

# THE SOCIOLOGY OF ADIVASI LAND ALIENATION

GOLDY M. GEORGE\*

## ABSTRACT

For decades land, forests, water and other natural resources are not free from public debates and academic discourses due to several reasons. In India this debate has taken different forms in different places based on the specific character of the locality. There has been, particularly in the neo-liberalisation era, a noticeable shift both in the tenor and the content of the debate. While looking at the history of Adivasi land alienation, there has been several interconnections between the multiple characteristics of post independent neo-capitalistic economics and the pre-independent colonial imperialism – both only aimed at taking away the land from the community with the consolidation of power centres or ‘eminent domain,’ at the cost of the community itself.

This ethnographic paper gradually discusses the sociology of land debate from pre-colonial period to present. It builds the argument that why land reforms failed in India at large and specifically in the context of Adivasi land rights. To understand the issue of Adivasi land alienation, the case of Mainpat hills in Surguja district of Chhattisgarh is taken to study in detail, where Vedanta Resources Plc is currently engaged in mining bauxite at the cost of the communities. In this paper, I discuss how the State initiated public hearing is applied as a strategic tool to construct ‘consent’ by flouting laws and dismissing people’s dissent. The last two sections of the paper capture the larger impact of land acquisition, land alienation and the socio-ethnic polity of Adivasi depeasantisation. In these Adivasi hotbeds, people have lost their faith in State and its democratic systems, due to excessive focus on alien patterns of development. Here land alienation and depeasantisation are interconnected aspects which in itself is a gross violation of human rights of Adivasi people not only in Mainpat but at large across the length and breadth of the state. It has changed the socio-cultural, economic and political dynamics of the community itself.

**Keywords: Adivasi, land alienation, depeasantisation, Vedanta Resources, Development, Jansunwai, Mainpat**

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\* The author is an activist cum academician. He has been the founder of several organisations and movements on Dalit-Adivasi issues in Central India. With a PhD in Social Science, he currently is the Chief Editor of Journal of People’s Studies. He could be reached at goldymgeorge10@gmail.com

## 1. The Emergence of the Land Debate

There is no doubt that development is essential for any nation to move forward. At the same time it is also important to look at the development paradigms and also focus on the people who would be affected in this process. For decades land, forests, water and other natural resources are not free from academic discourses and public debates due to several reasons. There clearly seems a crisis in the entire method, pattern and process of resource management between the people and that of the State. As this crisis between people-land-livelihood further intensifies, it is essential to look at some of the conflicts and its co-relation and how the indigenous people are adversely affected (George 2003). In India debate on land has taken different forms in different places based on the specific character of the locality. There has been, particularly in the neo-liberalisation era, a noticeable shift both in the tenor and content of such debates (Sinha and Pushpendra 2000: 17). While looking at the history of Adivasi land alienation, there has been several interconnections between the multiple characteristics of post independent neo-capitalistic economics and the pre-independent colonial imperialism – both aimed only at taking away the land from the community with the consolidation of power centres or ‘eminent domain’ at the cost of the community itself. This is the context where one needs to understand the historical tentacles of land question. This paper delves deep into the sociological aspects of land acquisition and land alienation.

In traditional India, ‘caste’ was the decisive factor to confirm ones ownership over land. Historically land issue has been the hangover of the high-skewed caste based landholding pattern, predominantly based on the Zamindari system. Uneven landholding has been the main reason of disparity and poverty in rural areas (George 2010: 8-9). This also affected the very character of control and management with a shift from community oriented (*sangha*) economy to market based production, accumulation, surplus and thereby defeating the cultural value chain among indigenous masses. As relation of property in the means of production drifts, the nature of relations among people in the process also alters (George 2011).

In the colonial period, the Zamindar's property rights were conditional. The colonial state honoured the rights of the Zamindars as long as they paid revenue. Thus the actual tillers were never in the scene. They were only as the tenants of their masters or otherwise worked for their masters in their own land. In the post-1947 era, in most of the areas, land was conveniently appropriated by the Zamindars as their private property. Other service providing inter-mediatory castes also emerged as a landed class, particularly the Other Backward Classes (OBCs). One of the major questions related with the whole issue is the manner in which the state has approached or responded to the questions of landed classes versus landless masses. Even after nearly seven decades of independence, the state – despite the fact in change of governments under the auspices of different political parties – has almost failed to address this issue in an absolute way. This raises an array of question on the very character of the state and ruling class towards the indigenous groups, the poor and the proletariats of the country. Land is by and large related with the production and

distribution of resources on earth. Thus the character of control and management of resources is closely linked with the development of a social system (George 2003). Hence, land – a resource meant for the betterment of all human beings and other living creatures – turned out to be a property, specifically private property, in this discourse.

A close examination of various land laws shown that the present legislative measures have become very complex. Thus a graduated or phased programme of fixing priorities on each problem in different areas would have been a citizenry way to deal with it; regrettably this has been entirely missing in the Indian context. In the post 1947 phase what followed was a new pattern of landlordship from the earlier format of classical Zamindari, in which the upper castes (in many areas it were the OBCs) had a natural trend to become the dominant landholder class. Beneath the undercurrents of the dominant landholding system of Zamindari, land reforms and land distribution become more harsh and formidable in the newly arisen socio-political context with the legalisation of the former in a different pattern. Thus people who were deprived arose against it in different parts of India. As Mohan (1998) places, one of the classic instances of this is the countrywide struggle on the question of land distribution between the rich landholders and the landless poor.

Gazing into the history to cross examine the man-property relation in India, a major shuffle could be observed after the influx of Aryans. Ironically this process was endorsed and socially legitimised by the *varnashram* dharma. With the stranglehold over the social fabric, the upper caste capitalised the situation not only by taking the control over land and property, but also they started dictating the fate of each lower caste community, which further led to the dispossession or removal of the children of the soil from the land. The real owners of the land were ousted or overthrow as garbage. Slowly it turned out to be individual based than community enterprise, particularly in the hands of the upper caste. Consequently they controlled the agrarian economy for centuries to come. Thus tension between the resourceful and resourceless, powerful and powerless, have and have not continues till today (George 2003).

Land had always been a compelling factor in terms of generating land revenue. The beginning of regularly assessed land revenue may fairly be traced to Akbar's settlement, which began in 1571 AD (PRIA 1988: 9). There had been some earlier attempts by Hindu kings, but those attempts were neither systematic nor in details. There was another great settlement carried out by the Mohmaden kings of Dakhan (south), but that was almost a replica of Akbar's settlement. Akbar's formula was adopted by most of the later Hindu kings too but no details of land settlement are available from those attempts. In both the settlements with appropriate records, the key objectives were to regularise the revenue generation mechanisms. *De facto* the extensive record keeping contributed to the assessment of land revenue in terms of money at a later stage, and that had become substantial or principal source of state's wealth, even before the British took over. Till the consolidation and expansion of their power, the British government claimed the share in produce of land based on

the assessment mechanism created by ‘ancient law.’ Gradually the government conferred the right to decide about share upon itself. Between the years 1770-86, some British administrators tried to apply western concepts and definitions regarding land revenue, which miserably failed (PRIA 1988: 10).

