

Mining, Development, and Indigenous Peoples

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Mining-Induced Displacement

- One of the most negative effects of mining today is the forcing of thousands of people to abandon their current places of residence. As pointed out by Theodore E. Downing (*Avoiding New Poverty: Mining-Induced Displacement and Resettlement*, 2002) only in India mining development displaced more than 2.55 million people between 1950 and 1990 (also see *Dirty Materials: Mining, communities and environment*, prepared in 2004 by Oxfam America Earthworks).
- Over the last three decades of extensive mining development, the power of the state has led, not only to involuntary and forced displacement (Fernandes and Thukral, 1989), but also to dispossession through the destruction of livelihoods of entire communities, turning humans into faceless Project Affected People (PAPs).

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- Large-scale acquisition of land is the most important driver of this displacement [Displacement, forcible eviction and dispossession are undeniable realities of life in the coal mining regions of India]; the Indian constitution, courts and government justify themselves in the name of 'public good', as evident in the following statement of the Supreme Court:

The power to acquire private property for public use is an attribute of sovereignty and is essential to the existence of a government. The power of eminent domain was recognized on the principle that the sovereign state can always acquire the property of a citizen for public good, without the owner's consent.. The right to acquire an interest in land compulsorily has assumed increasing importance as a result of requirement of such land more and more everyday, for different public purposes and to implement the promises made by the framers of the Constitution to the people of India.

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- Mining-induced displacement and resettlement is primarily an economic issue associated with loss or significant reduction of access to basic resources (land, pastures, forests and clean water) on which communities depend.
- According to Janssens et al. (2008) the most negative consequences of contemporary mining are land and water contamination, disruption or displacement of communities, clashes between citizens and state forces, and the involuntary migration of rural people to cities.
- Among the effects of resettlements affecting indigenous people, Theodore Downing distinguishes: “suffering a loss of land, short and long-term health risks, loss of access to common resources, homelessness, loss of income, social disarticulation, food insecurity, loss of civil and human rights, and spiritual uncertainty.”

Mining in India

- India has a long history of commercial coal mining beginning from 1774 with M/s Sumner & Heatly of the East India Company in the Ranigunj area – a portion of undivided Bengal-Bihar and Orissa unit. This unit was administrated by the Bengal Presidency under the leadership of Warren Hastings.
- During the 1800s many private individuals and companies obtained coal mining leases from the colonial government and started digging and transporting outside India. There were only 91 mining companies during the 1891 Census, but by 1942, there were as many as 725 coal mines operating in the whole country at different places (Premananda Panda, 2011).

Legal Policies and Laws

- To carry out the process of expropriation and alienation from landholding rights, the state is well equipped with a set of colonial laws under the Land Acquisition Act (LAA) amended in 1984.
- The Central LAA enables the acquisition of land. On the other hand, the matter of state's provision for compensation and R&R measures differ from state to state.
- In addition to LAA, the Coal Bearing Areas (Acquisition and Development) Act, 1957 (CBAA) - for mining of coal, occupies a prominent place in land acquisition and displacement (Bahera N.K. 2012).
- Atomic Energy Act, 1962 (AEA) - for mining of atomic minerals.

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- The mineral policy of the central government announced in the year 1993, opened up the mining sector to private investment and exploitation. It also allowed foreign direct investment (FDI), which has helped major transnational mining companies to enter the mining scene in India. [These laws are for the acquisition of land for mining and related purposes, the welfare of miners, the regulation of mines, labour and safety protection of environment, etc.]
- The Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) stipulates that in fifth schedule areas, the gram sabha has to be consulted, before land is acquired for any development project. According to sections 4(k) and 4(1) of PESA, the recommendation of the gram sabha is mandatory before granting of leases for minor minerals or concessions for the exploitation of minor minerals by auction. A Gol order dated November 11, 1998 further laid down the procedure for acquisition of land in Schedule V areas. [The PESA Act, 1996, gives villages greater control over natural resources; including minor minerals.]

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Impact of Mining

Land degradation

- Large-scale mining and allied activities have caused severe damage to the land resources of the tribal areas. Underground mining operations, especially of coal, have created unsafe surface conditions in many areas warranting diversion of roads, railway lines, etc, and the shifting of a number of townships.

Water and Air pollution

- Large-scale mining operations going on in the tribal areas have adversely affected the ground water table in many areas with the result that the yield of water from the wells of adjoining areas has drastically reduced. [Effluents discharged from mine sites have seriously polluted the streams and underground waters of the area.]

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Marginalization and Food Insecurity

- Entire families were pauperized after displacement from their original homes and consequent separation from the local environment. Their land and trees were lost, the number of animals they reared went down, and the number of families owning animals declined sharply. Their access to common land and forest trees was lost or the forest declined after mining.

Social and Cultural Risks

- As the displaced families become scattered in different rehabilitation colonies, seek refuge in relatives' homes, or obtain CCL's miners' quarters or coolie barracks, the process uproots people socially and culturally as age-old social and cultural networks are disrupted. [The traditional communal systems of conflict-resolution and coping with emergencies also break down.]

