during excavation, drilling, transportation, blasting and crushing operations. The emissions originating from the operations will also pollute the air. There will be heavy traffic on the road mostly trucks transporting heavy machinery. Continuous operation of machineries, blasting, influx of outsiders and runoff water from the mining site during the monsoon season would destroy the rich ecosystem. The impact of the industrial activity and influx of outsiders is already visible in shape of quarries on the edge of the Niyamgiri Reserve Forest and the felling of trees in the reserve forest area. The rehabilitation colony is just a few meters away from the Niyamagiri Reserved Forest. The adverse impact of this colony and the labour force staying near the forest is already visible.

The decision of the centre, based on the N.C.Saxena (2010) committee report as well as the Union Minister of state for environment and forests Jairam Ramesh favour rejecting environmental clearance to Vedanta due to serious violation of the environmental protection Act 1966, forest conservation Act 1980 and Forest Right Act 2006. The decision is also a tribute to the worldwide campaign by human right groups, voluntary organizations, and civil society in general and DongoriaKandha in particular that brought about awareness of the impending ecological imbalance..

One of the tribal women Mrs. LachhamaMajhi says, “We have been living for generations in the lap of nature. If we are evicted from this place by the company, we will become beggars on the street, so, we will not leave our homeland”. Alai Majhi who is illiterate but is in the forefront of the struggle says: “Your governments, you collectors, yourTahasildar have not given us this forest, land, rivers and the wealth under the earth. We have got these as gift of nature and have been enjoying them for thousands of years this will continue for future generations”.

Role of Establishment

In the early phase of the movement, sponsored by NGOs, some activists addressed press conferences in Bhubaneswar and Delhi. This is partly responsible for the notion that it is an NGO inspired/led movement. The company and the administration projected this notion to suit their own purposes. All the local regional prints and electronics media are supporters of the company. On the other hand, the national and international media are not reaching people. However, academics, some social activists and independent researcher are helping in publicizing the issue involved..

From the beginning, the democratic state has maintained a stony silence on the exact nature of the project, i.e. how many villages will be displaced or affected, how many people will lose their land, what will be the nature of compensation etc.. On the other hand, it has been continuously harassing people on one pretext or other. People have been beaten up, fired upon, jailed, lathi-charged and implicated in false cases. Sometimes, the local administration and police have tried to weaken the movement by setting one community against other: when violence erupts, it becomes easier for them to fulfill its nefarious designs.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Give land for land and do proper rehabilitation.
- Share 26 percent of the profit of the company, which means people’s participation in the company and livelihood security.
- Give jobs to all affected family members (above 18 years age) in the company.
- Company should be established in non-forest areas.
- There should be a national commission for protection of natural resources constituted by the centre and states.
- The governments should look into the time gap between the distribution of compensation and the actual displacement, which may be up to ten years. In the meantime, people consume the amount given as compensation and when actual displacement occurs, they have hardly anything to survive upon, which further leads to their impoverishment and misery.

IV. CONCLUSION

Environmental movements in Odisha have the core idea of livelihood and right to natural resources which the people have been using for centuries. All these movements revolve around a wide range of resistance and protest. . There is a mismatch between the nationalistic perspective of development and tribal development and these projects are marginalizing the already marginalized section of our society.

There is considerable violation of basic rights. The tribal people, the women, the dalits, and the poor people who have been directly affected by these projects. They fear to lose of livelihood, dignity, lose of land, forest and water sources, and the imminent threat to their traditional culture. Government is making a big effort to sell tribal lands to the investors in the form of guarantees, tax-concessions and investment subsidies. In the last fifty years, because of various developmental efforts, tribal people have come under the domain of the market economy. The project affected people are no longer in a mood to suffer displacement along with its parallel attributes like occupational degeneration, social disorientation, pauperization, loss of dignity and often getting cheated of the compensation amount, which serve to make the experience a suffering.

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