With the gradual expansion of the British Empire in India, the administration in different parts experimented with different systems through a trial and error method. Finally, by the second half of the nineteenth century, the land revenue system that evolved could be categorised as Zamindari, Raiyatwari and Mahalwari. Nearly 70 percent of the total landmass in India remained under the Zamindari system (George 2003). The Zamindari land revenue system generally conferred the right of private ownership of land on persons who belonged to the upper strata of the society. Many farmers became owners and the process continued in several ways (Kotovsky 1964). Each Zamindar was fully entitled to bring the vast area of wasteland under the plough by his own tenants so that in the course of time he became its owner. Such appropriated areas were called *khamar-nij-jot* or *sir* land (George 2003).

Even in the current phase of India, one could see the continuity of the Zamindari system with an added ingredient of corporate capital. Unlike the context of industrial revolution in Europe, capitalism in India originated on the pedestal of private property based on traditional caste lordship, mercantile profit of the propertied classes, conversion of land for monoculture plantation production and the proximity of these classes with the oligarchies of power leading to the colonial policy of State ownership over land that later got exchanged into private hands. This is the context where Adivasi land also got alienated for private use during the British. The situation never shifted even after the alteration of power into the so-called *Swadeshi* hand in 1947. Since then, the state has remained a silent spectator of all forms of land alienation of the Adivasi people.

## **2. Land Settlement – An Unfinished Task**

Primarily India is an agriculture-based country, and agriculture has been the cornerstone of her economy for many centuries. The peasantry used to have a need based production in almost in every part of the country. People lived in communities and had a common sense and feeling of caring, sharing and co-operation. Barter system existed in most parts of ancient India for long, where even the mode of valuation was not currency. Until a few decades the barter system existed in many of the Adivasi domains despite the influx of modernity at large. Hence to large extent there was a subsistent economy, even among the rustic poor.

Land, more than being a productive asset, have more been emotionally attached with the communities in many ways. For many it is the symbol of their freedom. To some it's the image of their fight against the upper caste and caste oppression. It's also the icon of reiterating the lost identity. To many it's an image of self-determination, co-existence and community feeling. However, to the corporates and agents of development it is a commodity to be consumed. The state also takes side with these

so-called think tanks. Land can be purchased and sold for commercial purpose. Or even it could be acquired forcefully. Hence in all these so-called development, the common man of the country sacrifices himself for the relish and enjoyment of the elite (George 2003). This is exactly what perhaps Nehru referred as the 'temple of modern India' while inaugurating the Bhakra-Nangal dam soon after independence, where large number of rural people had to make ways for the development theory of the few urban elites.

Under this context there is an urgency to develop a wider understanding and proper perspective about the diverse dynamics of land issue. Earlier the debate on land reforms was concentrated over issues like what should be the ceiling limit, at what size do landholdings attain viability, or whether tenancy as a practice should be allowed to exist under regulated conditions, or eliminated altogether and so on so forth. There has been, particularly in the neo-liberalisation era, a noticeable shift both in the tenor and the content of the debate (Sinha & Pushpendra 2000: 17).

Land settlement usually refers to redistribution of land from the rich to the poor; from the landed to the landless. More broadly, it includes regulation of ownership, operation, leasing, sales, and inheritance of land; indeed, the redistribution of land itself requires legal changes. In an agrarian economy like India with great scarcity and unequal distribution of land coupled with a large mass of the rural population below the poverty line, there are compelling economic and political arguments for land settlement. Not surprisingly, it received top priority on the policy agenda at the time of independence. In the decades following independence, India passed a significant body of land reform legislation. The Constitution left the adoption and implementation of land and tenancy reforms to state governments. This led to a lot of variation in the implementation of land reforms across states and over time, a fact that has been utilised in empirical studies trying to understand the causes and effects of land reform (Ghatak 2007: 336).

The most obvious argument in favour of land reform is equity to ensure that everyone has access to some minimum amount of land. However, this is a general argument in favour of redistribution, not necessarily redistribution in kind. To make that case, one needs to understand the economic forces that govern the allocation of land. However apart from equity consideration, another argument is based on the efficiency considerations (Ghatak 2007: 336).

Land settlement legislation in India consisted of four main categories: abolition of intermediaries who were rent collectors under the pre-independence land revenue system; tenancy regulation that attempts to improve the contractual terms faced by tenants, including crop shares and security of tenure; a ceiling on landholdings with a view to redistributing surplus land to the landless; and finally, attempts to consolidate disparate landholdings (Besley and Burgess 2000). Abolition of intermediaries is generally agreed to be one component of land reforms that has been relatively successful. The record in terms of the other components is mixed and varies across states and over time. Landowners naturally resisted the implementation of these reforms either by directly using their political clout or

applying various methods of evasion and coercion and sometimes a combination of both. This included registering their own land under names of different relatives to bypass the ceiling, and shuffling tenants around different plots of land, so that they would not acquire incumbency rights as stipulated in the tenancy law (Ghatak 2007: 338).

Keeping these theoretical arguments intact and probing the ground reality one could find many more allied issues and problems faced by the oppressed and marginalised sections like Dalits, Adivasis and women. The movement for land rights and land reforms also failed to address these questions or acknowledge those issues. The unacknowledged participation of Dalits in movement before and after 1947 was phenomenally high – particularly in Telengana land rights movement, Naxalbari and post-Naxalbari movement, various independent movements for accessing land to the landless. In most part of the country Dalits have been either small or marginal farmers or landless. Analysing it from the historical viewpoint they are the first plebeians of present India. Due to the obvious paucity of land or resources or employment today, they are the largest number of migrants from one state to another. Sizeable numbers among them are bonded labourers too. Their life condition is wretched and extremely inhuman. Women and children are subjected to atrocious harassment and torture, particularly in the migrated workplace (George 2003).

The character of the ruling class towards the Dalits remained the same in almost every part of the country. One of the major debates till date is the thorough failure of the progressive Communist movements to understand the plebeian-proletariat characteristic of the caste system and, hence the Dalits. One of the key reasons for this failure has been the inability of the revolutionary intelligentsia and those in party ranks to decode the debate between basic structure and super structure in the context of 'caste' in India. This not only debarred them to address the pertaining question of caste within the movement, but also the burning issues of Dalit land rights. Thus the Communist parties remained reluctant to acknowledge the quest of the landless Dalits even as a movement of socially oppressed group. These masses from the lowest social strata, one of the original inheritors of the land, could neither be recognised nor gain any momentum within the movement.

On the other hand Adivasis were landed and enjoyed freedom within their specific zones prior to the intrusion of external forces. Land and forest play an indispensable role in the wholesome life of Adivasis. First the Hindu kings and then the Muslim rulers entered their zone to take control over their lives, which was followed by the British. However, Adivasis bravely resisted all such attempts of intrusion. Hardiman (1994) has observed that, prior to the British invasion of forest and common lands, tribals had complex relations with local plains communities and their rulers. These relations were not based uniformly on subordination to plains communities, rather incorporated varying degrees of power and authority over, and autonomy from, plains communities. Such incidences of intrusion have not been recorded by the History writers nor have they documented the kind of resistance by the indigenous

masses. It continues till date and as Veigas (1991) says, in the past few decades there has been a gradual ‘weaning’ away of Adivasis from the forest. Adivasi culture and economy, in addition to being intimately linked with forests, have also a close relationship to land. Hence land was not a private property; it was the common or community belonging (George 2003). Munda (2001: 57) refers it as, the spirit among Adivasis was that the land does not belong to an individual, neither a woman nor a man – its transference by an individual would be counted as illegal as per customary law.