Mining in Jharkhand

- Jharkhand state in India is rich in minerals with huge reserves of coal, iron ore, mica, bauxite and limestone and considerable reserves of copper, chromite, asbestos, kyanite, china clay, fire clay, steatite, uranium, manganese, dolomite, tungsten, gold, etc.
- This region has been the homeland of indigenous people such as the Santals, Mundas, Oraons, Hos, Gonds, Kharias, etc. These indigenous groups comprising 85 to 90 per cent of the total population of Jharkhand have been the worst hit by the large-scale exploitation of the natural resources of the region through the development of mines, industries and commercial exploitation of forests.
- The opening of coal mining in Dhanbad area during the second half of the 19th century and the establishment of the Tata Iron and Steel Company in Jamshedpur in Singhbhum district in 1907 marked the beginning of the large-scale exploitation of mineral and other industrial resources in this area. [The history of the indigenous people of Jharkhand is one of struggles against such outside exploiters whom they contemptuously call 'dikus'.]

Impact of Mining

- The exploitation of mineral resources through surface and underground mining has caused wide ranging environmental problems such as land degradation, air, water and noise pollution, etc.
- The large-scale mining operations going on in the region have adversely affected ground water table in many areas with the result that the yield of water from the wells of adjoining villages has drastically reduced.
- The Damodar river, the major source of water in the region receives wastes from the many industries situated on its banks. A study of the area showed that a single coal washery was discharging about 40 tonnes of fine coal into the Damodar every day. [There are as many as eleven coal washeries in the region with an annual installed capacity of 20.52 million tonnes (Singh 1985: 217)]

Victims of Development

- The large-scale exploitation of the natural resources of the region through the development of mines, industries, etc, has adversely affected the indigenous people of Jharkhand.
- They are dispossessed of their political autonomy and their communities broken up in the name of 'development' for 'national interest'. [A new type of internal colonialism is being unleashed on them by the ruling classes of the country.]
- According to the *Directory of Mines and Mine Leases* published in 1976 by the Indian Bureau of Mines there were about 300 mines operating in Singhbhum and more than 1,51,000 acres of land were leased out, owned mostly by private agencies. [The total land area affected by mining is many times greater than the simple lease area.]

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- The growth of mining activities in the region has acted as the most powerful stimulant in the emergence of new industries and in the growth of new urban centres. These in turn have caused further alienation of indigenous people's land and their displacement.
- The Damodar Valley project (DVC) alone has displaced 93,874 persons from 84,140 acres of land in 305 villages. Of these 37,320 acres were cultivated land (Singh 1985: 223).
- The brutality inherent in the process of industrialisation – the plundering of its mineral wealth, and the decimation of its forests which provided much of the livelihood for its people, has not only reduced the majority of its inhabitants to destitution but has also brought the area to the brink of an ecological disaster.

Mining the Niyamgiri Hill

- Niyamgiri is a hill range, about 250 sq. km. in area lying between 19.33 degree N lat. and 83. 25 degree E longitude Forms the northernmost hill in the massif of the cluster of hills called the Niyamgiris or the Dongaria Kondh country.
- Niyamgiri Hills are better known as the country of 'Dongria Kondhs'. *Dongaria Kondha* is one of the primitive and scheduled tribes of the State and enjoys a critical and symbiotic relation with the Niyamgiri forests.
- Both culturally and ecologically, the Niyamgiri hills are extremely rich and significant. In view of its ecological importance, it was declared as nature conservation / game sanctuary and also was proposed as a Wild Life Sanctuary in the working plan of Kalahandi Forest Division.
- Niyamgiri hills belong to the Eastern Ghats, and this area is assumed immense commercial importance with the increasing demand of aluminium in the international market (aluminum-giants needed more reserves of bauxite – chief raw material for aluminum production).
- Vedanta Alumina Limited, a subsidiary of M/S Sterlite Industries (India) Limited (SIIL proposed to mine bauxite deposit from the Niyamgiri hills jointly with Orissa Mining Corporation Limited (OMC)

MoU signed between Vedanta Alumina Ltd. and Orissa Mining Corporation

- According to the MoU signed by SIIL and Govt. of Orissa on 7th June 2003, SIIL 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.
- The REIA (Rapid Environmental Impact Assessment) report prepared by Tata AIG Risk Management Services Ltd., Mumbai (TARMS) for SIIL mentions that the estimated bauxite reserve in the lease area is about 73 million tons and the estimated life span of the mining is 23 years.
- According to the letter of DFO, Rayagada (bearing letter no 6623/EFC (4F) 401/2004 dated 10th November 2004) the total forest area required for mining is 672.018 hectares, out of which 660.749 hectares (98.32% of total mining area) will be diverted for mining and other ancillary activities of the project.
- The proposed mining area is situated on Niyamgiri Reserve Forest of Kalahandi (South) Forest Division and Khambesi and Niyamgiri PRF (Proposed Reserve Forest) and Jungle Block (Protected Forest) of Rayagada Forest Division.

