

# Forced Displacement and Resistance: A Study of Lanjigarh Project, Odisha

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## Abstract

Since independence, India has been undertaking development projects to improve the quality of life through 'planned development' in successive Five-Year plans but some of them have brought adverse effects through displacement from original habitation due to large-scale land acquisition. All projects which includes industrial, mining, irrigation and infrastructural projects, farmers are resisting for land diversion and acquisition because it leads to their miseries, deprivation, joblessness, rehabilitation problem and resettlement. The main issues involved in land diversion process are fixation of compensation for acquisition of land, displacement of families and their rehabilitation at a secured place and employment of farmers. Development-induced displacement has brought severe socio-economic and environmental problems. For several decades, development projects in India have expropriated and forcibly displaced scores of people, without giving them the protection that a formal policy and legislation of development-caused displacement and resettlement should give to all citizens. The only existing relevant law has been the Land Acquisition Act (LAA) from 1894, which prescribed only how land could be expropriated with payment of compensation, but contains nothing about people's entitlement to be resettled and rehabilitated. In this connection the paper delineates about the Dongria Kondh a primitive tribal communities in south-west Odisha in eastern India, are at threat from the expansion of an alumina refinery and new bauxite mining project. Effectively kept excluded from the decision-making process, their land is to be used for other's profit. They have already suffered deprivation of their rights to water, health and environment, because of pollution and poor waste management by the refinery. The mining project will be located on the traditional lands of the Dongria Kondh, an Indigenous endangered community who now face the fear of losing their way of life, sacred hills, rights to water, food, livelihoods and cultural identity. This paper will discuss India's needs not only for a strong policy on population displacement, resettlement and rehabilitation, but also for enacting firm legislation, compelling for government agencies and for private sector corporations and programmes.

**Keywords:** Independence, development, deprivation, rehabilitation

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Since independence in 1947, India has been undertaking development projects to improve the quality of life of its people through 'planned development' under the successive Five-Year Plans. Development projects are perceived as symbols of national progress. If properly executed, they have the potential to facilitate generation of employment opportunities, formation of new skills, increases in income and consumption levels and improvement of infrastructure facilities. Such projects include dams, power, mining, industrial and allied infrastructures, transport network, urban development, commercial forestry

and other projects. It can also contribute to modifications in cultural patterns, and changes in old social values and traditional organisations. On the other hand most development projects drastically redefine the land use pattern. Some of these projects have brought adverse effects in the form of displacement of people from ancestral habitats and cause large-scale loss of traditional occupations. Though the carefully planned and judiciously executed development projects have been instrumental in the faster economic growth of the nation, they have often also proved to be destructive

(Parasuraman 1993b; Fernandes et al 1992; Thukral 1992; Cernia 1990).

Dams, mines, power plants, industries, parks and sanctuaries induce varying magnitudes of displacement of people from their traditional habitats. Often, displacement is followed by some form of voluntary or involuntary resettlement at the original or other locations. Typically, displacement causes serious economic, social and cultural disruption of the lives of those affected by it, and the social fabric of the communities of the area. In India, relocation normally meant movement of people from one place and environment to another. Such movements drastically altered the physical and social environment in which people found them and to which they had to adapt after relocation (Parasuraman 1996).

The number of people displaced by programs and projects intended to promote national, regional, and local development are substantial. The number most commonly cited is approximately 10 million people per year displaced throughout the world; over the last 20 years this would mean 200 million have been displaced (Cerna, 2001). In India alone, an estimated 25 million were displaced from 1947 to 1997 (Mahapatra, 1999). When displacement results from development activities it is often justified as costs borne by some people for the greater public good. On a theoretical plane, these costs can be potentially be off-set through the compensatory principle – in a developmental intervention, if gainers gain more than losers lose, the gainers potentially compensate the losers. In the policy realm, potential off-setting of losers' losses are insufficiently worked out. Project appraisals tend to ignore displacement costs. Compensation packages are extremely inadequate. Resettlement policies are at best *ad hoc*, and at worst absent. Resettlement sites lack basic amenities. Project authorities tend to view displacement and resettlement as project bottlenecks to be removed rather than as social scientist challenges that these need to be addressed. Promises of compensation and resettlement made to affected people before displacement remain unfulfilled. In practice, displaced communities experience acute marginalisation (Dwivedi, 1999).