In the wake of these enforced changes of culture and economy, most of the Adivasi communities are faced with a whole spectrum of problems due to the non implementation of land settlement – land alienation being the major one among them. The spectrum of issues faced by the Adivasis, specifically related to the land and forests, cannot have any concrete remedy unless there is a serious intervention. In a nation where thousands are landless and only a few handling the chunk of land and forest resources, the equitable distribution of land seems impossible. Land Ceiling Act has not been properly implemented in India, specifically in Adivasi areas (George 2003).

The gravity of the problems of Adivasi land alienation has again underlined the need for renewed and vigorous efforts to intervene on various fronts in order that Adivasis are not alienated due to the so-called development. This calls for serious measures, legal, administrative and socio-economic to effectively deal with the problems of alienation of Adivasis and protection of their interests and rights in such lands (Saxena 1991).

Analysing the issue of Adivasi land alienation Lourdasamy (2001: 43) says, ‘they (Adivasis) were never a working class community. Classes are groups of people, of which one can appropriate the labour, owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy. So what basically determines the difference between classes is their relationship to the means of production. Based on this analysis of a class society, Adivasis cannot be classified simply as the working class by virtue of them owing some land, which puts them into the category of small farmers and mostly they do not sell their labour power to the bourgeoisie. But recent Adivasi history testifies to the fact that a sizeable number of them are being dispossessed of their land by mega projects (dams, industry, and mines). At the national level, although they are only eight percent of the population, 40 percent of the total displaced is Adivasis. In terms of numbers, out of about two and quarter crore displaced persons since 1950, 85 lakhs are Adivasis, of them only about 30 lakhs have been offered some type of compensation, and the remaining 55 lakhs have been left by the wayside. This is the proletarianisation process taking place through which an indigenous egalitarian and geocentric society is being transformed into an exploited class.

Land settlement cannot be understood in isolation. Whatever the context may be, it needs to address questions such as redistribution of land, decentralised resource control, regeneration of soil and water, freedom to cultivate and produce, food

sovereignty, right to housing, access to work, as well as education and health facilities as high priorities (George 2003). These inter-connecting questions cannot be addressed unless land question is settled and equitable land distribution is realised as today it is by and large related with the production and distribution pattern. The implementation of land reforms has been subverted by the absence of political will, lack of bureaucratic commitment, loopholes in law, caste domination, feudal settings in rural areas, tremendous manipulation by the landed class, lack of organisation among the poor and excessive interference of courts. Therefore the intended benefits to the poor in general and particularly the Dalits and Adivasis failed to materialise. Various studies and reports point the lack of updated land records as yet another reason for the failure of land reforms in all states. In addition to this, tardy implementation of legal measures and legislative initiatives, judicial delay in setting up disputes, inadequacy of the laws and so on had contributed to the disaffirmation of land rights in India (George 2009).

In all way land settlement is an unfinished task and land struggle is an ongoing phenomena. A lot of serious effort needs to be put into this. *De facto* it needs a change and shift in the mindset. No measure could be enforced properly without a cardinal change in the overall attitude of the State and the social system that governs the state. Land reforms broadly conceptualised as a corrective measure to ensure a just and equitable human-land (resource) relationship, implies changes in laws, rules and procedures governing the rights, duties, and liberties of individuals and groups in control as well as utilisation of land. The question of land reforms is also a question of a change in attitude from the predominant one that exists in the present context to a more egalitarian one. In other words it needs a complete social transformation. The task of social transformation in general and land settlement in particular is too important that it cannot be left to the mainstream political parties or even to the caste based social structure (George 2003).

### **3. The Terrains of Mainpat**

Mainpat is a block in Surguja district situated on the top of a hill. This is basically a high land area. It is a terrain of hilly areas, which is 3500 ft. above the sea level, rich with natural and mineral resources. The terrain is surrounded by thick forest of trees such as Sal, Sarai and Tendu. It has an extremely beautiful landscape with unmatched ecosystem and abundance of natural vegetation in the surrounding forests. It is also enlisted as one of the fragile ecosystem with a combination of green canopy, wildlife and human beings that have been living in co-existence. The term Mainpat is assumed to have coined with the joining of two words 'Main' and 'pat,' which means 'a plan area on top of the hill.' Mainpat is assumed to be the land of Majhis – one of the prominent tribes in the hill terrains. The correct term perhaps for this is Manjhi. Manjhi is a synonym of Majhwar. Majhis are found only in parts of Surguja and Raigarh districts, while Majhwars are present in Bilaspur, Surguja and Raigarh districts of Chhattisgarh. Earlier anthropologists have referred the Majhwars to be mixed tribe originated from Gond, Munda and Kanwar (Tiwari 2002: 299).



Several cultural traits of Majhis closely link with that of Oraons. Majhis also have many cultural similarities with Pahari Korvas – one of the primitive tribal groups (PTGs). All these three tribes have many festivals in common, have common nature-based *devi-devtas* (goddesses and gods – also commonly known as deities), life cycle celebrations, drums, songs and dance, food patterns, clothes and dressing methods, ornaments along with its importance and physical features. There are also several linguistic commonalities among the three social groups. The three groups are well versed with *chotanagpuri* (one of the key languages of exchange among Adivasis in Chottanagpur region); however are able to handle their own community languages. To all the three, Hindi is the common mode of communicative language with outsiders. Apart from these three, Kanwar is another important Adivasi group with a sizeable population. In fact they are the second largest Adivasi group behind the Majhis in the Mainpat terrains.

In Mainpat, Majhis are said to be the first inhabitants. Along with the Majhis, it is also assumed that other Adivasis groups have been living in these terrains for several hundreds of years. Apart from the Adivasis, the Yadavs are also a big population in this region. They moved to this land approximately some 100 year ago from parts of Uttar Pradesh. While the Adivasis continue to hold their different languages in some form or other, Yadavs still speak Bhojpuri – making it clear their place of origin.

Mainpat also harbours seven Tibetan refugee camps. This was the first settlement of Tibetans refugees established in 1962 by Indian government in the aftermath of the Chinese annexation of Tibet in 1959. The settlement is popularly known as Phendeyling. The major economic activity is agriculture of which potato is a major staple crop. The land was made available by the then government of Madhya Pradesh and Indian State. Apart from this, they are also engaged in trading, restaurant, shop keeping and seasonal sweater selling.

Since late 1980s, Mainpat came to be known in populist circles for her bauxite deposits, particularly when land was acquired and mining activity began. Over the course of several decades, the terrain had witnessed multiple socio-cultural, political, economic and environmental changes, which have not only challenged the human races but also threatens the wildlife in Mainpat. Today due to excessive mining activity in most of the forest regions in and around, a new pattern of human-animal conflict has arisen. Adivasis who have the historical legacy of living in communion with the wildlife are today the victims of elephants, bears and leopards – that are causing a lot of destruction to human life, habitation and crop. Therefore along with many other conflicts, the question of land acquisition and mining on indigenous land attains importance to understand and study the human-nature conflict, particularly in the context of the fury one could see from wildlife.

#### **4. A brief description of BALCO-Vedanta mining in Mainpat**

Mainpat has been long in discussion for many controversial reasons, particularly with the beginning of mining operations of BALCO in early 1990s. It has been the single largest bauxite mining complex operated by the company since 1993. Situated

nearly 450 kilometres from the capital city Raipur, it is an open-pit bauxite mine located in Surguja district. It is approximately 170 kilometres from BALCO plant in Korba, which is where the bauxite ore from Mainpat is transported to the plant. The Mainpat mine has been active since 1993 with a leased hold area of 6.39 square kilometres. The validity of the lease was for a period of 20 years with effect from July 9, 1992 till July 8, 2012. The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) granted an extraction limit of 750000 tonne per annum (tpa).