Bio-Diversity of Niyamgiri

- Niyamgiri area is covered with wide range of hills and peaks. Niyamgiri forms a topographical high land in the area with an elevation of 1636 m above MSL. More than 75% of the Niyamgiri hills' landmass is covered with dense forests where the average forest density of Niyamgiri R.F. is around 0.6.
- A team of taxonomists, which visited 'Niyamgiri Hills' report in their preliminary assessment, *"The flora of the hill range exhibits a very rich and varied assemblage of plant species owing to its diversified topography with high mountain peaks and innumerable deep valleys and gorges, abundant springs and diverse vegetation resources."*
- Other salient features of the observations of the team include identification of about 50 species of important medicinal plants, about 20 species of wild ornamental plants, and more than 10 species of wild relatives of crop plants.
- Niyamgiri hills is the natural habitat for many endangered, threatened and conservation dependent fauna species.
- Many plant species, which were observed in the area, are classified as threatened by the IUCN in its list for Orissa.

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- A number of wild animals like Leopard, Tiger, Elephant, Palm civet, Mouse Deer, Barking Deer, Sambar, Striped Hyena, Chital, Wild Dog, Sloth Bear, Bison, Nilgai, Giant Squirrels, Porcupine, Four horned antelope and etc. are found in Niyamgiri hills most of which are in the IUCN red list of endangered species.

According to the Revised working Plan of Kalahandi Forest Division:

“A lot of the so-called damage is also caused to forests by wild animals like damage to bamboo clumps and clums, debarking of sal poles and trees by elephants, browsing of Sal saplings, Coppice shoots by Chittal, Sambar, Nilgai, Gaur. This mostly common in Karlapat, Nehla, Jerka, Sagada, Jugsai patna, Niyamgiri, Urdalani, Taprang, Benaguda, Sunamukhi etc. blocks. But this is a part of interaction between ecological community and cannot be treated as damage rather represent dynamism of ecosystem”. (Revised Working Plan for The Reserved Forests and Proposed Reserved Forests of Kalahandi Forest Division, for the Period 1997-98 to 2006-07, p. 52)

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- In the year 2004 Orissa Wildlife Division brought a proposal to declare certain patches as 'Elephant Reserve', which includes Niyamgiri in South Orissa (Phulbani-Gajapati-Kalahandi) Elephant Reserve.
- The Fact Finding Team of the Central Empowered Committee, Supreme Court in their report states,
- *"Niyamgiri is a very rich forest from biodiversity point of view. A proposal has already been approved in the working plan to declare this area as a Sanctuary. ...It was further revealed that the State Government have made a proposal to include this area in the proposed new elephant reserve. (Report of Fact Finding Team, under heading Findings of Team-iv)*

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- The Niyamgiri hill range abounds with streams (More than 100 streams flows from the Niyamgiri hills and most of the streams are perennial).
- Vamsadhara River, which is known as 'Life Line' of Kalahandi originates from Niyamgiri.
- Similarly, another important river, known as 'Nagavali', also originates from the Niyamgiri hills as well as the Bijipur Hills of the Eastern Ghats near Lanjigarh.
(<http://orissagov.nic.in/topography/topography.htm>)

Niyamgiri and the Dongria Kondh

- Niyamgiri is better known as the 'Dongria Kondh country'. The Kandha (Kondh) tribals are in majority among the scheduled tribes of Orissa. While Kutia Kandha & Dongria Kandha are the hill dwellers the Deshia Kandhas live in plain areas.
- The Dongrias have derived their name from 'Dongar' meaning agricultural land on hill slopes. The *Dongars* are created through shifting cultivation.
- The Dongrias believe that the hill-country belongs to *Niyam Raja penu*, a male deity represented by a sword and worshipped during *dussahera* and *jura parab*. (The top most hill of Niyamgiri hill ranges, Niyamgiri is regarded as his seat and hence is sacred to them).

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- The *Dongrias* consider that the right to cultivate hill slopes has been conferred to them by Niyam Raja and unless the hills are tilled, one can hardly call himself a Dongria. The right over swidden can never be confiscated or changed since each dongar plot is haunted by an ancestor spirit who helps in bumper growth of crops.
- They distinguish movable and immovable properties. Hill plots (haru), roof of the house (temberi) and fruit orchards are considered immovable property and one must possess them anywhere in the Niyamgiri hills to claim himself to be a Dongria
- The Dongaria Kondhas economy and its major sources of livelihood are directly related with Niyamgiri Forests. They collect various types forest products and sell it nearby weekly haats. Around 40 to 50% of their annual income derived from by selling of forest products like Siali leaves, Myrobalans, Amla and etc.

Critical concern over mining

- Mining in Niyamgiri hills, which is one of the most ecologically biodiverse areas of the state with its wide range of flora and fauna, rivers and streams defies logic and reasoning.
- It becomes even inhuman and anti-conservation when one sees gross undervaluation of the close interaction between the local tribes especially the primitive tribe 'Dongaria Kondha' with the nature and other forms of life in Niyamgiri.

Impact of Mining on Niyamgiri

- Bauxite mining probably destroys more surface area than mines of other materials
- It is not only land extensive, but also noisy and dusty
- Among the major environmental impacts of bauxite mining are the implications of the disposal of alkaline mud otherwise known as 'red mud'.
- As per the REIA,

Mechanized open cast mining is proposed for the deposit particularly due to low overburden thickness, high bauxite thickness and high production levels. The method of mining would be conventional method of horizontal bench with top slicing.

