

The Kalinganagar tragedy: Development goal or development malaise

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On 2 January 2006, the police in Kalinganagar, Orissa opened fire against a group of tribal people protesting against Tatas constructing a steel plant on their lands and not paying them adequate compensation. This tragedy killing 12 persons on the spot shocked the whole nation. But even in this tragic hour the political parties, which were not particularly concerned with the resettlement issues, lost no time in turning the incident to their advantage. With an eye on the tribal vote bank the Congress president quickly arrived on the scene to express sympathy for the victims of brutality. The BJP also tried to get mileage but was constrained by the fact that it was then part of the ruling coalition in Orissa. This paper provides a vivid account of these events, traces the root causes of this unfortunate incident, and reflects on the development path that India is currently pursuing under globalization pressures. It concludes that unless the displaced people are brought closer to decision making processes, the goal of inclusive development will remain ever more elusive.

I

The high-voltage support the state government has extended to industrial houses has created widespread discontent among the people who have been affected directly by projects launched by them. Their inability to receive a convincing response to their grievances from the state has compelled them to resort to violent protest as their livelihood and survival are at stake. No one disputes the fact that the state needs industrialization, as agriculture alone cannot ensure growth and development. The rich mineral deposits need to be harnessed to achieve prosperity. However, these questions force themselves on our attention and demand answers: 'Prosperity, for whom'? At what cost? Does this prosperity ensure 'equity' and 'justice'? These fundamental questions regarding the ongoing

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development paradigm require the close scrutiny of the planners, development practitioners and the corporate magnates who have joined hands for improving the state's economy.

The mining sector has become the most preferred area for investment for which the national government's policy has been modified and made investor-friendly. With the introduction of *planned development in the country in the early 1950s mining* was regulated through the Mines and Minerals (Regulations and Development) Act, 1957. All major minerals – coal, iron ore, manganese, chrome, gypsum, gold and diamonds – were reserved for the public sector. The steel industry was also so reserved. In 1993, the National Mineral Policy changed. The 1957 Act was amended in 1994 and again in 1997 to make mining more 'investor-friendly'. These changes have opened mining to foreign direct investment by removing the cap on equity and to private sector involvement by removing all minerals (except atomic minerals) from the reserved list. Mining projects were put on a fast-track clearance route.

The state's endeavours aimed at encouraging private investment at any cost have been vigorous. During the last five years, the state has signed 43 memorandums of understandings (MoUs). Notable among them are international and Indian corporate giants, namely POSCO (Korea), Vedant Aluminium (UK), Rio Tinto(UK), BHP Billition (UK-Australia), Alcan (Canada), Hindalco, Jindal, Tata and Sterlite. Mining projects worth 3, 000 billion rupees have already been launched and projects worth a further.11, 000 billion rupees are in the pipeline. This huge investment has an alarming dimension. If even 50 per cent of the projects are implemented, what would happen to the state's environment?

Armed with a liberalized mining policy the Government of Orissa has been zealously inviting investors compromising the interest of the state and its people. As the state's new industrial policy states: 'The Government is committed to radical reforms in the laws and rules guiding labour and employment, which inhibit creation of employment opportunities, establishment of globally-competitive industry, restructuring of industry in line with changing market conditions and deter investment'. To achieve this government has exempted information technology and IT-enabled services, bio technology, electronics and telecommunication, export-

oriented units and industries set up in special economic zones from working hours limitation of the Factories Act of 1948; in essence these companies are given full freedom to exploit labour.¹

The state government is also working overtime to appease the investors. 'It acquires land around mining sites, however truculent the population may feel. It manages permission for companies from the Union government. The lease procedure has also been simplified for quick processing. In fact, it has committed 18 rivers and reservoirs for exclusive use by industry for its water-intensive activities. In 2002-2003, Orissa produced over 52.21 million tonnes of coal, using up 10 million cubic metres of water, 50 times the total urban water supply in the state. The proposed production of steel, for instance, will require 1.2 million cubic metres of water every year, or 3,287.7 million litres per day. More than five times the total water supply to the state's 104 urban bodies, which is also mostly sourced from Orissa's 11 rivers. Steel industries are now coming up in the river basins of the Mahanadi, Brahmani and Baitarani. According to a report by the state water resource department, by 2051, the Brahmani river system will have to import 2,288.47 million cubic metres from the Mahanadi to meet water demands. The Mahanadi's water needs for industrial use will double by that date. So it is doubtful Orissa will be able to meet water needs as committed to the steel sector.'²

II

INDUSTRIAL ADVANTAGE AT THE KALINGANAGAR

Kalinganagar is located near the chromite mines of Kaliapani, Kalarangi, Saruabila and Sukurangi and iron ore mines of Tamaka of Jajpur district. The chromite reserve is extended to neighboring Dhenkanal and Keonjhar districts. In fact, Keonjhar has the highest concentration of iron ore and manganese mines. With the demand of steel reaching new heights in the international market, both domestic and global players are vying to set up their plants in Orissa.