Bharat Aluminium Company Limited (BALCO) is an Indian Aluminium company incorporated in the year 1965 as a Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) and remained as a PSU until 2001, when it was taken over by Vedanta Resources plc – a company listed on the London Stock Exchange. Initially when the mining began in Mainpat, neither Panchayat Raj Act (PRA) nor Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act 1996 (PESA) was in existence and therefore there were not much of legal hurdles. People's resistance against land acquisition went unheard as there was hardly any legal protection. Everything was part of the broader definition of national development and even the minimum Constitutional guarantees to the Adivasis were not followed properly. During the 10 years phase of mining in Mainpat both PRA and PESA came into existence – the former in 1993 and the later in 1996. This perhaps turned out to be the biggest hurdle for those who considered mining as a means of development.

Vedanta holds another mining licence in Bodai-Daldali of Kawardha district of Chhattisgarh over an area of 6.3 square kilometres. The Bodai-Daldali mine was commissioned in 2004 with a lease that is valid till March 26, 2017. The approved extraction limit for Bodai-Daldali is 1250000 tpa. This region holds an entirely different story of mineworkers. While the Mainpat's mining site was active, the trucks were loaded and unloaded manually and the bauxite was bulldozed onto an armoured pan feeder conveyor, where it was fed into the crusher.<sup>1</sup>

When I visited Mainpat in 2006, around thirty Adivasi workers were working, unhelmeted, clad in shirts and saris under a blazing sun, as the lateritic overburden was blasted. Some were from local area and some from outside. While I was still interacting with them, they moved in with a few iron pikes and hammers, to break and sort the ore before loading it by hand onto waiting trucks. Virtually all Vedanta's bauxite miners are contract labourers (George 2010). Prior to this Moody (2006)<sup>2</sup> notes that 'those we met at Mainpat informed us that, on a good day they can earn just over 60 rupees (less for women), for delivering one ton of ore. In Daldali it is different story since the rates are different for different group of people. Those who could bargain better rates get better and those who could not bargain it are the losers

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<sup>1</sup> Accessed from <https://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/1370431/000119312512248960/d355568d20f.htm> on December 10, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Moody visited Mainpat in 2005.

in this game. For instance, the Baigas could not bargain to the extent of the Gonds.' Whatever is the extent of bargain, it would not be more than 60 rupees per person per day.'

In Mainpat, the habitations of mine workers were small thatched hovels, perched over the quarry, deprived of electricity and adequate water. *'There's only one hand pump to serve 150 families,'* a young Adivasi woman worker spoke. *'The company provides no medical facilities and if someone's injured we have to take them ourselves by taxi down to the plains,'* informed another worker. Villagers at another, slightly better off settlement close by, complained that, day and night, the silica laden dust from the mining blew into their windows, covering walls and floors (Moody 2006).

Since the commencement of mining operations, Mainpat produced approximately 7.2 million tons of bauxite, with a production totalling approximately 620193 tons at 43.9 percent aluminium oxide in the fiscal year 2012.<sup>3</sup> Clearly these operations have extensively flouted land acquisition, environmental and labour regulations and standards, which have in the past and could in the future, caused significant costs or liabilities on the people. According to the reports of Vedanta, the power for mining operations was supplied by small on-site diesel generators, while water requirements were accessed through boreholes at the mine site.<sup>4</sup> This has depleted the water level and contaminated the quality of ground water. In a 2006 survey of Kudaridih village alone (George 2010: 81-99), out of 96 respondents, 91 opined that the water has become tasteless, 90 observed a change in colour, 91 complained about sedimentation of dust particles in water and 91 agreed in the decrease in water level.

In March 2012 while the Vedanta was still waiting for the renewal of mining lease, it estimated the bauxite reserves at Mainpat to be around 3.3 million tons. Based on the then and anticipated production quantity, it was assumed that mining operation will continue to operate for approximately 4-5 years. In Mainpat the ore was manually sorted and sized. Similarly in March 2012, the company estimated reserves of 3.7 million tons at Bodai-Daldali. Based on the then production and anticipated production, the company expected the mining operation will continue to till 2015. The metallurgical recovery factor for bauxite at both Mainpat and Bodai-Daldali is 65 percent.<sup>5</sup>

A cut-off grade of 44 percent alumina was used to define the reserves at the mines, as this cut-off limit was primarily fixed by Indian Bureau of Mines (IBM) for reserve estimation for the metallurgical use of bauxite. The reserves at Mainpat and Bodai-

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<sup>3</sup> Accessed from <https://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/1370431/000119312512248960/d355568d2of.htm> on December 10, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Daldali have been determined by verifying that the integrated operation is economic at an aluminium price of \$ 2146 per ton. In Mainpat the mining operations were shut down since 2012 due to want of environmental clearance. The company applied for the renewal of the mining lease which was initially rejected by the MoEF, but later in 2015 it got cleared. Thus a fresh process of land acquisition was the compulsion. This is the context under which the public hearing was mandatory not just due to environmental regulations, but at large due to the existence of PESA and FRA.<sup>6</sup> While PESA compels the government to consult with the gram sabha, under FRA the government has to oblige to take the consensus of the affected citizens.

### **5. Appropriation of Land by BALCO: Early Experiences**

Bauxite deposits in and around Mainpat have been mostly found in six villages namely Sapnadar, Kamleshwarpur, Kudaridih, Kesra, Barma and Pathrai. My interaction with the people in Mainpat has been primarily in the context of Bauxite mines by Vedanta Resources, formerly the BALCO. Here I have been consistently studying the impact of mining on communities for nearly a period of two decades. As in many other mining areas, land settlement has not been done in Mainpat too. I came across many Adivasis and Dalits who have been landless. Every new round of my visit exposed a new set of landless people. Here, at present the major landholders are the Yadavs, who had come from outside. It is said that there was once a time when it was only the Adivasis who inhabited the entire hill range. Over the course of time, the population of Yadav have swollen in the hill range. This shifting dynamics have also changed many socio-cultural, economic and political equations.

The acquisition of land happened here before the settlement of land question and landlessness, particularly that of the Adivasi communities and more specifically the primitive tribal groups (PTGs). Interestingly, I could not find a single Adivasi or Dalit who has been benefitted by the land settlement in Mainpat region, drawing the conclusion that land settlement was never done in this region. However the number of landless people would make a long list. Dalits in this area have been more a temporary group due to several socio-cultural reasons and therefore any scope of land settlement is more than impossible. Many landed Adivasis turned landless once the mining activity began. I observed landlessness in all the eight villages. Bhimsaria Majhi says, *'the question of landlessness existed even during the pre-mining phase too.'* This challenges the very notion of land reforms in the pre-mining phase and the idea of development.

However land alienation in the mining phase turned more crucial. Kamal Bhagat of Sapnadar says, *'in our village when BALCO came the first time, there were not much idea of what a mining company would offer the people. We all felt that it would add to our existing livelihoods and earnings. Predominantly we assumed that the*

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<sup>6</sup> The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 is commonly known as Forest Rights Act or FRA in short.

