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Globalization, Displacement and the Livelihood Issues of Tribal and Agriculture Dependent Poor People

The Case of Mineral-based Industries in India

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ABSTRACT

This essay contends that the economic liberalization, privatization and globalization (LPG) model of development in India is virtually depriving the tribal people and other agriculture dependent poor people of their traditional means of sustainable livelihood by promoting the unregulated growth of mineral-based industries in the tribal regions of India. In the name of modernization and the country’s economic development, the elites in India are taking over the life sustaining resources of the poor and pushing them into a further marginalized state of living as a result of displacing them from their land and homes. Such development serves the interests of these elites while it impoverishes the tribal people and poor peasants in these regions who are dependent on the life sustaining resources of the ecosystems in which they live. The mining and other industries that are taking over the resources of the ecosystems of these tribal people and poor peasants fail to provide them with an improved and sustainable means of making a living. The very nature of the present development paradigm does not provide for the absorption of these poor people into the organized non-farm sector economy by either developing their skills or providing them with technical education.

Keywords: Globalization, economic liberalization, tribal people, mineral-based industries, inclusive and consensual development

The Backdrop

Since the onset of the current era of economic liberalization, privatization and globalization (LPG), the areas inhabited by indigenous peoples have been subjected to incessant social unrests and protests. The sustainable
subsistence livelihood of these people is now under threat thanks to the free flow of global capital to these regions which is intent on exploring and exploiting their mineral resources.

Globalization has led to a new trend of homogenization in development process all over the globe. In the name of modernizing backward countries and regions and civilizing the ‘less civilized’ indigenous people in these areas, the current form of LPG development is creating wealth for the modernizing elites at the cost of the livelihood and security of the indigenous peoples in these areas. The elites believe that investment by multinational companies (MNCs) in mineral-based industries in the backward tribal regions that are rich in mineral resources will increase export earnings and accelerate economic growth, which in turn will develop basic infrastructure and bring about the progressive socio-economic transformation of the indigenous population. In the name of modernization and development, they have invited foreign capital and technology to explore and exploit the unexploited mineral and other natural resources of the so-called backward areas in India which are inhabited largely by tribal people and poor peasants.

The mainstream LPG development model promotes mega development projects in the developing countries to accelerate the process of development by increasing economic growth expressed in terms of gross national product (GNP). In the name of development it is causing the massive displacement of human populations and the decimation of the sustainable subsistence agriculture of the peoples who have traditionally been dependent upon their local ecosystems for their survival (see Blaser et al., 2004; Taylor, 1995).

According to the World Bank, development projects every year involuntarily displace one million people in the developing countries from their land and homes (World Bank, 1994). In India alone, between 1951 and 1990 around 21.3 million persons were displaced by development projects. Among this number 8.54 million (40 per cent) were tribal or indigenous people and only 2.12 million (24.8 per cent) were resettled (Government of India, 2002: 458). According to the latest estimates, the total number of people displaced during the last 60 years has reached almost 60 million (Mathur, 2008: 3). In recent years this displacement has become more intensified due to the conditions created by globalization and economic liberalization, which favour the growth of many mineral-based industries set up by the MNCs and large Indian corporate houses (ICHs) in the mineral rich tribal regions of the country.
This problem has created increasing conflict between these ecosystem-dependent peoples and the elites. The former are fighting to defend their traditional and sustainable forms of subsistence and the latter are intruding into the territory of these people to exploit the land, forests and minerals in their ecosystems. In the name of development and of civilizing, assimilating and mainstreaming the tribal people, the affluent elites are evicting these poor people from their homes and land (Gadgil and Guha, 1995). Mega development projects like multipurpose river dams and large scale mining generate benefits for the few relatively better off sections of population while marginalizing and excluding the poorer tribal people (Oommen, 2004, 2006, 2008). The majority of the latter become the victims of development. It is found that in large mining projects tribals lose their land not only to the project authorities, but also to non-tribal outsiders who converge on these areas and corner both land and the new economic opportunities in commerce and petty industry (Fernandes, 1994; Government of India, 2002: 458). Their status changes from self-sustaining members of their local ecosystem to ecological refugees who are forced into the slums of the large urban centres and urban-industrial towns created by the development pathologies of our time (Gadgil and Guha, 1995; Omvedt, 1993; Oommen, 2006).

The MNCs in the developed countries of the world are almost at the verge of exhausting the non-renewable mineral resources in these countries. Fortunately for them, the LPG model of development has opened avenues for the MNCs to locate their mineral and metal processing activities in the developing countries at the cheapest possible price for both the land (natural resources) and the local labour they need. As a result, in recent years the regions inhabited by indigenous peoples all over the developing world are witnessing massive social, economic and ecological changes. In the name of economic development, the indigenous peoples are involuntarily displaced from their lands and homes without any sincere efforts being made for their proper rehabilitation and integration into the modern development process (Blaser et al., 2004).

It should be noted that during the first wave of economic transformations that led to the birth of settled agricultural economies, the indigenous peoples were pushed into the hilly and mountainous regions by the more technologically advanced sections of the population. Now in the current era of globalization in the name of modernization and higher economic development, they are being pushed into oblivion and displaced by the modernizing invaders. In this context, the current essay focuses on the
issues of globalization, displacement and livelihood insecurity of indigenous peoples caused by the proliferating growth of mineral-based industries in the regions inhabited by indigenous peasants and tribal people in the Indian states of Orissa, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal.