The REIA Report

- The REIA report ('Land Environment', p.11) that the proposed project will result in change in land use pattern. There will be reduction in the forest cover (mainly reserve forest cover).
- An article published in 'The Hindu Business line' (August 2004), says that "a rich resource would be lost forever if the mines become operational".
- A Report of the Fact Finding Team members also expressed their concern over the mining and recommended for alternate option of sourcing ore. To quote:

*"Any mining in this area is bound to destroy the biodiversity +++.
Under these circumstances, alternative sources of ore should be
explored for the Project."*

Flora and Fauna

- The alumina refinery plant is situated at the footstep of Niyamgiri hill near Lanjigarh. The approach road to the proposed mining site and conveyors belt for transporting of ore from the mining site to Refinery plant passes through very dense and rich forests.
- Secondly, as it is being open cast mining, it will generate high noises during excavation, drilling, transportation, blasting and crushing operations.
- Thirdly, it will also pollute the air through emissions from various sources like drilling, blasting, transportation and crushing operations.
- The constant traffic on the road by the heavy machinery and trucks, continuous operation of machineries, blasting, influx of outsiders and run-off water from the mining site during the monsoon season would destroy the rich ecosystem of Niyamgiri hills and lead to the destruction of wildlife natural habitat.

Indigenous People

- The Niyamgiri hills, which are going to be adversely affected by the proposed bauxite-mining project also, happen to be home to Dongaria Kondhas, one of Orissa's most distinctive and traditional tribes.
- Their social, economical and cultural life is closely interlinked with Niyamgiri hills. Most importantly their beliefs and identity are confined to the Niyamgiri hills. The Niyamgiri hill holds the highest rank owing not only to its physical characteristics but also on account of the religious lore associated with it (*Forest Tribes of Orissa*, Vol.-1, The Dongaria Kondha, page No. 319)
- The proposed mining area that falls on the top of Niyamgiri hills is one of the most sacred places of Dongaria Kondhas. They believe that 'Niyamraja Penu' and other gods and goddess are living there
- The firm established an aluminium refinery in 2006 in Lanjigarh, despite the non-consent of villagers in and around the area. The residents of the region are also accusing the firm of forcefully acquiring over ten acres of village common land without the necessary clearances.

Anti-Mining Struggle

The company acquired land in the name of development in the region. However, those who have lost land have also accused the company authorities of adopting anti-local policies in all the appointments in their projects. Rights groups have also reported violations of the rights to water, food, health, work, and an adequate standard of living.

- “Development for us is being able to protect our hills, rivers and jungle”.
- “Let our blood flow like a river, but we won’t allow mining”.

Conclusion

- The Niyamgiri case is one of the most infamous industrial projects plagued by land-related conflicts.
- Resistance of the adivasis in the state has been ongoing since 1997, when Odisha Government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Sterlite Industries India Ltd. and Vedanta Aluminium, subsidiaries of Vedanta Resources.
- The anti-mining agitation was also helped by the popularity of the 2009 film Avatar, which is about a ruthless mining corporation looking to extract a precious mineral from a moon inhabited by a humanoid species.
- A Supreme Court judgement in 2013 upheld the rights of forest-dwelling adivasi and other forest-dwelling communities over their deity Niyamraja and upheld the power of the local gram sabha as supreme.

Dams, Development, and Resistance: Case Studies

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Dam Building and Popular Resistance in Northeast India

- In August 1998, the GoI announced its policy on hydro power development, followed by 50,000 MW hydroelectric initiatives in May 2003 – with a major focus on the hydroelectric potential of the Brahmaputra basin.
- Hydropower projects are being projected as the remedy for India's energy crises and the underdevelopment of its Northeast.
- The Ministry of Development of the North-eastern region has identified this area as the 'future powerhouse of India' aiming to generate 63,000 MW of hydel power by building as many as 168 dams on almost all its perennial rivers.
- Hydropower is perceived to be an important source for fulfilling domestic energy needs, generating much-needed revenue, providing employment, controlling floods and irrigating the dry areas, and developing the remote backward hill areas.

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- In the common imaginary, the Northeast is constructed as a 'backward' region – 'Untapped potentials', 'resource-rich', 'unexploited' and so on, have now become new catchphrases to define and describe the region.
- In its attempt to capitalise on the hydropower potential of the region, dam construction has currently outstripped any other developmental activity in the region (Vagholikar and Das 2010: 1).
- One of the major arguments for building large hydel projects in the northeast is that there is relatively 'small displacement' of people on account of its low density of population as compared to other parts of the country.
- But considering other parameters of this sparsely populated landscape, this logic of 'small displacement' appears rather problematic.
- Developmental policies, which are supposedly made for 'integrating and uplifting' the North-east region, themselves give rise to endless conflicts, in their 'presences' and 'absences', as these policies are never contextualized.

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- Many of these areas where the projects are being planned are remotely located and inhabited by various tribes, who are dependent on forests, swidden cultivation (Jhum land) and the river ecosystem for their food security and livelihood.
- This transfer of rights to use common property resources from the tribal and rural communities to the public sector, private industries and the bureaucratic apparatus of the Indian state is already generating considerable discontent in the civil society (Klingensmith, 2007: 13).

