

Questioning the Dominant Development Model: Local Assertions in Eastern India

Ambuja Kumar Tripathy*

Department of Political Science, University of Delhi, India

***Corresponding author:** Ambuja Kumar Tripathy, Department of Political Science,
University of Delhi, India, E-mail: ambujatripathy@gmail.com

Opinion

Volume 1 Issue 1

Received Date: June 18, 2018

Published Date: June 27, 2018

The rich stock of mineral resources of the state of Odisha in the Eastern part of India has attracted the attention of global capital for large-scale mining and establishment of mineral-based industries. Large multinational corporations are showing interest to establish steel and aluminum plants in Odisha. The government of Odisha has already signed more than 40 MOUs (Memorandum of Understandings) to produce about 58 MTPA steel. Further, since Odisha has a huge bauxite deposit that is 49.74 per cent of the country's deposit the state government is trying to lease out the bauxite mines to various companies to establish Aluminium industries in the state. The agreement signed between the Odisha Mining Corporation (OMC) and the Utkal Alumina Limited (UAL) to set up an Alumina project in Rayagada district is one major example. Projects by Vedanta Alumina Limited and others are also lined up.

However, in the recent times a new trend has emerged in the process of development in many parts of the country including Odisha, which poses a serious threat to this process of land acquisition for industrialization. As per the provisions of Land Acquisition Act, 1894 (Central Act) the government is empowered to acquire any land, which is not the property of government and which is required for public purpose or under the special circumstances described in Part-VII of the act, for a company. In Odisha, the state-owned IDCO (Odisha Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation) is the nodal agency for identifying and acquiring land both from government and private parties at strategic locations. The land so acquired is allotted for industrial as well as infrastructure projects. The local people resist the land acquisition efforts raising a host of questions since they affect adversely their lives. This has led to closure of the

mining units in a few cases. It not only involves colossal loss and premature closure of the industrial units but also generates a good deal of social tension and political turmoil.

The mining of bauxite in Odisha has given rise to several mass movements in the past as well. In the eighties of the twentieth century, a strong movement of the local people completely stalled the mining activities of the Bharat Aluminum Company (BALCO), a Government of India undertaking with foreign technical collaboration. The BALCO initiated officially its mining work in 1983 that was scheduled to be completed by April, 1985. The project came to a halt due to mass based agitations of the local people, mostly tribal's despite the fact that the BALCO claimed to have invested Rs. 30 crore on the project. The people have raised a number of significant questions relating to their displacement. The proposed steel project of the Tata Iron and Steel Company (TISCO) at Gopalpur in southern Odisha, which involved acquisition of 3500 acres of land, and displacement of over 2000 people in the late nineties, met the same fate. It appears history is being repeated now.

Niyamgiri movement is an instance of local resistance in contemporary Odisha. It is located in the most backward KBK (undivided Koraput- Bolangir- Kalahandi) region of Odisha. Niyamgiri movement has a unique character in the sense that the movement is not only about the economic and ecological issues but also about the religious and customary issues as it involves a tribal group described by the Government of India as particularly vulnerable tribal group' (PVTG) - Dongria Kondh. The problems in Niyamgiri began following the signing of a MoU in 1997 between the Government of

Odisha and Sterlite Industries (India) Limited, a subsidiary of Vedanta company. The MoU was signed for establishing a bauxite mine on the plateau atop Niyamgiri mountain- home to Dongria Kondh, as well as an associated alumina refinery plant near the town of Lanjigarh at the foot of the mountain. This was followed by an official agreement signed in 2004 between the Odisha Mining Corporation (OMC) and Sterlite Industries for the purpose of mining of bauxite reserves in the region. For the bauxite mining project in the Niyamgiri area, the Sterlite industries India, a subsidiary of the Vedanta Alumina, entered into a MoU with the Odisha Mining Corporation (OMC), a state government owned enterprise, in 2004. Vedanta Aluminium Limited (VAL) has received unconditional support from the state of Odisha to start an open pit bauxite mine in Niyamgiri Mountain. It is operating one million tonne per annum (MTPA) alumina refinery at Lanjigarh in Kalahandi district since August 2007.

While the Vedanta has already commissioned its alumina refinery at Lanjigarh, the company has been unable to start work at Niyamgiri, the chosen site of its captive bauxite mining operations. Vedanta's proposed expansion of its one million tonne per annum (MTPA)

alumina refinery to 6 MTPA was halted by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF) of the Government of India following a report from the Saxena Committee that castigated VAL for carrying out the expansion programme without any environment clearance. The Supreme Court, the apex court of the country, delivered a historic judgment on Niyamgiri mining issue in 2013. The Court categorically stated that Niyamgiri villagers themselves are to decide about the mining project. Following this landmark judgment, village councils were organized under the government supervision. In all the village councils, people unanimously rejected bauxite mining in the region. However, severe pollution caused by the refinery and lack of proper rehabilitation for the displaced are still the major concerns for the local communities.

These local oppositions raise a few critical questions: why are development interventions increasingly contested by the local communities in various parts of the country? Is the bigger development model deeply flawed? If yes, can there be local modifications of the model or can the local knowledge's and practices effectively offer an alternative?