Mining and Mineral-based Industries versus Agro-based Livelihoods

Owing to an acute shortage of land for agriculture and the lack of efforts by the state to provide the agriculture dependent poor people with the technical knowledge and skills they need to make a living from secondary and tertiary sector occupations, the post reform years of market led growth and globalization in India have been met with opposition. The acquisition of land for large industries, mines or special economic zones has given rise to the livelihood insecurity of the poor and less privileged people.

People in the urban hinterlands and even in the sparsely populated rural areas now strongly resist the state’s efforts to transfer and convert agricultural land to industry and mining activities. This is because the perennial income generating capability of land and its operational holding capacity have been diminished by this process of conversion while acute population growth has further aggravated the situation. This is clearly evident from the resistance of people to industry even in the progressive Left Front ruled state of West Bengal, where the Left Front Government has earned the distinction of ruling over the state for more than 30 years at a stretch.

Because of the land reform measures undertaken by the Left Front Government in the past, it was able to retain its popularity among the toiling masses. However, as discussed in the following pages as the protests and resistance to displacement by tribal people and poor peasants have resulted in killings in different parts of the state popular support for the state has declined. The people most affected by displacement do not expect to get fair treatment in terms of resettlement and rehabilitation (R&R), which might enable them to earn a decent living (Banerjee, 2006; Banerjee et al., 2007; Fernandes, 2007; Sarkar, 2007).

The Orissa Case

In the wake of the state’s plan to mine bauxite and to locate alumina industries owned by MNCs, the previously tranquil tribal belt of the Koraput, Bolangir and Kalahandi (KBK) districts in Orissa has experienced the
trauma of massive tribal unrest and protests since the early 1990s. It should be noted that the majestic plateaus of the north-west part of the present Rayagada district in Orissa carry almost one-third of the bauxite deposits in India. The misty mountain tops and the plateaus covering the Kashipur block of Rayagada district and Thumul-Rampur block of Kalahandi district have nearly a thousand perennial streams and considerable tree coverage. These streams and forests have engendered the unique eco-clime of the region that has enabled its inhabitants, who are mostly the tribals, to avoid starvation or struggle for food during times of adversity or natural calamities such as droughts. However, the self-sustaining livelihood of the tribals is now at stake. The land inhabited by them is increasingly being encroached upon by the mining mafia and MNCs to exploit the large bauxite deposits in the region.

Among all the MNCs and large Indian private companies vying for the bauxite deposits of the region are: UAIL (Utkal Alumina International Limited), Vedanta Alumina Limited and Aditya Aluminium Limited. The UAIL bauxite extraction project proposes to mine the Baplimali hills for bauxite and transport the mined ore a distance of 22 km to a refinery at D. Karol in Kucheipadar village. The proposed alumina production is 1 million tonnes of alumina per annum to begin with and to be expanded to 3 million tonnes during the course of the project. The company acknowledges that a total of three villages will be displaced by the refinery site. Apart from this effect, according to its own admission, the project will affect 26 villages of the region when it comes into full operation. No smelter is planned since the alumina is to be exported from Vishakhapatnam port. The company has already started its work notwithstanding several protests and resistance to their involuntary displacement and the inadequate compensation packages including R&R benefits provided to the project-affected people (Dash and Samal, 2008; TARU, 1996).

Vedanta Alumina Limited, a subsidiary of Sterlite industries (India) Limited has already proceeded with its plan to exploit the Niyamgiri bauxite reserve located on top of the Niyamgiri Hills in the Lanjigarh Tehsil area of Kalahandi district in Orissa. This company is going to exploit these bauxite deposits from the Niyamgiri Hills jointly with Orissa Mining Corporation (OMC). As per the agreement, Vedanta Alumina Limited has to set up an Alumina Complex, which includes a 1 MTPA (million tonne per annum) Alumina Refinery Plant, 3 MTPA of bauxite mining and a 75 Megawatt (MW) Captive Power Plant at Lanjigarh at an aggregate investment of Rs 40,000 million (Samantara, 2006).
Similarly, the Aditya Aluminium Project has planned to mine 3 MTPA bauxite at Kodingamali in Koraput district and to set up 1 MTPA Alumina Refinery at the Kansariguda village of Kashipur Tehsil in Rayagada district. Added to that, the company has a plan to set up 5 × 130 MW Captive Power Plant and 260,000 TPA aluminium smelter plant at Lapanga in the Sambalpur district of Orissa. This project is going to displace all the families of Kansariguda village including their cultivable land. Apart from that two other villages of Rayagada district and four villages of Koraput district will be affected due to acquisition of land for the project (VIMTA Labs, 2004).

It should be noted that the region covering Rayagada and Kalahandi districts where the bauxite is to be mined by three big companies are predominantly inhabited by tribal people and other depressed categories of the population. The region is densely forested. Although it does not have modern irrigation infrastructure or fertile agricultural land, people inhabiting the region are able to meet their basic subsistence needs adequately by depending upon its rich natural resources. The region has many perennial streams that serve the irrigation needs of agriculture in case of drought or inadequate rainfall. People get adequate sustainable resources including food materials from the forest. The tribal people of the region have a very peaceful and contented life. They do not see any bright future for them if the region is industrialized at the cost of losing their traditional means of subsistence. The majority are either illiterates or namesake literates. They do not possess any technical training or skills. Very few among the displaced are likely to be absorbed by the modern mines and industrial complexes that will be coming up there very soon. The people in general are apprehensive of losing their life sustaining natural resources.