*company would provide permanent employment to all of us. Even the company people promised us that. That's why a large number of people welcomed BALCO. A fake dream of glory and development roved across. We did not think much of what people in other mining areas have faced? Nor did we attempt to go and get a firsthand experience of other mining area. People did not think much and they agreed to give their land. While acquiring the land, the company made many promises such as permanent employment to one member of every family, electrification of village, clean and safe drinking water facility, irrigation water for agriculture, English medium schools for children, technical and vocational training institute for youths (both educated and uneducated ones), science and arts college, super speciality hospital, greenbelt, plantation, regeneration of water sources, maintaining international environmental standards, etc. The company made a point that land would be filled back once the bauxite extraction is over and it would be handed over to the original owner. The truth we had faced in Sapnadar is just opposite.'* In Sapnadar one could easily observe what is left is the set of people with broken promises. Based on this we could derive that consent was fabricated on the grounds of some fake promises.

Bhimsaria Majhi narrates another important aspects how the company deceived people. He mentioned that people did not want to give their land. The company took the land forcefully. *'Of course there were lot of allurements of money and employment, but more than that the company took the land from the people in a forceful manner. Many people were forced to sign the consent without allowing them to raise any question. Some people did not succumb to any pressure or force. Without any further question or notice or action, the company forcefully occupied such land. Another aspect was the common land that comes within the ambit of the Panchayat. It was just taken away without any discussion with the village people. The Tehsildrar, BDO and Patwari just pressurised and took it all,'* noted Bhimsaria.

In the previous round of land grabbing, the commons were taken without the permission of the people, which was not limited to Sapnadar alone. Forcefully grabbing commons and private land has been part of the reality in all mining villages of Mainpat. In some cases people came to know about land acquisition only after their land was demarcated. No notification or consent or permission over the land was sought from the land owner. Nor did the revenue department notify them legally. For example the land of the Paikra brothers from village Kudaridih was mined without any notification or permission or land purchase deed. Similarly in Kesra, the many Majhis' land was forcefully taken over and mined.

Interestingly not a single household in the eight mining village of Mainpat were eligible for rehabilitation or resettlement as per the government rules. The reasons seem to be obvious as none were defined as *'visthapit'* in the classical sense, which naturally disqualified them from the rehabilitation or resettlement package. The definition of displaced is so narrow that only those who lose their residential space would be counted as eligible persons as per the resettlement and rehabilitation policy. Most of them lost their cultivable land and apparently they were at the most

entitled for compensation. Accordingly their land was rated for compensation amount. The story of compensation has been different for different set of people.

Duklu Majhi and his four brothers from Kesra lost 10 acres of land. When land was acquired, the land was undivided among the brothers as in legal documents it was in their father's name. He would have got two acres of land as his share same as his four brothers. Ironically, he has no idea when he gave his consent, laughs off Duklu. As part of the compensation package, he received an amount of Rs. 10000/-. Later he came to know that there is an amount of Rs. 170000/- sanctioned against his land. When he enquired with the Tehsildar, to his surprise, the money was already given to him as per the official records. Duklu remained clueless. He came back to the village and checked with the Sarpanch and Up-sarpanch, who gave no information. Later he realised that the money has been devoured by the Up-sarpanch Yadav. Duklu today in his mid-60s is homeless. His children are no more with him nor are they willing to take his responsibility. There are several Duklus with similar stories who have not yet been identified. This has turned out to be the fate of many Adivasis in Mainpat.

Kapil Ram Baghel of Kudaridih says that *'earlier when the BALCO company came, they took away the land very deceitfully as people were not willing to give land. They even forged the documents and we remained in no position even to speak about it. I have been a teacher and it was difficult for me to speak against the government. People succumbed to different pressure tactics. Even gram sabha meeting resolutions were different from what the village people have proposed. The objection against mining on our land was not considered even as a resolution.'* Kudaridih certainly being the centre of the anti-mining agitation faced real threats from many sides. The gram sabha resolution against mining was dismissed by the officials. Later another resolution was drafted. People were asked to sign the register. In the matter of the redrafted resolution, the fact is that the gram sabha was not held. The register was circulated in the village, where people were asked to sign it. Many times, this turns out to be a common method in the village. Due to many types of work pressure (or even daily wage), people are not able attend the gram sabha meetings. Information about the gram sabha meetings are not provided in advance. Only a day before it is conducted, the village messenger announces it. Hence mostly people are unable to attend it due to their own economic pressures. Thus the same messenger carries the register from house to house in the village to get the signature of the eligible members. Sometimes the register with minutes and resolutions is circulated under the pretext of 'providing information' about the gram sabha meetings.

Blacius Tigga a former resident of Sapnadar village says, *'everything in the mining world have been based on many lies created by the government and company. The people are compelled to believe what the government says is correct. There is no truth in any mining deals in Mainpat. Anyone who opposes would be targeted in multiple ways. This is what they call it as development, while Adivasis keep losing their land, forests, water and other resources.'* Thus the earlier round of consent for mining was in fact strategically and systematically fabricated through spreading fear

tactics, allurements, forceful takeover of land, forcefully mining the land, forcing people to give their consent, entangling the Adivasis in fake cases, forfeiting the forest laws, spreading lies, giving fake promises of permanent employment for every household and surpassing the legal provisions under PRA and PESA or a combination of these. Thus the notion of decentralised planning and decision making in the panchayat through PESA has turned out to be only a fake reality. People's role in decision making through planning and development in mining area is dismissed thoroughly even within the ambit of Fifth Schedule area of Mainpat.

### **6. *Jansunwai*, before and after – Flouting Laws, Dismissing Dissent and Manufacturing Consent**

On April 2, 2017 a public hearing was held in Kesra village, which was notified in advance through the newspapers. People from all the six affected villages Kesra, Kudaridih, Sapnadar, Barima, Pathrai and Kamleswarpur assembled on the morning of April 2. The proceedings were held in view of the environmental concerns to get a public review for the proposed increase in bauxite production from 750000 tpa to 2.25 million mtpa. People turned out in large number – more than 2000 – leaving behind their work and assembled to express their opinion.

In the *jansunwai*, equal number of people from neighbouring villages and far away towns like Ambikapur, Sitapur, Lakhanpur and Udaypur were also present. Most of the ones from outside were there for a stage managed show of support to the Vedanta and therefore were transported by *dalals*.<sup>7</sup> Apart from transportation, lunch, snacks, tea and mineral water was arranged for the company transported ones' at the *jansunwai* site. On the return every person was provided the days wage along with a bottle of country made liquor. The company did a lot of preparations in this context from bribing to alluring to cajoling to showing fraud dreams and making fake promises.

According to local residents, from at least a week ahead of the public hearing, Vedanta officials and *dalals* were busy to bribe, allure and apply pressure tactics. Suraj Baghel of Kudaridih says, '*raat bhar company ke dalal log gadi dauda rahe the. Gadi me paisa bhar bhar ke logo ke ghar jake raat ko utha ke paisa baat rahe the.*' (With money on vehicles, the company's *dalals* roared village streets the entire night. They went from house to house in the night, woke the sleeping ones and distributed money.) Bhagat of Sapnadar makes a similar comment, '*Mujhe bhi bola tha ki 10 gadi arrange kar lo. Sara kharcha pani utha lenge. Par maine saaf mana kardiya.*' (I was also asked to arrange 10 vehicles. All expenditure would be taken care. But I said a big No!) This is certainly not a story being created by the people of the village; rather I have witnessed the sense of fear that loomed around in the village during the period of *jansunwai*.

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<sup>7</sup> The literal meaning of *dalals* is a tout or middlemen. Here in this case they are mostly the ones who function as the agent of rich, the dominant political force and upper caste sections.