The threat of marginalisation results in strong resentment among affected communities who have often expressed themselves through protests, resistance and movements. In recent times, the active involvement of NGOs and social activist groups in displacement issues has contributed towards giving displaced communities a voice, raising national and global awareness of their problems and building a radical critique of the ways in which such projects are justified as being developmental (Dwivedi, 1999).

In this context this paper attempts to provide a broad overview of impacts of developmental projects on the tribal people in India and in particular Lanjigarh Vedanta project, Odisha. The article attempts to address the complexities involved in the forced displacement problem and explores possibilities for its reworking. Keeping all this in mind the article is divided into four sections. First section will provide basic idea about the relationship between development and environment in Indian situation. The second section will provide a brief overview of history of industrialization in Odisha and basic features of Vedanta Alumina Project. Third section delineates the differential impact of the project with special focus on forced displacement and losses of land and land-related livelihoods of indigenous people. Finally, the concluding section deals with the dynamic of displacement-resettlement arena and suggests some changes necessary to initiate reworking the displacement-resettlement problem.

The relationship between development and environment has been the subject of debates and discussions, both at national and international level. The impact of the prevailing pattern of development on the environment has invoked global concern. The dominant model of development once hailed as the panacea for all human crises, is now questioned on the grounds of ecological costs and goes against the very notion of development. This development model operates on the principle of 'optimum utilization' of natural resources. This has far reaching consequences for the people who are still dependent on nature for their survival. In India, due to its peculiar socio-historical conditions, the over-utilization of natural resources proves beneficial only to a small group of people. The developmental goals are fulfilled by diverting the resources away from the survival needs of the majority. While the benefits from development are shared by a privileged few, as a repercussion it will cost the life of the poor, the marginalized and the humanity. The misutilization and depletion of the natural resource base result in the further impoverishment of these people. These unequal rewards from development are mediated through the state, the ultimate source of power. This process of uneven growth, however, is not going unchallenged. The environmental movements have emerged as the indicators of this challenge. The movements in the current discourse are viewed as being critical towards the development strategies and advocators of an alternative pattern of development that proves sustainable in the long run.

### **Development and Environment: The Indian Situation**

The most appropriate definition typical of all contemporary discourses on development is given by Riddell: "change in favor

of general human improvement, and change of two kinds usually linked: expansion in consumption and enhancement of welfare” (Cohen, 1985). This development model is based on the panacea for every crisis that hits mankind. It will eradicate poverty, ill health and associated human miseries and will lead to general human welfare. Economic growth, productivity and consumerism thus gain prime importance in a country’s planning as indicators of development.

Both the capitalist and the socialist countries follow the same model of development with little variance. In capitalist countries market is the chief allocator of resources, whereas in socialist countries central planning assumes that role. However, both consider industrial growth, increased production and consumption, progress in science and technology as the index of development. The increased material prosperity is to be achieved by conquering the forces of nature with the help of science and technology.

The dominant development paradigm defines ‘rich’ as a person/nation that has more purchasing power, and ‘poor’ as a person/nation that has less purchasing power in a consumerist economy. Rich or ‘developed’ nations, who have achieved the highest degree of material prosperity and are able to provide their citizens a decent standard of living, stand as a role model for the ‘underdeveloped’ and ‘developing’ countries. These countries are expected to learn from the ‘developed’ world and follow the same road towards productivity, consumerism and prosperity (Mohanty, 2005). Since in developing countries, capital the prime input is always in short supply, internal capital accumulation is to be assisted by the first recipients of the fruits of development, but the results, it is believed will eventually, either ‘trickle down’ automatically or are to be distributed through the administrative machinery to the vast majority of the poor people.

The historical roots of this process of development can be traced back to the industrial revolution that began in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Western Europe. The discovery of steam power and the introduction of machineries revolutionized the system of production of goods. The new inventions in the field of science and technology gave man a better understanding of the world of nature and helped him in utilizing this knowledge to further his material needs. Along with the industrial revolution, there was a revolution in the field of agriculture. New farm technologies were used for the increased production of food on the one hand, and cash crops for the market and raw material for the industries on the other. The process to put ‘nature’ in commercial use had thus begun.