The protests of the tribal people and other marginalized people facing involuntary displacement have been going for a long time. This has caused delays and uncertainty with regard to the projects slated for the region. The tribal peoples’ protests and the reaction of civil society organizations and the political parties to the present form of industrial development in the region have affected the progress of all the projects. It has also put the state government into an embarrassing situation as a result of police firing on protesters and the deaths of three tribals in the village of Maikanch in the Kashipur block of Raigada district in December 2000.

In a collective show of defiance, the affected villages in Orissa have been resisting the mining projects that threaten to displace them and
completely ruin the livelihood of the majority of the inhabitants of these villages. The anti-mining movement is led by an organization of the local people known as Prakritik Suraksha Sampada Parishad. Both in the Kashipur area of Rayagada and Lanjigarh area of Kalahandi the tribals state that thousands of them have been living for ages in the forests and obtaining a decent livelihood by cultivating crops watered by the streams which flow down from the hills. They feel threatened with losing their livelihoods based on agriculture and forest that would ensue if the projects go through. The struggle of the tribals to stall the mining activities has been continuing incessantly for many years. The tribal women of the region fear the loss of their liberty and work freedom in the wake of the loss of forest and agricultural land. In all likelihood, the best they could hope for would be to end up washing dishes in the homes of company officials, if these projects come through.

The leaders and women activists among them question the government that has done very little for their development in terms of education, health or other basic infrastructure. They say that the state has no moral right asking them to sacrifice their livelihood for this type of development that would benefit only a few outsiders and companies led by the MNCs and ICHs. The tribals of the region believe the bauxite mining will drive them out of the forest and deprive them of their livelihood. It would also leave gaping holes in the forest after the ore is exhausted. The mining would also damage streams and ground water sources, permanently rendering the forest unfit for habitation. It would convert the entire region into a desert and barren land after the exhaustion of bauxite ores. Nothing would be left for the future generations to earn their subsistence. The tribals resent the fact that in spite of the area being governed by the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India which deals with the administration and control of the scheduled areas of indigenous peoples and the fact that the victims in this case are Adivasis (original inhabitants of the region), the government is going ahead with the project without consulting them and without devising any concrete R&R policy for their sustenance.

They have started to oppose both tooth and nail the establishment of the planned industries. Even state intellectuals, civil society organizations and many political parties that otherwise would most likely not bluntly oppose the industrialization measures of the state, have voiced their concern over the present model of industrial development. According to them, it is likely to generate ecological problems and affect the livelihood security of the poor and marginalized tribal peoples in the region. They
have extended their support to the protests of the tribals and other displaced persons against the market led industrialization being facilitated by the state. In recent years, the protest movements by the tribals and other project-affected persons in different parts of the state have often culminated in extreme violence in the form of bloodshed and killings of the innocent tribals by police bullets. Almost the entire tribal belt is now in turmoil.

It is not only the MNCs and the large Indian private corporations that are threatening the lives of the poor tribals to reap rich dividends, the public sector agencies are also equally responsible for the injustice meted out to these people. For example, since the mid-1990s, the villagers of Kulhapada in Sundargarh district have staged several protests and resorted to blockades in front of the Basundhara coal mines office demanding higher compensation and jobs for the people displaced. They are aggrieved at the inadequate compensation and loss of hundreds of acres of land to Mahanadi Coalfields Limited (MCL) in Orissa, a subsidiary of Coal India limited (CIL). It is reported that many displaced persons have not been paid adequate compensation or given employment for the loss of their land. The displaced tribals report that although the Basundhara mines in Sundargarh district started operating in the early 2000s many displaced persons have not been given any employment. Also, their compensation settlements have not yet been finalized. They have appealed repeatedly to the district administration and the MCL but none of their grievances has been redressed. In the 1 July 2007 edition, The Times of India reported that the ousted villagers of Kulhapada had resorted to a blockade of coal production and transportation from the Basundhara mines, thereby causing huge average production loss of 10,000 tonnes of coal per day, apart from the loss caused to the company due to idleness of manpower and machinery.

In recent years notwithstanding the higher incidence of poverty, Orissa has witnessed massive protests against industry-led developments that cause the forced displacement of people dependent for their subsistence on the land and forests. The killing of 13 tribal protesters by the police in the Kalinganagar industrial area of Jajpur district on 2 January 2006, intensified the protests by tribal and civil society groups against the continued development of mineral-based industries in the tribal regions. In the same above cited edition of the Times of India, it was mentioned that even in the mineral rich Keonjhar district, which did not have any history of recorded mass protests against mineral exploitation earlier,
massive protests have taken place against the involuntary displacement of people in the district.

In June 2007, the people of nine villages in four Gram Panchayats (GPs) of Keonjhar District resolved to oppose the Sterlite Steel Plant at Mahadeijoda. The villagers of Mahadeijoda, Raisuan, Janardanpur and Nuagaon fear this project will affect more than 1,000 acres of fertile agricultural land, rivers, streams and plantations. The local Bisthapan Birodhi Manch (Displacement Opposition Front) contends the 5.1 million ton steel plant will affect as many as 12 minor irrigation projects, nine lift irrigation projects, the Hemrada and Machhakandana rivers and four streams that presently help people of the region in growing a huge quantity of crops and vegetables. According to the blueprint of the project, it will acquire 2,160.89 acres of private land and 1,217.18 acres of government land. This would lead to displacement of 173 families in the aforesaid GPs. Particularly three villages, namely, Dhatika, Tikarpada and Kedargarh will be worst affected. In this situation, if the state goes against the wishes of the project-affected people and proceeds ahead with the land acquisition for the project, the region may witness intensive protests. Thus, the formerly peaceful Keonjhar district may be converted into another Kalinganagar.