Apart from being a mineral belt, two national highways passing through Kalinganagar connect it with Kolkata and Chennai. It also boasts of a good railway infrastructure. There is a proposal to construct a port at Dhamara and connect it with Kalinganagar by road and rail. In addition, the second largest river of the state, the 'Bramhani' flows past Kalinganagar, meeting its water needs.

These advantages of Kalinganagar have made TISCO, VISA industries, Jindal Stainless, Maharashtra Seamless, MAL industries, AML Steel and

Power, National Steel and Power, National Steel and Agro industries, Tube Investment India, Dinabandhu Steel and Uttam Galva Steels sign MoUs with the state government for setting up steel plants there.

Kalinganagar is thus emerging as a new industrial destination of Orissa comprising 12000 acres of land covering 83 revenue villages of 10-gram panchayats of Sukinda and Danagadi blocks of Jajpur district. The following table indicates land allocation to various corporate houses in Kalinganagar.

List of plants and land allotted to industrialists in Kalinganagar

Mideast (MESCO)	530 Acres
Orion	150 Acres
Maithan Ispat	100 Acres
Uttam Gala	370 Acres
NINL	2500 Acres
Maharashtra Seamless	500 Acres
TISCO	2400 Acres
Rohit Ferrotech	50 Acres
JINDAL	678 Acres
VISA Industries	390 Acres
Dinbandhu	100 Acres
K.J. Ispat	50 Acres

Source: ADM office, Kalinganagar

III

KALINGANAGAR: AREA AND PEOPLE

Kalinganagar, under Sukinda and Danagadi blocks of Jajpur district of Orissa, is about 100 kms from the state capital, Bhubaneswar, and about 30-40 kms from the district headquarters. The NH-200, connecting the iron ore/chromites belt of Jajpur and Keonjhar districts with the Paradeep Port, runs through this area. Unlike the plains of coastal Orissa, the topography of the area is undulating and interspersed with hillocks and jungles. Nallas and rivulets are the main water sources for the area, which also provide fish and crab. The Brahmani, one of the major rivers of Orissa, flows around 5-6 kms away from the Kalinganagar industrial complex. In the Khapuria-Kumbhiragadia locality, there is a large grazing land, which supports hundreds of milkmen families rearing cattle. However, rice cultivation, is the main source of livelihood for a majority of the local people. In the absence of irrigation, the area is largely rain-fed and productivity remains at a low level. In some villages, people grow pulses.

The area has a high concentration of Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Caste population. The two blocks – Sukinda and Danagadi – under which Kalinganagar falls have 36.06 per cent and 28.19 per cent Scheduled Tribes and 11.89 per cent and 22.31 per cent Scheduled Caste population respectively. It is significant to note that the Scheduled Tribes population in the acquired area is much higher than the block average. Of the tribes, people belonging to Ho community constitute nearly 80 per cent of the population, and the rest of them belong to Munda and Santal communities.

Socio- economic profile of the three villages to be displaced by the Tata and the Maharashtra Seamless Company

<i>Name of the village\ panchayat</i>	<i>No. of Households</i>	<i>% of ST population</i>	<i>% of SC population</i>	<i>Literacy rate</i>	<i>% of cultivator</i>	<i>% of agricultural labour</i>
Chandia	331	85.9	.2	37.6	41.0	36.2
Gobaraghati	558	88.8	2.1	53.5	16.0	37.7
Gadapur	140	97.8	0	46.7	43.0	13.5

Source: Census 2001

IV

PEOPLE'S ASSERTION

The ongoing development programmes of the Orissa government have a negative fallout as far as the tribal people of the state are concerned. Development programmes generally associated with large-scale commercial exploitation of minerals, building of mega hydro-electric dams, industrial forest plantations, etc. caused extreme hardships for the tribal communities as most of these projects are located in tribal inhabited areas. In fact, the root cause of their sufferings is these development projects, which have invariably led to destruction or loss of their ancestral territories, resources, values, political, economic and socio-cultural systems. Protection and mitigation of the adverse impacts of development are not enough for indigenous people who did not opt for such projects in the first place. Fallout of these negative impacts, over the years, has forced them to build up their own distinct movement in order to survive.