As industrialization progressed, there took place an outward migration from village to cities, which were the location of industries and markets. Man became dependent on the market for the satisfaction of his needs in the form of finished goods and services. He neither stayed in close proximity with nature nor did he become directly dependent on nature for the satisfaction of his needs thereby thus failing to treat nature with awe and respect. The development ethic does not recognize any level as ‘optimum’ or enough; rather ‘limitless maximization’ is the principal on which the development pattern of development is based.

Unlike other developing countries the intensive industrialization in India has currently attracted the attention of ecologists to the issues of ecological degradation. India’s development strategy over the last 65 years did not recognize the environmental impacts of development. The inter-linkages between the economy and the environment cannot be overemphasized. Economic growth leaves its unique “footprint” on the environment, and environmental degradation in turn can jeopardize economic development. India’s industrialization strategy emphasized more resource-intensive and more energy-intensive heavy industries until the late 1980s resulted more pollution and degradation. Likewise, India’s extractive, natural resource based industries such as steel and cement, and unsustainable agrochemical and irrigation-dependent agriculture is added to environmental degradation. The range of environmental problems confronting India can be classified under two groups: (1) those arising from industrialization and urbanization such as pollution and solid waste, and (2) natural resource-based problems such as deforestation, land degradation (due to erosion, salinity, and water-logging) and biodiversity loss.

In the last 65 years of debate over development there have been a number of experiments regarding its achievement and failures. From the very beginning social equality has been the core of our emphasis in the process of development, which is yet to be achieved. But with the change of the development policies since 1990s by prioritizing economic growth as the major thrust of development our policy makers have adopted a new paradigm of development. Along with the economic growth and social equity, ecological stability has always attracted the attention of sociologists and environmentalists. So we should visualize our development by taking all these three aspects viz- economic growth, social equity and ecological stability into consideration. Awareness of the three aspects/components clubbed with economic efficiency and some kind of social equity and ecological stability are essential for any development to take place.

A close look at the priorities of our planners as also of implementation should support the argument that three aspects (economic growth, social equity and ecological stability) talked about above have not been recognized as important. In the first years of India's development, from the 1950s to the 1990s, we can notice that social equity was most pertinent and hence economic efficiency disregarded. When the focus shifted to economic efficiency with an introduction of liberalization in the 1990s, social equity as an essential for development has taken a back seat, one may argue. But in both case ecological stability is not given the due priority. The great contribution of the environmental movement has been to bring this issue to the fore. Once you recognise that all three are important, and then we can start looking at how it is practical to incorporate the three.

Environmental movements in the world are known for their diversity and complexity. However, most of the environmental movements in India are interpreted as protests by a group of grassroots people against the developmental policy of government. These developmental policies of the Indian government are considered destructive both to nature and to the people at grassroots levels. Because of their traditional-cultural ties with the environment, these local people claim to have protected the nature more than anybody else. In fact, because of their cultural ties with nature they are exemplary stewards of the land (Baviskar, 1997). Thus, different parts of India that are being exposed threat in the domain of environment either by the government or any other agency, have witnessed environmental protest.

Serious debate over development and environment is going on in sociological circles. This debate has emerged from potential issues particularly due to the new growing polarity of world income. It is an accepted fact that the proliferation of environmental concerns linked to questions and issues of development has profound theoretical and practical implications. One is that the politics of environment has embraced a wide terrain including not just new social movements, but transnational environmental alliances and networks and a sensitivity to a panoply of local conflicts and resistances. Another is that theories about development and environment-socio-political ecology in its various guises – have been pushed and extended by the realities of the new social movements.

The introduction is structured around two broad themes which link the issues of development and environment. The first is the 'political ecology' which encompasses the constantly shifting dialects between society and land-based resources. This leads to a discussion of how political ecology may be

extended through post-structural critiques of western reason and discourse theory. The second is the environment politics and specifically ideas on social movements and other political forms, which are struggles for livelihood and simultaneously are ecological in nature since they express objectives in terms of ecological requirements for life.