In the early 1990s, the idea of developing a major industrial complex in the mineral-rich region of Dangadi, Duburi and Sukinda in the present Jajpur district was started by the Orissa state government. Since then, the state government has already signed a Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) with nearly ten units spread over an area of 13,000 hectares. The proposed complex has the capacity of producing 15 million tonnes of steel annually. The complex will include about 13 mineral-based industries such as iron and steel, stainless steel, sponge iron and ferrochrome et cetera. Iron ore and chromites, which are the raw materials for these industries, are available in plentiful supply in the region. The major corporate houses such as the Tatas, Visa, Jindal, MESCO, Nilachal Ispat Nigam and others have already started their projects and a few of them are nearing completion. In pursuance of the MOUs, the state government will grant mining leases to the concerned industrial units and provide them with land for setting up their industries.

The state government has taken the initiative to acquire land from the local residents for the proposed industrial complex. It is looking into all matters relating to displacement, rehabilitation and resettlement of the displaced population. However, the industrialization efforts of the region
are being increasingly opposed by violent protest movements of the tribals. Since the attack on the District Magistrate of Jajpur and some policemen on 9 May 2005 during the Bhumi Puja ceremony to break ground for the project by Maharashtra Seamless Limited (MSL), the incidents of violence in the region have increased phenomenally. This forced the MSL to back out of the project. The tribal people inhabiting the region have repeatedly expressed their dissatisfaction over the payment of compensation. As previously mentioned, this culminated in the loss of life of 13 persons in Kalinganagar on 2 January 2006, when the boundary for a proposed steel plant by the Tata group was started in the presence of an armed police force to suppress the protesting tribal people displaced by the project.

It is interesting to note that the compensation package for the land acquired by the government in the Kalinganagar area was announced in 1994. According to this announcement, people displaced from their land were to be paid at the rate of Rs 35,000 per acre by the Infrastructure Development Corporation of Orissa (IDCO). When it was learned that the IDCO sold the land to the industrial houses at a rate of Rs 300,000 per acre, there was hue and cry by the displaced landholders, and the compensation package was revised later to Rs 50,000 per acre. The resentment continued among the displaced landholders. They demanded a higher price for their land, since the market price of the land in the urban-industrial complex of Kalinganagar had gone up almost 25 times the amount of the revised compensation price. It is reported that a 0.04 acre of land in the Kalinganagar industrial now sells at a price of Rs 100,000. Hence, the people who have lost their land feel not only deprived of their primary source of livelihood, they feel cheated by the state and the land mafia, who purchased land from them at a very low price.

After the 2 January 2006 incident, the tribals of Kalinga Nagar launched an indefinite economic blockade on the National Highway 200 at Madhuban Chhak Square for more than a year. They made an all-out effort to mobilize the tribal people displaced in Orissa and other neighbouring states of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh to raise the demand for more cash compensation for the land and an R&R package to improve the living conditions of these people. The tribal groups are not prepared to work out any compromise with the state government, unless the R&R package devised by the state is on a par with the prime beneficiaries of other development projects carried out in the country. So far all efforts of the government to appease the tribal people have failed, and the
present situation is characterized by a deep emotional overtone. On May 23, 2007, about 5,000 women from Orissa, Chhatisgarh, Jharkhand and Andhra Pradesh organized a rally and resolved not to lift the road blockade until an amicable settlement is reached with the government. Among other things the 7-point charter of demands includes a complete halt to displacement in the area.

Despite rampant poverty and the substandard living conditions of the people in Orissa, none are willing to give up their agricultural land and to sacrifice land and homes for the cause of industry. This is clear from the resistance of people in even the highly literate Jagatsinghpur district in coastal Orissa where there is resistance to the location of a mega steel plant by POSCO, a South Korean company. This MNC has been planning to set up a 12 million tonnes capacity steel plant near Paradeep port since June 2005. The POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti, an organization of the local people, has been spearheading the resistance since the state government signed an MOU with the company and notification for the acquisition of land for the project was issued. The project is aimed at displacing and affecting the livelihood of people living in 22 villages in the Ersama block of Jagatsinghpur District (Dash and Samal, 2008).

According to a government source, only 435 acres of private land will be acquired for the plant. This would supposedly involve the displacement of 20,000 to 25,000 people. However, in reality the livelihood of more than 100,000 people in the region is likely to be affected as it is a densely populated area and the land is highly fertile. More so, many people of the region have been subsisting on encroached government land and forest land for a generation. It is reported by the people that in a small patch of less than half an acre, a family can earn a reasonably good living by growing the betel vine. If the industry is built in the proposed site the land encroachers will not only not receive any cash compensation or land-based compensation, many other people who are not displaced will be deprived of their principal means of livelihood due to the environmental pollution likely to be generated by the plant. Also, the greater demand for water by the industry will affect the water supply for agriculture.

Although the majority of the people who will be displaced are completely against the project, a section of population that does not have an agricultural source of livelihood supports the location of industry in the proposed site. Since 2005, the villagers in Kujang, Dhinkia and Nuagaon have been restive over the issue. The Panchayat Samiti, which is the local government, is opposed to the displacement and has mobilized a brigade.
of 1,200 people who are ready to keep the movement alive. At times there have been violent clashes between the supporters and opponents of the proposed plant. Taking advantage of the differences between the locals, the state and the company have done their best to create factionalism and conflict between people in order to weaken the movement against displacement. However, more than 30,000 people have pledged not to obey any measure that the state government may enforce to press for their displacement. The POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti (PPSS), the organization spearheading the anti-POSCO movement in the state, has also involved the children and women of the locality. They have put up barricades at the entry points to these villages which are guarded by women and children to prevent the entry of government and POSCO officials (Meher Forthcoming; Dash and Samal, 2008).