Security-Development Nexus

- 'Security-development nexus' unfolds and engages on how the two get 'appropriated and incorporated' (Stritzel 2011: 345) both in policy and practice.
- The continual enforcement of the law replaces civil administration with military administration. Henceforth, the region has remained a 'state of exception' (Agamben 2005) within the Indian nation-state as 'extra-constitutional and emergency laws are in place specifically for the region' (Bora 2010: 342).
- Baruah notes that 'development discourse is a product of the Indian state's push to nationalise the space of this frontier region' (2003: 917). The construction of the region as an insecure region is constitutive of the process by which development is made a security issue.

A Case Study of Tipaimukh Dam

- The Tipaimukh dam on the Barak was originally designed in 1926 as a flood-control measure for the Cachar Plains and was transformed into a multipurpose hydroelectric project in the 1990s.
- The Central Water Commission (CWC), at the request of the Government of Assam, submitted a detailed project proposal to construct the Tipaimukh dam after a long gap in 1984.
- The Tipaimukh hydroelectric project was approved in 1999 and construction entrusted to the North Eastern Electric Power Corporation Limited (NEEPCO). An MOU was signed by the Government of Manipur with NEEPCO on 11 January 2003 to generate power from the Tipaimukh dam

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- The north-eastern Barak river (also called *Tuiroung*) flowing through Manipur is the critical cultural and economic resource for thousands of people residing on its banks; the region is regarded 'the gift of the Barak river' (Dena 2008: 181).
- Several sites of religious significance are located along the course of this river and rituals play a vital role in revitalising the ancestral connections and affirming the collective memory of the Hmar.
- The proposed Tipaimukh dam will permanently submerge an area of 275.50 sq km in Manipur (AFCL 2007).

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- Development is a site of struggle and there are several co-existent discourses of development with their own strategies and practices (Grillo and Stirrat 1997: 11-27).
- 'Life projects diverge from development in their attention to the uniqueness of people's experiences of place and self and their rejection of visions that claim to be universal. Thus, life projects are premised on densely and uniquely woven 'threads' of landscapes, memories, expectations and desires' (ibid.:19).

The Barak and the Hmar Identity, History, and Culture

- The Hmar cosmology does not distinguish between nature and culture, as the land mediates their spatial existence.
- Veronica Strang in her book *Uncommon Ground* (1997) discusses how their aboriginal identity is based and derived from their attachment to land. She emphasises that, among them, there is no difference and between who they are and where they come from (ibid.: 159-60).
- The Hmar discourse follows what Blaser (2004a: 19) terms as 'life projects' which are embedded in local histories. They encompass visions of the world and the future that are distinct from those embodied by projects promoted by the state and the market.
- A. Baviskar (1995) and V. Arora (2006, 2009) argue that rivers are not merely water courses, but embody the spiritual connections between people and their 'ancestral' landscape. The rivers Barak and Tuivai are considered holy by Hmars.

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- In 2008, during an interview, a villager of Tipaimukh elaborated,

Our [Hmar] community is like this great river Tuiroung [Barak]. It has been flowing before any of us can remember. We take our strength and our wisdom and our ways from the flow and direction that has been established for us by our ancestors, many years ago. Their wisdom flows through us to our children and our grandchildren to generations we will never know. We will live out our lives as we must and we will die in peace because we will know that our people and this river will flow on after us.

Ruonglevaisuo as a 'sacred' site for the Hmars

- Ruonglevaisuo – is believed to be 'Pielral Kawtsuo' (also known as *thi-le-dam*); a 'Heaven's Gate' where the dead departs from earth to begin another journey.
- The Barak River is not merely a socio-politico-economic lifeline, but also integral to several tribes' cultural history, memory, and identity as a Chin-Kuki-Mizo group.
- With several sites of religious significance located along its course, the Barak River plays a vital role in revitalising the ancestral connections and affirming the collective memory of these tribes.

Objections Voiced Against the Tipaimukh Dam

- Location in a geologically unstable region
- Loss of biodiversity with submergence of land
- Economic feasibility studies and cost-benefit analysis
- Administrative lapses, procedural violations, and human rights violations
- Social and cultural objections

No 'prior and informed consent'

- The indigenous people opposed the project by contending that there has been no 'prior and informed consent' with the people about the development project on their land.
- They further argue that the state government is illegally pursuing this massive project on their land and this will destroy their agricultural land (that were thriving on subsistence economy) and forests.

Questioning 'National' Development

- Many of the areas where these projects are planned are remote areas inhabited by indigenous peoples who are completely dependent on forests, jhum lands, and river ecosystem for their food security and livelihood.
- This transfer of power over common property resources from indigenous tribal people and rural communities to the bureaucracy, public sector companies, and private developers, has had important consequences for the livelihood and way of life of individuals and communities (Klingensmith 2007: 13).

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- Resistance to this is encapsulated in the SIPHRO (Sinlung Indigenous Peoples' Human Rights Organisation) declaration of 2007:

Our land and the waters are our history, inalienable receptacles of our collective memory, permanent sites of great spiritual and religious significance, the foundation of our civilisation and life. This land and rivers are not gift from any government but ours owned by inheritance and right.

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- Development approaches and project planning often reduce 'environment/nature' into a 'natural resource' and a commodity.
- The DPRs and EIA overwhelmingly regard land as a resource, while, for the people who subsist and depend on it, it is both a lived landscape and an imagined 'sacred' landscape – it is regarded the homeland of their belonging and locus of ancestral connections, it materially embodies their traditional knowledge, it is the source of their distinctive 'indigenous' identity, and the locus of claims of political autonomy (Arora 2009).