It must be noted that the intellectual firmament of the last thirty five years is marked different from that of the environmental wave of the 1960s which was dominated by Darwinian or Malthusian thinking. Perhaps, the most important line of recent social scientific thinking about 'environment' and 'development' is 'political ecology'. The term can be traced with some certainty to the 1970s when it emerged as a response to the theoretical need to integrate land use practice with local-global political economy and as a reaction to the growing politicization of the environment. Subsequently taken up by anthropologists, sociologists and historians, it is perhaps most closely associated with Blaikie (1987) and Blaikie and Brookfield (1987). In their view, political, ecological and economy combines the concerns of ecology with "a broadly defined political economy". Accordingly environmental problems in the third world are less a problem of poor management, over population or ignorance as of social action and political-economic constraints. Standing at the centre of this argument is the argument of recent sociologist focusing on "land manager" whose relationship to nature must be considered in a "social historical, political and economic context".

While all such arguments are put forward, the focus of logic goes towards a complex association of political ecology with the institution of civil society. The growth of various environmental movements, which have occurred during the last two to three decades, are devoid of suppression by the state. It is observed that efforts at integrating political action – whether everyday resistance, civic movements, organizations and resist the predations of the state remains to be studied.

The interaction between 'development' and 'environment' is often eluded to have found its expression in the environmental movements of third world, especially in India. Environmental movements as a kind of neo-social movements have been a recent phenomenon in environmental sociology. While the origins of such movements are country specific, in India, they are generally traced back to early 1970s. Strangely their growth and rampantness has been witnessed in the short span of thirty-five years, particularly during the last quarter of twentieth century and the succeeding years of twenty first century. These movements have been a major area of focus because of their natural and mass appeal that they have aroused during this

period. It is worth mentioning that, among various kinds of mass protests that India has ever seen, the role that environmental movements have played during the last few years have been very different. Since these movements are directly related to the society, environment and very existence of people in a large scale and have challenged the state authority directly, they are considered as powerful and potential. Hence, sociological studies of such movements become relevant.

While various factors have been attributed to the growth of these movements in India, the role that 'Development' has played is often accused as a major one. The strange irony is that 'Development' is a concept that is attributed to drive away the maladies of the society. However, this concept has been a major area of debate between the societies as also one of strange dichotomy between the first world and the third world and, therefore, it is alleged that the implications of 'Development' are not similar either.

It is in this light that we might attempt to unravel the present pertinent debate of "development" with its effects, either positive or negative vis-à-vis the backwardness of the state of Odisha. Clichés such as "A state gifted with rich mineral resources, yet so poor", "Plenty of resources, plenty of poverty too", "why Odisha is so poor with abundant natural resources?", "Odisha's poverty unexplainable", these are among the most talked about statements. A summary of the standard and typical statements and interpretations on the state and its situations would suggest that the State of Odisha is endowed with plenty of natural resources like forests, inland water, mineral deposits, raw materials the most essential elements required for pursuing the goal of modern development. Its long coastline combined with potentially viable ports inspires for developing Special Economic Zones (SEZ) and turning Odisha into one of the most industrially developed states. Planners and development critics are worried: despite all these positive features and factors the state has rendered to be one of the industrially and economically backward states of India.

### **History of Industrialisation in Odisha**

Any contemporary discourse on development in Odisha does give an impression that Odisha is really backward in terms of industrialization, where as the actual scenario may not necessarily be so. Odisha has been there in the industrial and mining map of the country ever since its inception of mining and industry in India. The very first private sector steel plant established in India in Jamshedpur by Jamshedji Tata in pre-independence period sourced its raw materials from the iron ore mines in Mayurbhanj district of Odisha. The public sector

coal mines have also been there much before independence. The post independence period also witnessed a number of public sector initiatives in Odisha, which helped in expanding mining and industrial map of Odisha. Many large scale Industries like Rourkela Steel Plant, Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd, (HAL), National Aluminum Company (NALCO), etc came up one after another and mining sector also expanded significantly- an area that is continuously expanding. In the beginning of the Reforms Era that is in the year 1991-92, the mineral production was estimated at 37200000 tons. Within 10 years mineral production went up by 100 percent. As per the Economic Survey of Odisha-2002-03, mineral production in the year 2001-02 was estimated to be more than 74900000 tons.