In recent years, Orissa has witnessed the growth of many large sponge iron plants. According to government sources, there are 104 sponge iron plants located in nine districts of Orissa, namely in Sundargarh (47), Keonjhar (19), Jharsuguda (11), Sambalpur (10), Mayurbhanj (2), Cuttack (4), Jajpur (4), Dhenkanal (4) and Angul (3). Except in Cuttack district, the other eight districts contain a fairly high percentage of tribal and other depressed categories of the population that subsist off of the land these sponge iron plants are causing massive pollution problems in the regions around their locations which are negatively affecting the agricultural economy of the peasants and other poor people. In Jharsuguda and Sundargarh districts, farmers report that due to incessant emission of coal and iron dusts by the sponge iron plants, soil is getting harder and infertile. Agriculture is affected due to coal and iron dusts emitted by all such plants causing low yield and contamination of food grains.

The entire industrial corridor of Sambalpur, Jharsuguda, Sundargarh, Keonjhar, Jajpur and Angul districts in Orissa is getting highly polluted day by day. There is extensive mining of minerals like coal, iron ore, manganese, limestone, dolomite, chromites et cetera and the functioning of many mineral-based industries such as iron and steel plants, sponge iron plants, aluminium plants, thermal power plants et cetera. The peasants and tribal people subsisting on agro-based living now feel deprived of their traditional means of subsistence. On the top of it, majority among them do not have education and the technical skills to switch over to non-farm sector occupations. The technology used by the industries and mines does not generate adequate employment for them. They see darkness all
The pollution generated by the industries and mines is affecting land, water bodies and the atmosphere in the entire industrial corridor covering central table land and northern plateau region of Orissa. It is now officially admitted that the sponge iron units are highly polluting and destroying the natural ecosystem of the region in their areas of operation. So, now the state government has realized its follies and claims it has decided not to give permission for the establishment of any more sponge iron plants.

The Jharkhand Scenario

Like Orissa, the other two tribal-based states, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh on the Chotanagpur plateau region are equally affected by the globalized market forces that threaten the livelihood of the tribal peoples and poor peasants who are dependent on subsistence agriculture. On 2 February 2001, the tribal people of Topkara in Jharkhand demanded the scrapping of the Koel Karo hydro-electric project. The project was likely to displace thousands of tribal families. Here, too, the police resorted to an unprovoked use of shooting, killing 10 tribals and injuring many more. Such police brutality against minorities in the name of which the new state had been formed, sparked off anger not only in Jharkhand, but all over the country (Bhatia, 2001).

The tribal people displaced by the coal mines of Jharkhand have been subjected to livelihood insecurity notwithstanding adequate cash compensation and provision of one job to each of the displaced family members in the mines operated by Coal India Limited (CIL) in the region. The sleepy hamlets around Punkhri-Barwadih in Jharkhand are now witnessing violent resistance to the prospect of losing their fertile farmland to an industrial venture. The NTPC, the largest power utility in the country, has a joint venture agreement with CIL, one of the world’s largest coal producing company. Apart from the loss of over 10,000 acres of well-irrigated farmland and dense forests, NTPC’s planned opencast coalmine is likely to obliterate, or at the very least damage irreparably, Punkhri-Barwadih’s megaliths. This is in fact one of the last vestiges of a prehistoric civilization, which flourished in the region. Punkhri-Barwadih project at a total cost of Rs 40,000 million was scheduled to commence operations in December 2007. The project would displace some 14,000 families. In November 2006, a mob of thousands of farmers tore down NTPC’s project-site office at Barkagaon. It was further reported that the
villagers in the remote hamlets in this region were busy in reorganizing themselves for a stronger assault before the process of land acquisition by the government was stopped. In order to show their protests and resentments against the land acquisition by the project the affected villagers have formed the anti-land acquisition organization Karanpura Bachao Sangharsh Samiti (KBSS) and the Karanpura Bisthapita Morcha (KBM).

The NTPC is faced with coal shortages for its power plants and expects to mine 15 million tonnes of coal a year from the opencast mine. Explorations have confirmed deposits of 1,400 million tonnes of thermal-grade coal in the Punkhri-Barwadih coal block, covering an area of 10,482 acres (42.42 sq km). It is reported that NTPC was allotted three coal blocks in Jharkhand – Punkhri-Barwadih, Chatti-Bariatu and Keredari – by the Union Coal Ministry in October 2004. The government is acquiring land under the Coal Bearing Area Acquisition and Development Act of 1957, which is exclusive and binding for India’s coal-bearing areas.

The company will acquire a total of nearly 40,000 acres for the three projects together. In the wake of acquisition, those set to lose their homes, farmlands and forest-based livelihoods are largely small farmers in the area. Rivulets crisscrossing the agricultural landscape around their villages supply enough water to produce three crops every year, while the forests – consisting mostly of Saal (Shorea Robusta) trees – provide ample sustenance with their leaves and myriad fruits. In such a rich ecological base, it is natural and obvious that people strongly resent this public sector company depriving many of them of the source of their sustainable living and their dispossession from the land. The protesters say that they would rather die fighting for their land then give it away to NTPC or any other company while alive. It is reported that much of the land which is to be acquired falls under the Gair Mazurwa (GM) category. This means that the land is owned by the government but has either been officially granted to some villagers to cultivate or has been in their illegal possession for many decades and is being used for residential or agricultural purposes. In this situation, very few among the tribal people to be displaced are likely to be compensated adequately by the NTPC, although all those affected have been enjoying usufruct rights to the land since time immemorial (Das, 2007).