While developing Kalinganagar the people of the area were never taken into confidence, perhaps they were not considered worthy of a dialogue, ever since the Government of Orissa decided to transform this backward forest tribal tract into an industrial hub of Orissa. Their reaction to the

early ventures, therefore, was spontaneous and was guided largely by a survival instinct. The government stand has been totally legalistic, declared from the high pedestal and reminiscent of the colonial era. The lands have been acquired according to the archaic law taking no note of the changes above and the reality below. Those who had the titles were eligible for compensation. They could be considered for rehabilitation, that too as a matter of charity and not because they have any legitimate rights. Those who have no titles could at best expect some token dole. While dealing with the resistance they offered to implement the project, the government showed no concern at all with the questions raised. No one cared even to learn from the experience of other enterprises such as the Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP).³

What is never mentioned in a long list of measures to be adopted for implementing the projects is how a popular elected government of a free country would negotiate with the tribals about land acquisition.⁴ The state government had acquired around 12000 acres of land in Kalinganagar during 1992-94 for allocation to steel projects. Those who owned these lands were then reportedly compensated at Rs.37, 000 per acre with some additional compensation later on when a tide of protests rose. Two companies implemented their projects, but neither met the promise of providing employment to one person in every household displaced from the land the projects now occupy. Then, in 2004-05, the government allotted 1,960 acres to Tata Steel, reportedly at nearly 10 times the rate at which the landowners were originally compensated. There were serious grievances: extremely inadequate compensation for the land acquired, gross failures in resettlement and rehabilitation, and major shortcomings in the provision of jobs.⁵

The roots of agitation date back to the early 1990s when the government started acquiring land in response to the promise of a London-based non-resident-Indian millionaire Swaraj Paul, for setting up a giant steel plant in the state. Though Mr. Paul backed out from his lofty promise without giving any reasons several other companies approached the state government for acquiring the same land.⁶

The tribals in the area have been cultivating mostly non-patta land in the absence of proper land records. Though they have been dependent on these lands for their livelihoods, they were neither offered compensation nor land in lieu of the land cultivated by them. They continued to occupy the land that the government had acquired from them. Unsure of finding an alternative source of livelihood, they protested whenever a new project was to be launched in the area.⁷ Subsequently, the government raised the

compensation amount by another Rs. 25,000 per acre to pacify them and to ensure their parting with their land, but the tribals refused to yield. Having got a raw deal and the prospect of losing livelihood sources, they were angered further when they came to know that the Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation (IIDCO), the nodal agency for development and rehabilitation in Kalinganagar, was selling the land to industrial houses at Rs. 3.35 lakhs an acre, almost five times what the government had paid them. While the government hoped that the people would leave the villages, the latter were ready for a confrontation.⁸

On 9 May 2005, the tribals faced the first onslaught of state brutality while opposing the bhoomi puja (a religious ceremony) for the setting up of a steel project of Maharashtra Seamless, which was to be graced by the state finance minister. Tribals were disarmed before the arrival of the minister and were made to wait for a few hours. After sometime, the situation became volatile leading to a lathi-charge by the police. Not content with the brutality unleashed, a series of midnight police raids were conducted to search for the men who had fled into the nearby forests to escape police action during the lathi charge. The police arrested 26 people, including 25 women and 14 children in the early hours of 10th May.⁹

The tribals' dissent became more strident when Tata entered the area for the construction of a boundary wall on 7th October the same year. They vehemently opposed the move and demanded rehabilitation before displacement. The situation was somehow brought to control once Tata abandoned the work for the time being. However on 2 January 2006 Tata returned, this time determined to complete the construction of the boundary wall. Their determination had the full backing of the state government. Tribals now became more aggressive. Anticipating trouble, the local administration had beforehand deployed massive paramilitary forces. However, the forces failed to deter the tribals numbering around 3000, who were armed with bows and arrows. Strangely, without much provocation the forces resorted to firing, which led to the death of 12 persons on the spot and of another later in the hospital.¹⁰

The killings were widely condemned and put the state government in a spot. Initially the administration was totally clueless as to how to deal with the situation. The incident brought to the fore the issue of the long overdue rehabilitation of displaced persons in various parts of the state. Incidentally, the state government was around that time engaged in preparing a comprehensive R&R policy. The incident hastened the process of policy formulation and a five-member ministerial committee was

constituted to oversee the process of policy formulation and to finalize the document without much delay.

Tribals in Kalinganagar instead of becoming panicky after the killings became more determined to oppose any construction in that area. They resorted to roadblock and immobilized the traffic movement in one of the busiest routes of the state, which they are continuing till date. They made it clear to the government that under no circumstances would they withdraw unless their demands are fulfilled. The demands are: (i) no fresh displacement on grounds of industrialization, (ii) five acres of land in lieu of land acquired, (iii) rights over possessed land, (iv) action against state finance minister and four senior officials directly responsible for the killings, (v) ex-gratia of Rs. 20 lakhs each for families of the dead and Rs. 10 lakhs for each of the injured, (vi) ban on multinationals units' entry into the area and (vii) withdrawal of cases slapped against tribals. They have formed a Visthapan Virodhi Jana Manch (People's Forum to Oppose Displacement) to lead their agitation.¹¹

Call for Nation's Response to Kalinganagar Challenge:

The Kalinganagar tragedy is the expression of the overwhelming domination of the corporate sector to the extent that the state everywhere has turned to be almost executor of the will of the corporate sector. The present despicable situation could not have arisen had the civil society not been fractured by selective patronage extended to the academics and social activists by the corporate sector directly or indirectly through the state machinery, which as has already been mentioned is functioning as the executioner of the corporate sector.