The pace of development, which has been treated as if synonymous with industrialization, which in turn has been equated with mining, does not appear to be convincing for some people. This rate of industrialization in Odisha, they fear, may not lead us to a proper growth rate and therefore to greater reduction of poverty. However, there is dearth of questioning about the cost and benefits of industrialization so far as the poor and their economy is concerned. There does not seem to be any study which would give us an idea about each industrial and mining project in the state with the details of benefits they have brought to the native population, the local economy, the state and the nation and their relative costs. In fact the areas, which seem to be relatively developed in terms of mining and industrialization do also present a horrifying picture of abject poverty and pauperization of thousands of families, mostly indigenous (Vasundhara, 2005).

Majority of growing Industries in Odisha are linked to the available natural resources like metals and minerals, Forest resources and water. Diversification and expansion in these sectors have also led to large-scale deforestation (Mining and Industrial sectors have accounted for nearly 39% of total conversion of forest area to non-forest area, Economic Survey of Odisha) and responsible for acquisition of 622463.94 hectares of land (Pandey, 1998) of the poor in Tribal and Rural areas. As the majority of large industries and mineral resources are located in the Northern and Southern Tribal dominated regions of the state, they invariably encroach upon the major source of livelihood like forest produces, forest and revenue lands of Tribal and forest dwellers. It is important to note that here going by the incidence of poverty among various social groups in Odisha.

The emphasis in successive Industrial Policies for large Industries and Mining sector has led to expansion of mining activities and establishment of some mega projects in the state.

The overall contribution of large-scale industries in terms of poverty eradication and economic growth over last two decades has not been significant. The mega projects have however necessitated large-scale acquisition of revenue land, forestland and common property resources. As large number of rural poor and Tribal in the state are dependent on forests resources, forestlands and common property resources for their livelihood, acquisition of such land has led to massive displacement. Since majority of the displaced persons in the state so far have belonged to the marginalized section of the population, the impact of such displacement on their socio-economic conditions has been severe (Vasundhara, 2005).

### Background of Vedanta Alumina Project

Vedanta Alumina Limited, a subsidiary of M/S Sterlite Industries (India) Limited (SIIL), plans to exploit the Niyamagiri bauxite reserve located on top of Niyamagiri Hill in Kalahandi District of Odisha for commercial exploitation of bauxite. This company is going to mine bauxite deposit from the Niyamagiri hills jointly with Odisha Mining Corporation Limited (OMC) as per the lease agreement signed in between Vedanta Alumina Ltd (VAL) and Odisha Mining Cooperation (OMC) in October 2004. According to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by SIL and Govt. of Odisha on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2003, SIL would set up an Alumina Complex, which includes 1.0 MTPA Alumina Refinery Plant, 3.0 MTPA of bauxite mining and 75 MW Captive Power Plant at Lanjigarh in the district of Kalahandi at an aggregate investment of approximately Rs. 4000/- crore. SIL has been now named as Vedanta Alumina Ltd. For this purpose 723.343 hectare of land is required by the Vedanta Alumina Ltd. Out of this 232.75 ha of land was private and was acquired under Land Acquisition Act, 1984 for “public purpose”. Most of this land belonged to scheduled tribes. Another 721.323 ha of land are required for the bauxite mining on top of the Niyamagiri Hill. Most of the land is categorized as forest. The mining lease is to be in the name of the “Odisha Mining Cooperation Ltd”, however, for all purpose the mining and the use of bauxite will be done by Vedanta Alumina Ltd. Given the extremely high quality of the bauxite on the Niyamagiri Hills and the low cost at which it is being given to Vedanta, the proposed project would have been one of the most profitable in the world (Samantara, 2006).

Mining-based industrialization has grown rapidly since the independence of India. Industrialization is seen as the best way to stimulate accelerated economic growth and social transformation to bring backward regions into the fold of development of the country. However, our experience gives us an idea about industrialization via the generation of negative

social and economic consequences resulting in the disintegration of social, cultural and economic life, displacement, marginalization and environmental pollution. The problems have been aggravated with the restructuring of the Indian economy after the implementation of the new economic reforms during 1991 (Nayak, 2007). In March 1993, the new National Mineral Policy of India opened up its mining sector to private and foreign investment as a part of its new open door economy under the twin principles of liberalization and globalization. It was further opened up by removing restrictions on foreign equity participation in the mining sector in India during 1994–1999. As per the Foreign Direct Investment Policy—2006 of the Government of India, the mining sector is completely open for private and foreign investment (Government of India, 2006).