All over Jharkhand the tribals and other land dependent people now strongly oppose new industries and development projects that require acquisition of private agricultural land. There have been many protests
against the Arcelor Mittal steel industry, thermal power plants and many other iron and steel industries given permission by the state government to the MNCs and ICHs in recent years. The tribal activists of the state paint a gloomy picture of mining and mineral-based industries that cause massive displacement of people from their traditional ecosystems without absorbing them in the modern manufacturing and service sector economy. The many protests and demonstrations of the tribals in Jharkhand reveal that they are completely disillusioned and apprehensive of the present development efforts of the state that encourages growth of mines and industries in the name of developing the income earning capability of the poor tribals and the revenue generating capacity of the government.

The Case of Chhattisgarh

Similarly, the tribal people of Chhattisgarh are losing their sustainable means of subsistence due to the opening of mines and setting up of many mineral-based industries in the state. Chhattisgarh has 28 varieties of major minerals. The state has one-fifth of the country’s iron ore deposits and one of the best quality iron ore deposits in the world in the Bailadila mines. The state also has the only deposit of tin ore in the country. Like Jharkhand and Orissa, it has huge deposits of coals, bauxite, limestone, dolomite and corundum. Since the government reforms stimulating economic liberalization have been enacted, all doors for private investment are open in Chhattisgarh. The state’s Mineral Policy 2001 has facilitated large-scale private sector investment in the mining sector and this has had its fall out effects on the tribal people and other subsistence farmers. In the coal bearing zones of Sarguja, Raigarh and Bilaspur districts, more than 72,000 acres of land have been granted on lease to South Eastern Coalfields Limited (SECL), a subsidiary of CIL. Similarly, in Bastar and Durg districts more than 20,000 acres of land have been occupied for mining of iron ores in Bailadila and Dalli Rajhara areas of these two districts respectively. Apart from these areas, the state has reportedly given on lease 18,652 acres for various mining purposes and 26,410 acres for the setting up of various industries such as cement, steel, Ferro-alloys, re-rolling mills and rice mills. This means all total 137,062 acres of land have been leased by the state for mining and mineral-based industries (George, 2004). This land could have sustained at least 34,265 families or around 180,000 people with an average distribution of four acres of land per family.
However, in this state there is a low level of literacy among the tribals and the Scheduled Castes categories of the population and the industries and mines with high level of mechanization require technically skilled workers for their operations. As a result, very few among the land-affected families are likely to benefit from such development. The employment level of the nearby giant public sector steel plant at Bhilai in recent years has declined from around 64,000 in 1980s to around 33,000 in 2007 due to increasing automation and mechanization. In a similar manner, the employment opportunities provided by the mines and mineral-based industries in the past have declined considerably (Meher, Forthcoming). In this context, people displaced by the mines and mineral-based industries are likely to have a very difficult time sustaining themselves in the future, unless they are properly rehabilitated and skilled to earn their living in the non-agriculture based manufacturing and service sector economy of the region.

In July 2007, when the author visited the village of Kondekosa in the Dalli Rajhara mines area of Chhattisgarh, he found a dualistic picture of development among the mine-displaced people. While a few had found regular jobs in the Bhilai Steel Plant’s iron mines and feel that they now have a better standard of living than their forefathers, others without any regular jobs have now realized that mining in the region has destroyed their sustainable and peaceful way of life of the past. For example, Mr. Patiram Tekam, who was displaced and presently works in the mines, reported that life was very hard for the tribal families of his village before the opening up of the mines in 1960s. Everybody had land, but it was infertile and rocky. Despite having 15 to 20 acres of land for every tribal family of the village, none was able to meet its annual subsistence needs from agriculture. The yield rate was very low, just two to three quintals of rice paddy per acre. That too was highly uncertain and subjected to vagaries of the monsoon rain. It was revealed from the discussion held with the people that around 300 acres of village’s land was acquired by the BSP for its captive iron mine in 1963. People were paid cash compensation at the rate of Rs 1,500 per acre for the acquired land. In addition to that one family member of each family that lost land was given employment in the mine by the BSP. However, while only one person could get employment there were usually two to three legal heirs for all such holdings. People who got employment were only a small minority. Now those who were given employment earn around Rs 10,000 and above per month and live well. In contrast, the majority from the same
landholding family now split into three or four separate nuclear families live without any employment or land to sustain them. They struggle for their survival. Moreover, because of the increasing mechanized operation of the mines, employment opportunities for the illiterate tribal workers have been squeezed over the years.

All the villages surrounding the mines area are predominantly inhabited by members of the Gond tribe, who used to have their sustainable living from the land and forest in the past. Before the mechanization of the mines in the region, some people had the opportunity to get wage employment in the mines either as daily wage labourers or piece rate workers. Nowadays, except for regular BSP workers, only a few others can find work under the contractors. In 2007, a labourer working for one of the contractors received only Rs 80 per day as wage or Rs 40 per tonne of ore mined on a piece rate basis. The workers working for a contractor do not get any other benefits like sick leave, paid leave, medical benefits et cetera. With much difficulty, all such workers’ families struggle hard to earn Rs 3,000 to 4,000 per month by putting their entire family members to work. Moreover, it was observed that almost half of the hard-earned money by the mine workers was spent on country liquor.