A Case Study of Mapithel Dam

- Based on discursive field experiences, this study reflects upon the competing values in relation to land use and ownership systems and raises a question –
 - 1) as to whether in the name of development, is the government eroding tribal people's right over their land and resources?
 - 2) some key aspects of the very political closure approach which emphasizes state's hegemony through forceful intrusion into the life, livelihood, and 'lebenswelt' of tribal people and infringement of their traditional rights.
 - 3) analyses the debates surrounding the dispossession and forceful acquisition of land.

Inception of the Dam

- The Government of Manipur's Irrigation and Flood Control Department (IFCD) undertook the project with the approval of the Planning Commission in 1980 and assistance from the Central government. Essentially, the dam would have a multipurpose utility – generation of electricity (7.5 MW), irrigation, flood control, and supply of drinking water to the valley areas.
- The Planning Commission of India approved the project at an estimated cost of Indian Rupees (INR) – 47.25 crores in May 1980, and subsequently revised to INR 223 crores in 1994. The latest revised cost of the project stands at INR 390 crores.

Controversy and Resistance to the Dam Project

- The indigenous people opposed the Mapithel project by contending that there has been no 'prior and informed consent' with the people about the development project on their land.
- They further argue that the state government is illegally pursuing this massive project on their land and this will destroy their agricultural land (that were thriving on subsistence economy) and forests.
- Jiten Yumnam, convenor of Committee on the Protection of Natural Resources in Manipur, said 'the project is a clear violation of communities' rights over their ancestral land and forest and also violates the Forest (Conservation) Act and Forest Rights Act'.

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- The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) stated that the MoEF conceded Stage I and Stage II 'Forest Clearances' without conducting any site visits into affected areas and without full adherence to Forest Rights Act, 2006 (FRA, 2006) and undermining its instructions to the Government of Manipur on 23 August 2013 to comply with FRA, 2006 before final Forest Clearance.
- The Forest Clearance was cleared fraudulently in violation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006 only after the affected communities filed a complaint with the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in August 2013.

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- A serious question that emanates from an introspection of underperforming dams in Manipur is – as to why indigenous people of Manipur should sacrifice their land, forest, and other survival sources for such unsustainable projects? Is this the price that project affected people will have to pay and a sacrifice that they will have to make in the interests of ‘the common good’, even if they themselves do not participate in that common good?
- A social worker asserts, ‘It is irrational to displace a large number of people from the hill districts in order to save the Thoubal valley from floods and provides irrigation and water supply to Imphal city’.

The 'Politics' of Land Acquisition

- There has been apprehension hovering in the minds of the tribal people that the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reform (MLR & LR) Act of 1960 might be extended to the hill areas after such dams are built.
- The policymakers and planners held the view that extension of the Act to the hill areas would usher in economic development. However, this Act is perceived to disrupt the traditional land holding system, in both the Nagas and the Kuki tribal areas.
- Recently, the Manipur state Government has initiated a New Land Use Policy (NLUP, Manipur) 2014 with the objective of inclusive development through effective land resource development and livelihood of the people.

Dam(n) and development amidst 'militarization'

- The unfolding aggressive and militaristic development process guided by neoliberal policies and increased effort to privatize people's land and their survival sources in the name of development has denied the indigenous peoples' rights to land and survival sources.
- Today, indigenous peoples' land designated for large-scale development is not freed from extensive militarization and has become an enclosure or territorialized space of the state.
- Seizure of lands for military camps is a common practice in Northeast, as the region is dubbed as 'disturbed area' and perceived as a 'conflict zone'.

Cont.

- The construction site of the Mapithel dam is highly a militarized zone. Secretary of the MDAVO (2014) argued,

‘Mapithel dam has been pursued in violation of both Indian laws and international laws on development. The continued militarization of land and suppression of voices of affected indigenous communities for a just rehabilitation and resettlement is a clear instance of injustice due to Mapithel dam construction’. It would suffice to be labelled as ‘development at gun-point’.

Cont.

- As contended by Lund (2006) and Peluso and Vandergeest (2001) violence appears to be the conjoined twin of all sophisticated forms of land control. New mechanisms of land control and new actors notwithstanding, practices and technologies of governance and control, subtle or violent, are still employed to acquire, secure, and exclude others from land in intense competitions over control.
- An extensive militarization of indigenous peoples' land, water and forest resources is evident in the case of Mapithel dam, and other large development projects in the region.

Conclusion

- In the name of 'development', indigenous people are being forcibly dispossessed from land they have lived on for generations.
- The overall impact of developmental projects particularly on tribals has been often loss of livelihood, massive displacement, and involuntary migration.
- Often, the acquisition for development aggravates the problem of alienation and encroachment on tribal land.
- Developmental project such as dam have only increased the miseries of the tribals and further marginalize them.
- The dissenting voices from the margins are voice against development that demands that one set of people make sacrifices for the 'nation' for nothing in return but exploitation by unscrupulous agents through forceful means.