Almost two months prior to the day of the public hearing, the company managed to win the support from one of the key villages in the mining zone. That is Kesra. They were able to win over the Sarpanch and Upsarpanch through some fictitious promises in the village. For some unknown reasons they had an understanding which stroke a cord through a village meeting in February 2017. In the previous round of mining, Kesra received the poorest compensation packages alongside Adivasis being deceived by dominant castes. The village meeting was organised to give consent to the Vedanta in writing; however it was not an officially conducted gram sabha. The company in connivance with the block level government officials had tried to convert it into a gram sabha meeting and perhaps this may go down the records as a special gram sabha with a resolution in favour of the company. In fact it was not a gram sabha at all. No mandatory procedures were followed to convene a special gram sabha.

Over the course of years the gram sabha has become a customary ritual in this area. Most of the steps required to be essentially followed for such an official engagement are often forfeited. Rules and regulations are mostly flouted. According to PESA, it is assumed that the agenda is to be fixed by the gram panchayat for a gram sabha meeting. In dire contrast to the spirit of PESA, the agenda is fixed by higher authorities. The gram sabha seems to be limited as an implementation agency to enforce the agenda fixed from above. Even when people try to bring in their concerns into the agenda, they are told by officials that it does not fit into the framework of PESA. It is dismissed without any discussion even.

As per the rule, notification of the gram sabha meeting should be given at least 7 days in advance. The notification should be announced through publishing it on the gram panchayat notice board and in all the associate villages and hamlets. The notice should be pasted at all public places like walls of the panchayat office, community recreation centres, community health centres, roadsides, schools, shops and the important junctions in the village. Important personnel in the village should be informed in person. Finally the village messenger should announce it in all the villages and *padas*.<sup>8</sup> What often happens is that all the stages involved are dismissed and only the last stage of announcement by village messenger is done. This is often done a day before or sometimes on the same day and by then people fix their day's schedule. They would be at work at the scheduled time slotted for the gram sabha meeting.

The gram sabha meeting becomes official only when a minimum of 20 percent of the total registered voters are present. Every state has a different set of rules of quorum. There is a separate quorum for women, which is the one-third of the general quorum. Only then the gram sabha proceedings could be officiated. None of these are taken care in any of gram sabha meetings. Since the meetings are convened without prior

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<sup>8</sup> Pada is the settlements within a village where people belonging to differing communities reside.



information, people find it difficult to leave their work and attend the gram sabha proceedings. The earlier zest and clout built around PESA has completely disappeared due to gram sabha's inability to take up common Adivasi issues; the masses have lost their interest in gram sabha meetings too.

For at least the last one decade the gram sabha meetings are not happening in real terms. The elected representatives and some of the dominant sections in the village together do the essential format filling and make the resolutions according to their whims and fancies. The attendance register is later circulated among the households for obtaining signatures from the registered voters. This has become the common practise to complete the legalities of the gram sabha as a custom. In the past, many such resolutions were drafted (read framed) against the people. In a similar fashion many resolutions have been fabricated in favour of Vedanta Resources in Mainpat region. Kesra was not void of any such deals with the company. Since the MoEF refused to provide the environmental clearance to Vedanta, the company have been consistently eyeing on all possible measures to rope the Adivasis in their favour. Such efforts have been met with strong responses from many quarters of Adivasis. Nevertheless, Kesra had fallen to the trap.

The environmental regulations says that once the questions pertaining to mining license is clarified, the MoEF provides the permission to go ahead with the process, until that anything that the company does would not be valid. Since the current grant of permission for license was a fresh one, it required a fresh process too. This means that the earlier pretensions and prepositions of land acquisition will not fit into old format, it needs a fresh restart. The company has to go ahead and conduct a fresh Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and share the report with the panchayats. The report should also be available in public domain for comments, inputs and legal action if any. As per the rules, it is mandatory to share the full EIA report and a translated version of the executive summary in corresponding local language. Based on this each panchayat will initiate a process to discuss and list out the impacts that individual household would have to face at large. Followed by this, the district collector in consultation with the State Pollution Control Board should call for a public hearing.

Interestingly the EIA report was not provided to any of the panchayats. When enquired about the EIA report Jansai Majhi, the Sarpanch of Barima panchayat just wondered what it was all about. *'Aap kya bol rahe hai, ya konse report ke bare me pooch rahe hai, ye mujhe samajh nahi aa raha.'* (I am unable to understand what you are talking about or which report are you referring to!) Baratu Majhi the husband of the current Sarpanch<sup>9</sup> says, *'I do not know. No such report was ever shared. In fact I am not even aware of any such study about the impact on*

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<sup>9</sup> It is to be noted that in almost all the panchayats of Chhattisgarh, despite having a women reservation – whether in non-Scheduled or Scheduled Areas – all official proceedings are led by men.

*environment either.*' Phulkuwar Majhi, Sarpanch of Kudaridih and Lalsai Majhi, the Sarpanch of Sapnadar also hummed the same note.

I went ahead with an internet search to find the EIA report of Mainpat mines, the company conducted after the lease was granted. To my surprise, I could only find the English and Hindi executive summary of a 2012 EIA report. Since it was an executive summary of EIA conducted in 2012, I checked with one of the former Sarpanchs if that report was shared. Sohan Majhi the former Sarpanch of Kesra says, '*though we have given some sort of consent to the company for mining, no such report was ever shared with us by the company. Had they shared we would have not simply given them the consent to mine our village.*' Whatever key words I searched with to find the full report was just a waste of time and energy. No such report could be found in the public domain for people to comment or discuss on. Without providing the full report as well as the executive summary in Hindi, the company went ahead to call for the *jansunwai*.

I also came to know that a meeting of the Sarpanchs from all the affected villages were called a few days ahead of the *jansunwai* by some government officials. This was intended to construct a favourable atmosphere in the panchayats for the Vedanta. For all possible reasonable reasons, this was a direct threat to the Sarpanchs in an indirect manner. Individuals working in any of the government departments were unofficially warned not to indulge in any matter related with Vedanta's mining project. Thus many of those with strong dissent, permanently or temporarily employed in some government department or offices, were not able to speak. In fact they were not allowed to speak due to the pressure tactics of the State agency. It is to be noted that an individual in any village is free to speak about his problems, whether he works with any government department or not. For him it is to speak about his domestic problems. Some in the village even feared about dire consequences like implicating in fake Maoist cases. The proposed mine is not leased to BALCO, which was a PSU; rather it is to Vedanta Resources, a private sector company. Altogether in the days preceding public hearing a combination of rumours, blood-coated fear, pressure tactics, horse-trading and bribery was applied to operationalise and overpower Adivasis through suppressing dissent and flouting various legal regulations – eventually leading to the construct of 'Consensus' for the project.

Yet hundred dared to attend the *jansunwai* with the determination of the slogan '*BALCO<sup>10</sup> bhagao – Mainpat bachao*' (Drive off BALCO – Save Mainpat). The mine labourers from outside the villages were also present in the public hearing. They also queued up to speak their minds in favour of the company. Apparently all of them were directly transported, fed and advance tutored by the company. Their argument

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<sup>10</sup> As a matter of fact the local villages are yet not aware of the fact that it is not BALCO but Vedanta. They still believe that the mining operations in Mainpat region is conducted by the government in the name of BALCO.

was that if the company would not remain how would they survive and where would they find work! This argument certainly is valid from the perspective of workers; however the hearing was to listen to the environmental impacts of mining.