The mineworkers report that they cannot continue to do the hard work associated with their jobs in the mines without taking alcohol. Because of excessive consumption of liquor, many suffer from malnutrition and quite a few among them die at a very early age. The entire area is malaria prone and many of the people suffer from the disease. Also, quite a few of those who work in the mines develop respiratory diseases like asthma and tuberculosis after five to six years of continuous work in the mines. After losing scope of employment in the mine sector in the recent years, people now realize that mining is not a sustainable means of living for them.

Many villages located below the mine area complain that their agriculture is now completely ruined after long exposure to the pollution generated by the mines. Because of the deposits of red laterite soil and iron oxide that get carried away along with the rain water from the mines to the agricultural land below, the fertility of the soil is lost. Day by day, the land is becoming more barren and the top soil is lost due to mining and large scale felling of trees. The villages near the mine are so severely affected by the pollution that they have made several representations to the District Collector in Durg to save them from increasing land and water pollution.
In August 2008, Mr. Pravin Patel, Director of the Tribal Welfare Society in Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh reported that the displaced tribals of HINDALCO’s bauxite mines at Samri in Sarguja district of Chhattisgarh were leading a very pathetic life after losing their land and forest. Mr Patel said that the livelihood of thousands of tribals have been destroyed by the state to satisfy the greed of private corporations. According to him, HINDALCO by virtue of an agreement signed with the state of Madhya Pradesh in May 1997 has obtained mining leases for bauxite mining in Samri of Sarguja district. Although the entire Sarguja district is a Schedule Five area that supposedly protects the interests of tribal population, not a single village council meeting has been held to consult tribals and other villagers about the opening of mines, the selling of their lands or the granting of mining leases. The land of over 200 farmers most of whom are tribals have been coercively purchased or acquired since 1997. The process is continuing each year with more and more land going for bauxite mining to HINDALCO.

When land is acquired for the mines the farmers are paid at predetermined rates. According to Patel, there are many instances where no money is paid but land is taken over by the HINDALCO anyway. Also, some land has been ruined by HINDALCO and the tribal people who own this land are not able to cultivate this remaining farmland. There are many instances of violation of the agreement by the company, but the state government has not taken any action despite the many complaints and protests by the people who have been affected. According to the agreement signed by the state compensation for land was supposed to be paid based on its market value. In case of any dispute, the District Collector’s decision is supposed to be final. The tribals complain that they have been forced to accept compensation money based on the value of their land determined by the company. Secondly, according to the agreement, HINDALCO is duty bound to pay each year the average annual income of the farm land to those whose land is taken on lease for mining. However, no one among the land holders whose land has been leased has received any money on this account. Also according to the agreement, HINDALCO is supposed to return the land in its original condition after the lease for open cast mining ends. Nonetheless, according to Patel, so far not a single inch of land has been restored to its original condition. Moreover, only some three among 100 have been provided with regular jobs. The rest others are exploited as cheaply paid daily wage contract workers by the company’s contractors. All such contract workers are paid at the rate of Rs 90 to Rs 94 per day and to qualify for such wage, the worker has to break a
minimum of three metric tonnes of bauxite ore a day. According to Patel over 1,400 workers are presently working in the mines of HINDALCO in Samri. But none has any employment security. They do not get any medical or sick leave, and no paid holidays. Also, they are not provided with any safety gear and equipment in the work place.

Those who are working as loaders for the transport contractors have a very miserable life. The average monthly income of such workers is around Rs 500 to Rs 600 only. The rates fixed for loading a truck with nine metric tonnes of bauxite ore is Rs 200 only and that is shared by a group of six to eight persons. Much of the time, they sit idle and only get half a day’s work. When their services are not required, they return home empty handed, as their work is paid on a piece rate basis. So far, the company has done very little for the welfare of the project-affected people. Rather it has thrown the tribals into a state of livelihood uncertainty. And many members of the most vulnerable section of population like widows and old people are living in desperate conditions after losing their land to HINDALCO (Patel, 2008).

The West Bengal Scenario

The West Bengal Government offered a highly attractive compensation package to the Singur farmers including both registered and unregistered tenants for 997 acres of farm land to be used by a plant by Tata Motors to manufacture low priced motor cars at Rs 100 thousand. Added to that, the Tata Company promised to offer each displaced family a regular salaried job in its proposed automobile plant. Nonetheless, the agriculture dependent people were apprehensive of the livelihood security of their offspring and future generation in the wake of loss of agricultural land. The fight for a better compensation package for all including the unregistered tenants and other project-affected people went on for quite sometime till September 2008. The protesters with the active political support of the Trinamool Congress Party and its leader Ms Mamata Banerjee finally succeeded in stalling the project mid-way, and the House of Tata finally decided to shift the project from West Bengal to Gujarat.