Competing Visions of Development along the Narmada

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Introduction

- India remains one of the leading countries in dam construction, figuring among the top five dam-building countries (WCD 2000: 9).
- In the early years of independent India, large dams were conceived to be an important marker of modernity and a symbol of progress.
- Large dams promised to solve the problem of hunger and starvation by providing irrigation and boosting food production, controlling floods and providing much needed electricity for industrial development. It was this grand promise that prompted Pandit Nehru, our first Prime Minister, to call dams 'secular temples of modern India'.
- The World Commission on Dams (WCD) (2000, overview, p. 7) states that "Dams have made a significant contribution to human development, and the benefits derived from them have been considerable".

Cont.

- Large dams have often been seen as an effective way of meeting water and energy need. However, the WCD's (2000) review has emphasized the wide range of problems associated with them. Dams can provide hydropower, irrigation and flood control. These are benefits concerning development, but there are also costs to be paid in social, environmental and economic terms.
- Dam building is integral to India's development vision, which until recently was modelled on the Soviet style centralized, state-led economic development with an emphasis on industrialization (Hardgrave and Kochanek 1993, 354-55).
- Within this context, dams are ideal since they are amenable to top-down planning, provide tangible benefits to industrialization needs vis-à-vis hydroelectricity, and also to modernized agriculture in terms of irrigation (Savur 1995, 156).
- The construction of large dams has already emerged as a major issue of conflict in India and throughout the world (Baviskar, 1995; McCully, 1996).
- The main issue at stake regarding construction of large dams has been the problem of Resettlement and Rehabilitation (R & R) of the displaced population (Dwivedi, 2002; Parasuraman, 1999).

“Dam” the Irony for The Greater Common Good

- Arundhati Roy's essay, *The Greater Common Good* (1999), frames her vehement opposition to the construction of the Narmada Dam in central India. Roy contends that the project benefited a few at the expense of India's poor, and the protest against its construction was much more than a fight to save the river valley; it was a struggle to reinstate justice in Indian democracy.
- The Narmada Dam debate is a longstanding and highly polemical struggle over a river valley whose factions are split between those rendered homeless in the wake of the dam's construction and those others upholding the dam's essentialness for the nation's development and progress.
- The struggle marks an ongoing controversy over the meaning of development and its purported beneficiaries since Nehru's (the first prime minister of independent India) endorsement of dam projects as “the temples of modern India” (Khilnani, 1998).

Cont.

- The Narmada Dam debate is important not only because it exemplifies perseverance for human rights in the face of rising stridency in the struggle over precious resources in neoliberal globalizing India but also because it marks the emerging importance of mediated spaces as the site for both enunciation and contestation of environmental issues (see Hansen, 2010).
- Roy (1999) contends that while the dam promises electricity to urban Indians, brings water to big farmers, augments the power of government bureaucracies, and furnishes the rich with lucrative contracts, it flushes out “like rats” the indigenous and tribal populations from their forested homes, bringing them to the doorsteps of urban poverty and degradation.
- Roy questions the nature of Indian democracy and decries the inequitable development model it supports.

Cont.

- Roy (1999) writes that “the highest court in the land” has “sanctioned” that the homes of the tribal citizens “be drowned this monsoon,” and adds, I suddenly remembered the tender concern with which the Supreme Court judges in Delhi . . . enquired whether tribal children in the resettlement colonies would have children’s parks to play in . . . but that was before vacating the legal stay on further construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam. (p. 1)
- Roy argues that the Narmada Dam can only be constructed because the poor, the voiceless, the tribals, and the Dalits are subsidizing India’s progress and modernization. The sufferings of the populations on the margin are beyond most peoples’ imagination. Hence, monstrous development projects can go unchallenged because “the ethnic ‘otherness’ of the victims takes some pressure off the Nation Builders” (p. 4), and “democracy (or our version of it) continues to be the benevolent mask behind which a pestilence flourishes unchallenged” (p. 6).

The Case of Sardar Sarovar Dam

- The public debate on large dams has been going on between dam advocates and opponents.
- The Sardar Sarovar Dam is a case of a development project which is both directly and indirectly causing environmental displacement on a massive scale.
- The livelihoods of many millions of people also suffer because of the downstream effects of dams: the loss of fisheries; contaminated water; a decreased amount of water; and a reduction in the fertility of farmlands and forests due to the loss of natural fertilizers and irrigation in seasonal floods.

Cont.

- The Sardar Sarovar Dam is the second largest project in the Narmada Valley in terms of both total area submerged and the numbers of people displaced (Baviskar 1995, 199).
- According to the independent review conducted by Bradford Morse and Thomas Berger for the World Bank, once completed the Sardar Sarovar Dam Project will submerge approximately 37,000 hectares of land for the reservoir, and approximately 80,000 hectares for the extensive canal works. It will displace at least 100,000 people who reside in approximately 245 villages.

Cont.

- In the case of the impact of large dams in India, Singh (1997: 203) states,

..displacement caused by large dams has actually resulted in transfer of resources from the weaker sections of the society to the more privileged 'large dams do little to alleviate the existing social inequalities , on the contrary, they further aggravate the already skewed social structure in favour of socially, economically and politically powerful'.