The Odisha economy is predominantly an agricultural economy that contributed about 28.13 percent to net state domestic product during 2001–2002 and provided direct and indirect employment to around 65 percent of the total workforce of the state as per the 2001 provisional census. Odisha, the ancient land of temples in the eastern coast of India, is one of the most resource-rich States in the country. The State is endowed with vast natural resources, mineral, marine, agricultural and forest wealth. It has abundant reserves of coal, iron-ore, bauxite, chromite, limestone, dolomite, magnesite and manganese with other minerals like tin, nickel, vanadium, gemstones and granite. At the moment, the present ruling class ignores the importance of agriculture and its role in the state’s economy. They are taking the state to reckless industrialization drive by promising to make Odisha a number one industrial state in the country without taking into consideration agriculture and related issues. With the onset of the economic reforms in India and fast emerging globalization of the economy, Odisha is in the threshold of rapid industrial growth. Any opposition to the current industrialization move is branded as anti-development. As discussed later, even brutal force is used to suppress any resistance to this mindless developmentalism (Nayak, 2007).

When we think about all these three aspects i.e. economic efficiency, social equity and ecological stability in Odisha we will find a major gap in it. Still today Odisha is considered as the poorest state of India with 47.08 percent (Odisha Human Development report, 2004) living below the line of poverty. There is also a wide regional variations existing as the obstacle towards the development of Odisha. With all these existing problems the new trends of development accompanying with the movement of liberalization, privatization and globalization (LPG) created new problems in the development dynamics of Odisha. The rapid force of industrialization in the name of

privatization and economic well being of the people costs towards heavy deforestation and ecological destruction of the area, what once considered as the environmentally rich. The ongoing destruction in Odisha in the name of development should be the major concern of the peoples as an emerging challenge to society.

With these advantages Odisha has become a major destination of steel plants, thermal power plants, alumina/aluminum projects and oil refineries. The project/proposals in hand include 13 steel plants, half a dozen large power projects, three alumina/aluminum projects and two green field oil refineries, most of them by major national and international industrial enterprises. The State Government is determined to take full advantage of the sweeping changes in the national and international scenario and forge ahead with its programme of industrialization.

The main argument of the ruling class in Odisha is that mining and industrialization will bring development. Economic growth will bring economic and social empowerment. The promise of the ruling class is a myth that can be understood while looking at the impacts of mining-based industrialization in Odisha. The industrialization process of Odisha has influenced the social, economic and cultural milieu in a massive scale, uprooting thousands of rural population, many of them tribal people and other marginalized communities. Officially, 81,176 families from 1,446 villages were displaced due to development projects from 1950 to 1993 that required the acquisition of 14,82,626 acres of land. The major development projects that induced large-scale displacement in the state during this period were industrial projects—such as Rourkela Steel Plant, Hindustan Aeronautics and the National Aluminum Company (Jena, 2006). Most of the time, tribal people are the real victims of this process of industrialization as the tribal areas of Odisha are nothing but the mining map of Odisha. There is a great deal of debate among the anthropologists, economists, and public policy-makers on the impact of mining and industrialization. However, the impact of industrialization in Odisha can be studied under the following points: economic impacts, and social and cultural impacts (Nayak, 2007).

There is a flow of private companies national and international in exploiting the existing resources of the state with a supporting hand of the government. Among all other projects, the bauxite-mining project in Lanjigarh is the crucial one as a development initiative getting caught in controversies and facing resistance from the subaltern sections of the society.

Kalahandi is one of the most economically backward districts of Odisha. However, it has rich deposits of bauxite over its hill ranges. Recently the State Government and its corporation

have entered into agreement with certain industrial houses for creating infrastructure to extract bauxite and process it. The thickly forested and riverine region of Lanjigarh in Kalahandi is under severe pressure from mining development for bauxite deposits and alumina processing, by the British Vedanta Group, in collaboration with State of Odisha, Odisha Mining Corporation and also, Ministry of Environment and Forests.