Similarly, in January 2007, when efforts were made by the Government of West Bengal to acquire 10,000 acres of land for the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Nadigram, violence erupted resulting in the death of four protestors and severe injury of more than 20 persons. The violent clashes in Nadigram reportedly involved members of the local Krishjami Raksha Committee (Save Farmland Committee) and persons linked to the

Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), which leads West Bengal’s Left Front government that is seeking to industrialize the state for rapid economic growth. This was followed by the ransacking of the CPI-M Party Offices at several places and incidents of violence and arson at the residence of several local leaders of the CPI-M. The agitators also damaged many bridges and culverts and dug up several roads as a result of which the movement of vehicles became impossible. This was followed in March 2007, with violent clashes between the armed people of the Bhumi Uchhed Pratirodh Committee and others owing allegiance to the ruling Left Front. These clashes resulted in the death of 14 persons shot by the police. All efforts by the police to control the unruly protestors by lobbying tear gas shells and rubber bullets could not bring the situation under control (For details see, Rediff News, 2007). Here also, the state had to yield to the will of the agriculture dependent people by closing the SEZ project.

Conclusion: The Alternatives

Development should be a holistic concept that encompasses the progressive improvement in the quality of human life in terms of food, clothing and shelter and the conditions for a healthy living with increasing longevity of life and happiness. However, the LPG model of development in India reveals the symptoms and effects of widening inequalities between the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ and the increasing deprivation of the poor and marginalized sectors of the population. There are very little trickle down effects of the economic growth associated with this model of development. Despite India’s higher economic growth in recent years, poverty continues to persist almost among one-third of the country’s population (Bhaduri, 2005).

In this scenario of development, if mines and mineral-based industries are allowed to proliferate in the mineral rich tribal regions of the country and continue to displace the indigenous people who live in these regions in order to enrich the affluent elites, the inequalities and poverty in these regions will be aggravated further. In a largely populated country like India, poverty is caused due to lack of adequate employment for the poor and marginalized people. The industries and mines using high technology for higher productivity and profits do not provide opportunities for adequate living and employment for the land-dependent people, who are displaced under the present development process. Many among the tribals, peasants and other rural servicing communities subsisting...
on land and forest are reduced to the status of wandering unemployed workers. Land has always been a source of security for these poor people irrespective of their individual land ownership status. It is the base of local resources on which the poor subsist and meet their food deficits. If land and other natural resources like water and forests that belong to the state or the local communities are acquired for industrial use or lost to development projects like river dams, the people who depend upon such resources become the direct and immediate victims of these projects. Impoverishment arising from such loss of resources cannot be prevented unless those who are affected are adequately compensated with alternative resources to sustain themselves.

In populous countries like India, development based on high technology that minimizes the employment of human labour and puts a strain on natural resources does not serve the interests of the poor and marginalized sectors of the population. It is not necessary for a country like India to promote large capital-intensive iron, steel and alumina plants by exploiting its mineral deposits from the tribal regions in the Chotanagpur plateau and thereby turning the poor tribals into wandering unemployed workers in their traditional homeland. The mineral-based industries that are encouraged by the state governments in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Orissa improve their revenue generating capacity and develop their economic infrastructures for facilitating the investments of MNCs and ICHs in these states. But they only benefit the privileged sections of society in terms of jobs, access to new gazettes, consumer durables and the like. In contrast, this model of development pushes out the tribal and other downtrodden people from their traditional base of sustainable living. The iron and steel, aluminium or electricity produced by industrial projects in these areas does not serve the needs of the downtrodden and tribal people adversely affected by these projects.

For the development of India’s poor and half-starved people it is necessary, first and foremost, to ensure food security for their healthy living. These people need the development of health care facilities, skill-based education as well as a sustainable food supply to improve their quality of life. These needs can be fulfilled by pursuing a sustainable development model that ensures ‘growth with equity’ and provides employment for all. It is an undeniable fact that there is high pressure of increasing population on the land and that the surplus labour force is disguisedly employed in the primary sector economy with very marginal and low rate of returns. This surplus labour force needs to be employed in highly productive jobs in other sectors of the economy. However, this outcome requires
the development of skills by imparting modern technical and scientific education to the illiterate and less educated people who are presently unemployed or underemployed. Unless the skills and knowledge of these people is developed to make them capable of securing sustaining employment in the non-farm sector economy with improved living standards, their human development cannot be improved.

By using intermediate technology that employs a maximum of human labour, a populous country like India can sustain its renewable and non-renewable resources for the future generation and at the same time can ensure an improved standard of living for its poor and marginalized people. There is no need to invest in mega development projects like big dams, huge thermal power plants or large iron and steel industries by displacing poor and marginalized people from their lands and homes. Such development only contributes to the consumerist culture of the India’s upper and middle class families who aspire to affluent living like their counterparts in western societies. Moreover, in a tropical and highly populated country like India, an energy intensive development model that warrants massive burning of fossil fuels generates more greenhouse gases and environmental degradation problems. These problems threaten the survival of such a large heterogeneous population. Therefore, the present development model needs to be recast to make it all inclusive and consensual in order to bridge the development gap between the rich and poor and end the deprivation of the latter. The interests of the poor and the marginalized members of the population have been sacrificed all along to meet the virtual hunger for all sorts of non-essential goods and services of the more affluent city dwellers.

This situation needs to be regulated and controlled to bestow the benefits of development on the poor and marginalized people. Their attachment to their land and homes, community assets and local resources form a natural bond and strengthens their social capital base and allows them to help one another during unforeseen crises and disasters. Much more effort needs to be made to strengthen these community bonds and the social capital of these sections of the population. As far as possible development projects should be planned and designed so that they do this and they never force the involuntary displacement of the human population in any part of the globe – regardless of the caste, class or social status of the people involved. Also, when it is necessary to undertake development projects that involve the displacement of people, it is essential that these projects obtain the legal mandate and support of the people who are
affected and that in return for giving up their land and homes they receive priority if not exclusive rights to the benefits emanating from these projects.

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