The *dalals* were one of the most active players in this game. They also came with people from outside affected area, but these ones were poorly tutored. This set of outside just said that support the company, whatsoever without any concrete reasoning. Another set that remained active were the members of the political parties. Leaders of both BJP and Congress played a neutral-appearing role that was honestly never neutral. *De facto* it poured in as the natural support for the company as if the existence of the company is primarily responsible for the development stretch in Mainpat. These leaders – from both local as well as district level and were mostly invited to speak in the *jansunwai* – duped the Adivasis masses by clearing their point in favour of the company. They said you cannot drive off the company; rather we should make sure that all the promises made by the company are fulfilled. The company should provide facilities like schools, colleges and super speciality hospitals, along with controlling air pollution and water contamination, said every single political party leader. It is to be reminded that Mainpat at one point of time has remained a stranglehold of Communist Trade Union movements of which most of the leaders shifted to BJP and Congress. Turing a mockery of the *jansunwai*, some of the ones from outside also brought their children to speak in English. These children appeared to have mugged up what they had to speak, ‘*we want BALCO here but the crusher machine and pollution is bad, and hence please control it.*’

One set of people such as contractors, businessmen, truck owners and earthmover owners spoke of big roads, development of tourism, and construction of resort as the development indicators of Mainpat. They said, if in the previous round these much have been developed then this round may turn Mainpat into a real heaven. Perhaps they are the ones to reap maximum benefit from mining project. The *jansunwai* was moderated by the Upsarpanch of Kesra. Some of my key informants pointed him as the main *dalal* in Kesra, the company has put their money on. Here his stage management needs a mention too. Whenever a bunch of people from ‘affected villages’ come and speak one after another, he would either give the microphone to someone who is standing much behind whom he knows would support the company or else invite a prominent political leader to speak for the company. He smartly manoeuvred the neutralisation strategy with diametrically opposite shift of the current. Perhaps, he was well trained for the task.

Rajnesh Pandey a local leader of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a family member of Congress Party state leader T. S. Singhdeo, former and sitting Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) and Tinu Singh a former contractor with Vedanta were the key persons who influenced the *jansunwai* proceedings within and outside the school premises. Importantly, all of them spoke an equivocal language – the language of the ruling class. Each one of them began with a point that they stand with the people of Mainpat, but went on to eulogise the company for the kind of development it brought in Mainpat. The final advice to the Adivasis from them was equivocal in this form.

*‘Kuch pane ke liye, kuch khona padta hai’* (to get something [better], one should be prepared to lose something). ‘However it is important that the company spends “more” for security and support activity,’ they continued.

The political party, *dalals* (inside and outside), and company set the tone aright for a favourable atmosphere for the Vedanta. The air was filled with a clear divide between the Adivasis and the non-Adivasi, particularly the Yadavs – one among the OBC section. Most of these Yadavs supported the Vedanta except the ones from Barima and Kudaridih. The Yadav’s community panchayat in that area convened a meeting of its leaders to favour the company. A member of the medical team that was set up for the public hearing narrated his observation on the condition of anonymity. *‘I have been sitting since 8 am and it is 8 pm now. 80 percent of Adivasis are against the company while 70 percent of Yadavs are in favour of the company.’* The next day some media reported it to have received mixed response (Das 2017) while others focussed on non-related issues. Broadly the national media has been in support of the Vedanta, while a few local media gave a balanced report.

### **7. The impact of Adivasi Land Acquisition**

The forging of Adivasi consensus in the context of development projects certainly leads to land alienation and depeasantisation. The problem of land alienation in Adivasi areas is not a mere structuralist-legalist problem, but it is deeply connected to the phenomenon of contradictions related to the existing socio-economic disparity. On one hand mining is counted as a means of development, while on the other it aggravates the already existing socio-economic and cultural divisions in a village. The separation of land from Adivasi communities can be understood in a more scientific manner with the help of the theoretical formulation of the concept of alienation. Alienation is inherent in exploitative relations of production and its nature varies with that of exploitation. Hence it also differs among societies based on slavery and serfdom (Rupavath 2009: 4).

Land acquisition is the eventual consequences of all forms of industrial projects, particularly that of Adivasi. Adivasi identity and alienation from land and resources is a major problem across the mining zones of India. Land being the mainstay of culture, identity and livelihood, almost 90 percent of Adivasis depend upon it for their living and are closely attached in an intense emotional manner. Alienation from land and landlessness has increased among the Adivasis during the last three decade particularly in the name of development projects. Several socio-economic surveys reveal that Adivasi land alienation is becoming more intense. The main cause of land alienation and landlessness is land acquisition for industrial and other development projects (George 2015: 88).

Though the history of land alienation began with the code of Manu, the current phase of systemic alienation among Adivasis began during British. The colonial state interfered in the Adivasi region with the objective of exploiting natural resources, where the British faced severe resistance. Prior to this, Adivasis lands were occupied by both Hindu and Muslim rulers and they were controlled by Zamindars against

which the Adivasis fought several battles. Of late the moneylenders and traders engaged with Adivasis land by advancing them loans against land mortgage. Over a phased out period, these mortgaged land went into the hands of traders and moneylender. Opening of mines and few factories in the heartland of Adivasi habitat provided wage labour as well as opportunities for factory employment, but this brought increasing destitution and displacement.

Forestland and its resources have been the chief means of livelihood for the Adivasis, which included agriculture, food gathering, fuel collection, raw materials collection, hunting and development of local herbal medicines. After the British came to power, the forest policy of government was more inclined towards commercial considerations rather than human utility. Some forest areas were declared reserved, where only authorised contractors were allowed to cut the timber and the forest-dwellers were kept isolated. The expansion of railway in India heavily devastated the forest resources in India. The government demarked forest zones as 'reserved' especially the ones with rich teak, Sal and deodar forests for the manufacture of railway sleepers and consequently blocked the entry of Adivasis into forestlands. British also introduced several criminal, civil and commercial laws to consolidate the hold over people and landmass. The establishment of police, revenue, and forests departments along with stringent laws paved the way to legally acquire land and forest and flush off the Adivasis. In 1894 the Land Acquisition Act came up with the American principle of eminent domain into India (Neelakantan 2007: 342).

If the pre-independence phase was indented at the consolidation of British domain in Adivasi areas, the post-independence phase tells the story of forceful eviction from their land. The phase of industrialisation under planned development was perhaps the systemic phase of land alienation of Adivasis in modern India. According to Padel and Das (2011), 'approximately 20 million tribal people have been displaced in the name of development since independence.'

Nithya (2013) mentions the fast growing urbanisation, establishment of industries, lack of land records, administrative inefficiency, poor economic conditions, non-possession of land, legal entanglement, delay in getting judgement, fear of police and administration, unprofessional counsel for the Adivasis, oral mortgage, indebtedness and drinking habit as the reasons of tribal land alienation. Depeasantisation, displacement, exploitation, increased poverty, fear, insecurity, lack of employment, migration, extremism, Maoism, security issues, militarisation, law and order problem, direct and indirect beggary and prostitution are the major outcomes of land alienation.