Lanjigarh, located in the south-east part of the Kalahandi district in state of Odisha, has become the site of an ongoing struggle against company and government establishment of bauxite refinery. The Lanjigarh project involves bauxite mine high up on the 4,000-foot northwest ridge of the Niyamgiri mountain range. For generations, indigenous people from the *Dongria Kondh*, *Kutia Kondha* and *Jharania Kondha* tribal groups have lived in the lush forests of Niyamgiri mountain, by foraging in the forests, raising chickens and growing vegetables and rice (Actionaid Report). They are one of Odisha's most distinctive and traditional tribes, and live in about 90 villages, scattered throughout this range. For them, as for the *Maji Konds* in the plains area below, the *Niyamgiri* is their place of origin. The presiding deity of these mountains is *Niyam Raja*, who also receives worship at Hindu temples in the non-tribal towns and villages round the periphery of these mountains. Niyam Raja's name means "Lord of the Law" or "Lord of Dharma". There is wonderful forest throughout the Niyamgiris, but the ridge where the mine is being staked out has exceptional forest on its expansive summit, as well as its sides - home to tigers and elephants, as well as innumerable other species. Half the mine site is Reserved Forest, which is supposed by Law to be preserved. This whole forest, on the Kalahandi-Rayagada border, is one of the best in Odisha. The north ridge of Niyamgiri has many springs on its sides, which form the source of the great *Vansadhara* River (Padel and Das, 1994).

Environmentalists argue that, bauxite has great water retaining capacity and its mining would lead to the drying up of a perennial stream. Mining also disrupts the water tables. It leads to heavy pressure on fertile agricultural land. If all the mountains presently leased to the mining companies start being mined, Odisha will face an environmental catastrophe. The aluminum rich bauxite mountains sustain Odisha's fertility and forests. The sources of major rivers are in the slope of these mountains. Most of the rivers are filtered through the bauxite.

The ongoing project has so far displaced four villages, two completely and two partially and it may displace more in future. Equally alarming are the observations on how the project affected communities were forcibly evicted and rehabilitated. The people have been displaced from their houses through

physical eviction by the district administration. Many were beaten up by the employees of M/s Vedanta. The National R&R policy requires that land for land should be given after due process of consultation, particularly in the case of the tribals. Contrary to the above cash compensation was offered to them and which was not acceptable to many. The tribal people living on the plant site are mainly Kondhs who are illiterate and depend completely on their agricultural lands and forest for their subsistence. They have deep spiritual and cultural attachment to their ancestral lands and settlements. The displacement was opposed vehemently by them despite being offered large cash compensation by M/s Vedanta. In the face of resistance, the District Collector and the company officials collaborated to coerce and threaten them. An atmosphere of fear was created through the hired goons, the police and the administration. Many of the tribals were badly beaten up by the police and the goons. After being forcibly removed they were kept under watch and ward by the armed guards of M/s Vedanta and no outsider was allowed to meet them. They were effectively being kept as prisoners (Vedanta Alumina Project in Lanjigarh, Odisha).

Apart from the land acquired by the District administration from the large number of tribals and the harijans of Bandhagunda and Rengopali villages, land was also illegally taken over by M/s Vedanta for which neither acquisition notice was served nor compensation was paid; about 64 households of Jaganathpur Village, most of whom are Kandha tribals have been cultivating for generations Khasra No. 186 – a revenue land. Encroachment cases have been filed against many of them. These tribal families were evicted by force from the land being cultivated by them for generations without any compensation or any shelter thereby taking away their main source of livelihood. This has taken place even though these cultivators have been officially shown to be in possession of this land and cultivating. The eviction has taken place without any process of verification and is in violation of the special protection provided to the scheduled tribes. Though they approached the District Collector against the forcible eviction, he took no action. The people affected by the mining projects, started the struggle against the company and the government, whereas the state is trying to suppress the movement by using brute terror. In addition to the heavy police force, paramilitary forces have also been posted. The state police behave as if it's a private army of the mining company.