- Displacement, by definition is involuntary, but the actual act is often accompanied by brutal force, police action and violence. In Sardar Sarovar, in order to break people's resolve of 'drowning rather than leaving their homes' (*Doo benge par hatenge nahi*) are some of the slogans used.
- The Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) constructed in the Narmada basin has been a telling story as it reopens and reignites the debate on dam construction in India (Baviskar 1995; Visvanathan 2000).

Cont.

- The Sardar Sarovar Dam in Gujarat is arguably the most controversial dam ever built in India, displacing 4,763 families in Gujarat, 4,307 in Maharashtra and 23,614 families in Madhya Pradesh.
- It has been argued that modernisation adversely affects forest tribes because it devastates traditional culture and lifestyle, dupes simple tribal folks with little understanding of markets or prices, and destroys their habitat (Morse and Berger 1992).
- The most serious threat to achievement of resettlement and rehabilitation policies may well lie in entanglement in debt cycles, and the resultant loss of land to money lenders or local landowners. (Morse and Berger 1992)

What's at Stake?

- The damming of the Narmada River in western India is an issue where the perceived conflicts between economic development and environmental protection have become the battleground of other conflicts over human rights, decision making processes, and development objectives.
- Critics of the project cite its potentially negative environmental and social impacts, particularly the relocation of tens of thousands of people, the majority of them members of lower socioeconomic (adivasis) communities.

World Bank Report (1992)

► It stated:

We think the Sardar Sarovar Projects as they stand are flawed, that resettlement and rehabilitation of all those displaced by the Projects is not possible under prevailing circumstances, and that the environmental impacts of the Projects have not been properly considered or adequately addressed. Moreover, we believe that the Bank shares responsibility with the borrower for the situation that has developed.

Significance of the Narmada

- One of the striking aspects of the local, national, and global debates over Narmada is the array of actors with different objectives who nevertheless defend their positions in the same terms, a phenomenon made possible when these terms—like “sustainable development”—are conceptually flexible and vague. While the range of actors and issues involved in the Narmada controversy are remarkably diverse, both those resisting and those defending the Sardar Sarovar Project use the same moral vocabulary of social justice, the same economic rhetoric of sustainable development, and similar evocations of the legacy of Gandhi.

Deploying Gandhi

- Religion creeps into the Narmada issue in many ways, not least because the Narmada is, for Hindus, one of the most sacred rivers in India: its banks are lined with numerous sacred monuments and sites and it is the subject of circumambulation by devout pilgrims.
- Religious identity is also invoked by the Morse report, in its defense of the indigenous identity of many people affected by the Sardar Sarovar Project, and by critics of the report, who contest the characterization of project-affected people as indigenous and tribal people, arguing instead that they are “backward Hindus.” [Even more striking in the Narmada issue, perhaps, is the omnipresence of Gandhi.]

Competing Visions

- While dam advocates and opponents are generally sincere in their advocacy of sustainable development and social justice, and in their evocation of Gandhi, what they mean by the use of these terms and symbols differs profoundly.
- Sharing the same rhetoric to describe very different goals and means disguises fundamental philosophical differences, maintains confusion in the debate about development, and makes it more difficult to mount an effective challenge to the dominant development paradigm.

Cont.

- Underlying the conflicting arguments are visions of the Narmada as goddess, homeland, or development resource. These contrasting visions serve a range of positions on social justice and sustainable development.
- For millions of people in India, “Narmada Mai is a goddess.” This is one of the most dramatic and long-standing visions of the river. Along its banks are thousands of temples dedicated to Ganga and Siva, and each year thousands of pilgrims throng to these and other sacred places.
- Contrasted with these views of the timeless sacredness of the Narmada geography, the focus on the Narmada as a resource which might supply irrigation water for up to one hundred years seems a narrow, temporal concern.
- The Sardar Sarovar Dam is a vivid example of modernist convictions that one can obtain mastery over nature, and that the failure to do so will mean ruin.

Cont.

- It reflects Descartes's conviction that the general good of all humankind could be pursued by the attainment of knowledge that is useful in life (anthropocentric view) so as to make ourselves "the masters and possessors of nature."
- This perspective on development defines and responds to two aspects of nature. Nature is seen as threatening and dangerous—in need of containment—while, simultaneously, it is viewed as a stockroom of resources for technological advancement.
- It is important to highlight what happens in the politicization of religion and the environment in the Narmada conflict and the violence done to local lives and views.
- As the struggle between dam builders and dam opponents evolves from a struggle over a specific dam to a clash about the process of development—a clash in which the dam builders and opponents each harden their points of view, and a contestation in which a sacred dam is made to confront a sacred river—the voices of the local people are at risk of being drowned out, their views and lives reduced through overgeneralization to simplistic caricatures.

Critiquing Development

- While the terms of sustainable development and social justice and the evocation of Gandhi are familiar, the meanings are profoundly different. For the activists, the dam, far from being sacred, is a sacrilege.
- The Sardar Sarovar Project is just one more of too many projects said to be in the “national interest,” but which in fact undermine the ability of the rural poor to control and use local resources.
- The positions of environmentalists and activists opposing the Sardar Sarovar Dam are ideologically heterogeneous and include a number of hybrid positions blended from Gandhian, Marxist, and “indigenous knowledge” positions.
- In the view of some of these activists, the struggle of the inhabitants of the Narmada is a living example of a true environmental movement, a challenge by communities who worship nature and use it sustainably.