Negi and Ganguly (2011) indicate that the Adivasi displacement is relatively much higher than many other social groups. Available reports suggest that due to development projects in India more than 21 million people are internally displaced populations (IDPs). Although Adivasis only make eight percent of the total population, they constitute more than 40 percent of the development induced displaced population in India. The difficulties faced by IDPs are numerous but distinct. Though not entirely, yet a large number of conflicts are related with land

alienation in the Adivasi zone of Chhattisgarh. The resources in the state has remained as an apple in the eye of the corporate houses for long due the heavy deposits of minerals and rich bio-diverse forest ecosystem. In places like Bastar, while the entire anti-Maoist operations and state sponsored vigilante group 'Salwa Judum'<sup>11</sup> is been carried on, in the same region Adivasi land was being transformed into industrial land without much of hue and cry (George 2015B). Thus manufacturing consent leads to alienation, and alienation leads to depeasantisation and it has the potential not only to dispossess people off their base and culture, but also to give birth to armed struggle and multiple military like conflicts.

### **8. The Socio-Ethnic Polity of Adivasi Depeasantisation**

In rural Chhattisgarh land is the lone sources of livelihood for both the landed class and landless mass. All economic activity related to land are based on cultivation and crop production. When land is taken for mining or any development project, apparently it is a denial of access to land and cultivation, which is the process of land alienation. Land alienation need not happen only with displacement, it could be exercised with the potentiality to completely dismantle people's dependency on land, forest and related sources for their life. Both alienation from land due to displacement and dismantled dependency are integral part of life in any mining plazas. In either case, it leads to a definite state of depeasantisation. In the last two decade, as an integral part of globalisation liberalisation policies large area of land has been taken away from the people for various purposes – mega industries being the major one. While land acquisition has been a major issue of concern to the Adivasi population, the corporates views the opposition to land acquisition as the biggest challenge. To the industries – most of them being private including both national as well as international – it is a means of multiplying capital and market. This bridge between alienation and acquisition evades and blocks cultural practises of engagement with the land and forest ecosystem. Depeasantisation therefore, involves the erosion of peasant practices and the substitution of community rationality of cultivation and agriculture with market logic of agri-business and farmhouse culture.

Vanhaute (2010) says that the survival and persistence of peasantries in a globalising and ever more commodified world have been puzzling social scientists for a long time now. The very notion of peasants and peasantries confronts us more than anything else with the flaws of traditional/mainstream economic development theory. The understanding of old and new 'agrarian questions' asks for new historical knowledge about the role of peasantries within the long-term transformations in the capitalist world-system. Represented as the expulsion of small producers from the land, it is a

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<sup>11</sup> The idea of Salwa Judum keeps on popping up back and forth in different forms. While the Salwa Judum was officially disbanded after the intervention of the Supreme Court, new forms of vigilante groups were forms. The government of Chhattisgarh converted the Salwa Judum into Special Police Officer (SPO) under a different act just one day before the Supreme Court ordered against it.

premise of theories of capitalist modernity. Both liberal and Marxist narratives of development view depeasantisation as a precondition for liberal democracy or collective socialism, respectively. Peasantries are considered obstacles to change given the modern view of 'tradition' as pre-social, and given an assumed resistance to technological change (McMichael 2012).

Modernisation trajectories follow the rise of urbane, industrial orders, and the relocation of peasants into the urban proletariat as industrial production systems expand. Such expansion involves the global elaboration of factory systems, post-industrial service sectors, and industrialisation of food systems from farming to retailing. Agro-industrialisation and agro-exporting have been decisive in displacing peasants in Southern agrarian societies by the organised dumping of cheapened Northern food surpluses via World Trade Organisation's (WTO) liberalisation rules, and land-grabbing for agro-exporting and industrial biofuels to supply distant consumer markets. At the same time, rural-urban migration has proceeded apace, as rural conditions have deteriorated, urban jobs have outpaced rural employment, and farming and farm-work have been devalued in a modern market context (McMichael 2012).

The Adivasi situation in Chhattisgarh is not exactly for agri-industry, rather it is mostly the industrial mining that has displaced or caused land alienation. Most of these people's standard of living has fallen drastically. The main culprits are big dams and mining/metal projects that dispossess tribal lands, flooding them or turning them into wastelands, and converting skilled cultivators into 'unskilled labour' (Padel 2015: 16). When tribal people and other small-scale cultivators are thrown off their land, this is often justified by economic reasoning: they are 'only doing subsistence farming', which is 'uneconomic'. But Adivasi economics is based on ecological principles (Padel, Dandekar and Unni 2013). Mainstream economists understand hardly anything about this, or about the ecosystems on which life on earth depends (Padel 2015: 15).

A sizeable part of land alienation and depeasantisation happened in mining areas of Chhattisgarh. Sarguja, Raigarh and Bilaspur districts are the coal zones in Chhattisgarh. It is estimated that more than 72 thousand acres of land have been leased out to SECL for coal mining, by which hundreds of villages have already been affected. Bastar and Durg districts have some of the rare quality of steel in the world. As per earlier estimates, nearly 20 thousand acres of land have been occupied for mining steel in Bailadeela and Dalli Rajhara areas of these districts (Neeti Marg 2000: 14). Steel from here is even exported to various countries and also to other parts of the nation.

Heavy deposits of limestone are found in Chhattisgarh region. In an area of three districts itself, i.e. Raipur, Durg and Bilaspur, there are 10 big cement factories of all big industrial houses and with many more small ones and its auxiliary units. Most of these have been established in the last 20-23 years. Lafarge a French MNC owns two of the cement factories which it took over from Raymond Cements and Tata. Huge diamond deposits in Devbhog (Raipur) and Bastar are taken over by MNCs like Rio

Tinto, De Beers and Vijay Kumar & Company. Here again the story of the Adivasi on whose land the diamond was found is simply pathetic. This irretrievable loss of land leads such regions to more and more poverty, pauperisation, and at large increases social and political disparity (George 2010: 101-2).

An overwhelming majority of the Adivasis are agriculturists. Apparently there are a few Adivasis nomadic by history, culture, character and nature. The settled groups owe land for centuries without any external intervention, mostly in forest areas and fringes. Their entire life process was centred and built upon two major means of production namely the forest and the land. To understand the dynamics of land issue in totality, one needs to understand the logic underlying the forces that govern its ownership pattern. The specific economic form in which unpaid surplus labour is pumped out of the direct producers, determines the relation of the rulers and the ruled. Hence land problem of a particular area has to be understood from its historical perspective (George 2010: 102).

Historical evidences are ample to prove the conception of depeasantisation as the net result of uneven structural changes that have taken place from time to time due to the commoditisation of the Adivasi economy in which land plays a critical and predominant role. This is what has and is happening to the Adivasi areas in Chhattisgarh.

In Bodai-Daldali of Kabirdham district, which again is another of the mine field of Vedanta, in typical fashion, Baiga inhabitants from the first of four Adivasi settlements in the project's pathway have been ejected from their homes, without due legal process, and dumped on the plains in the heart of a non Adivasi community. They had to leave behind their standing crops. This is where mellows like Baiga – traditionally a nomadic group practicing shifting cultivation – which has recently moved towards settled cultivation – has been thrown off the windows for the sake of corporate (Moody 2006: 10).

In Mainpat the land loss has been not only created a state of depeasantisation but at large it has ruptured the socio-cultural community life, social organisation, nature-centric economic structure, balance of culture and nature – which the community has evolved over thousands of years. People have also lost their faith in State and its democratic systems. In a nutshell land alienation and depeasantisation are interconnected and inter-exchangeable aspects, which in itself is a gross violation of human rights of Adivasi people not only in Mainpat but at large across the length and breadth of the state. It has changed the socio-cultural, economic and political dynamics of the community itself.

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