In addition to the proposed mine, Vedanta has already constructed a huge alumina refinery plant near the town of Lanjigarh, and is now digging 'ponds' to hold the toxic waste that the factory will produce. This plant and associated

perimeter wall and feeder road has been the source of major conflict with local villagers, who claim that homes and farms have been bulldozed without due consultation or compensation. In response to these developments, villagers from the surrounding area have been organising in ever-greater numbers to protest against the company and are gaining support locally, nationally and internationally. At meetings from village to district level, local people have been condemning the Vedanta development and planning how to respond. On May 16, 2006, a huge meeting was held in Lanjigarh where 10,000 mostly indigenous people from the affected districts of Rayagada and Kalahandi unanimously opposed the construction of the refinery. The women's network is particularly strong (Actionaid Report).

Resistance to the project continues to intensify. The movement against Vedanta in Lanjigarh has growing support from residents of nearby urban areas and has enlisted the support of local, national and international lawyers and activists. Community representatives and campaigners supporting their case come together as Sachetan Nagarik Manch (SNM), chaired by local lawyer Sidharth Nayak. SNM and other local activists have confronted Vedanta and are demanding that they cease their activities in Niyamgiri. Petitioners have also appealed to the Supreme Court of India, the Odisha state Parliament and the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF). There are currently three separate complaints against Vedanta being heard by the Supreme Court. All the petitions allege environmental violations on a range of counts. Key amongst these allegations is the illegal diversion of forestland and construction of road in a wildlife sanctuary for bauxite mining and questions over the initial 'permission' for setting up the refinery. A ruling from the Supreme Court is expected on 9 August, 2007 (Actionaid Report). Despite these legal challenges and the mobilization of local indigenous people against the project, the company appears determined to press ahead with its plans.

One would have imagined that developmental project would lead to a better quality of life for the masses. But when the masses are forced – obviously against their will – to shift away from the land that they have held for generations, what kind of "welfare" can it bring to them? It is a matter of serious concern that a large fraction of the land acquired for business is forest land, including the farm land of tribals. Though there is enough research to highlight that big business may not be ideal for a state like Odisha, what kind of industry suits such a poor state is at best taken to be a polemic issue. Such issues, therefore, need to be debated in a rational and civilized manner, getting common people involved (Mishra, 2006). One can clearly see the source of the state's impatience with dissenting voices. In this era, when liberalisation, privatisation, globalisation (LPG)

are eulogized and painted as the panacea for all problems – be it underdevelopment, poverty or inequality – the Lanjigarh incident is not just a reflection of the attitude of the government machinery or the party in power. To our horror, it highlights the current political mindset in the whole nation!

Many of the big development projects have been set up in tribal areas and on the lands owned by tribals. Tribals are by and large very simple people and attached to their life style, customs and tradition. Displacement of these people means disturbance of their way of life, which automatically leads to destruction of their social, cultural, religious and economic traditions. These are the groups that have traditionally depended on the common property resource basically on forestland for their survival. There are a large number of tribals and other forest dwellers who come under the forest laws that do not give any right of ownership to the cultivators even after several generations of occupancy and cultivation (Fernandes and Thukral, 1989). According to the present law, they are not entitled to any compensation. Hence in the name of development, there is a difference between the class that benefits from the project and those who pay the price (Mahapatra, 1991). Again only compensation for their homestead does not in any way compensate for the loss of their livelihood since the village is dispersed and is not rebuilt as a unit.

## Conclusion

The above discussion proves that the unfortunate thing about developmental projects in tribal areas is the lack of people-centric developmental planning. The indigenous people and their land, the local needs and basic requirements to improving their livelihood are not given enough consideration while planning for the areas. Most of the projects and schemes are formulated with market-driven-motives. For instance, the proposed project is one of the most profitable ventures in India as the extremely high quality of bauxite on the Niyamagiri Hill is available at a low cost to the company. Secondly, it is observed that the state government indirectly alienated the tribals from their land while implementing such developmental projects. The land owners are either forced to donate or get compensation which is ten times less than the existing market price without being given any stake in the projects. If this entire situation is carefully observed, it reflects that the state-led development projects create class consciousness among the tribes, a repercussion of which is the evolvment of environmental movements, which gets intensified against the MNCs and the state.

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