The roadblocks in the path leading towards a sane society cannot be removed unless there is a moral resurgence, focusing on ten or so issues critical to those sections of the society, which have become most vulnerable to the tsunami-like advance of the jaguar net of the corporate sector.

In this task of offering resistance to the dehumanized operation of the corporate sector in different forms and through different channels for historical reasons underpinned by the imperatives of the political economy the tribal and indigenous people in alliance with other forest dwellers, agricultural labour, marginal

and small farmers, petty traders and craftsmen and women will play the role of the vanguard. Conscious activists and academics must undertake a pilgrimage to them on foot (*Padayatra*) all over the country, with a well-prepared manifesto reflecting the vision of the society that must be ushered in if humanity (not only spiritually, but even physically) is to survive.

Prof. B.K. Roy Burman

In the wake of the Kalinganagar killings, the state government announced compensation of Rs. five lakhs for each of the victims' families. In addition, the Centre also agreed to offer Rs. five lakhs to each family. It is commonly felt that the tribals were unlikely to accept any relief as long as the government does not fulfil their seven-point charter of demands. The Manch leaders have been categorically saying that the tribals would continue their agitation till their demands are fulfilled. The tribals outright rejected the chief minister's invitation for talks. They have also refused to lift the blockade of NH-200 that is causing huge losses to the state's economy.

Political parties that were never too concerned about R&R in the past are now trying to take advantage of the situation. The Congress president did not miss the opportunity of reclaiming her party's lost tribal vote bank by visiting Kalinganagar a few days after the firing. The BJP also sought to gain some mileage. Its state president, a tribal himself, tried to convince their central leadership to withdraw support to the state government as they are the coalition partner, but fell in line after the party bosses expressed their disapproval.

Interestingly, captains of the steel industry were quick to shift the blame on to the government by saying that it was the responsibility of the state to ensure proper R&R of the affected people. They say they had never refused to bear the cost of R&R.

The tribal people, however, are strong in their resolve to oppose new industries in Kalinganagar. Under the banner of the Visthapan Virodhi Janamanch (People's Forum against Displacement), they have planned a series of programmes to continue their agitation. They are drawing strength from the support that is being extended to them by some civil society organizations and prominent citizens from different parts of the state and outside.

Backing the demand of the Kalinganagar tribals for the suspension of industrial activities in the area, a group of activists demanded immediate cessation of land acquisition and proper rehabilitation of those displaced by earlier development projects. Pointing out that land acquisition in tribal pockets after 1997 had been undertaken in violation of rules, the activists demanded that the mining concessions given to private parties be withdrawn immediately.¹²

On the one hand the incident forced the state government to re-examine the issues relating to and concerns of the displaced persons, a widespread protest of the large number of project-affected persons from different parts of the state gathered momentum. The oustees of Hirakud Dam, Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP), Mohanadi Coalfields Limited (MCL), Upper Kolab Multipurpose Project and many new private industrial establishments in Dhenkanal, Jajpur, Koraput and Jharsuguda districts came forward demanding justice for themselves. All this presented a serious challenge to the administration and they were clueless as to how to resolve the crisis. At many places people became violent. In RSP they immobilized the administration and for a period of over a week they resorted to massive roadblocks, and forced the Revenue Divisional Commissioner (RDC) to negotiate with them on their own terms.

While tribals in Kalinganagar were waging relentless protests facing extreme hardships in order to protect their lives and livelihood, several institutions created by the government to safeguard their interests failed to respond. The Governor of the State, the Tribes Advisory Council, the State Human Rights Commission, tribal representatives in the State Assembly and Parliament failed miserably to respond to the crisis. Had they collectively raised their voice at the time of the crisis, the killings would certainly not have taken place. Leaders of the agitation approached several institutions for intervention but none responded. They petitioned the President of India, Governor and Chief Minister of the State, National Commission for Scheduled Tribes, Chairman – Central Pollution Control Board and all the key-district administration officials but failed to receive any response. A summary of the petition is given in the following box.

To safeguard the financial, social and cultural interest of the people of Sukinda valley we place the following demands:

- a) Withdrawal of all plans to set up plants in the Agricultural Land of Tribals, Scheduled Castes and other weaker sections of Sukinda valley.

- b) Settlement of all lands possessed by the people in the valley before 1980 and giving them permanent "patta".
- c) Lands acquired by the government but not utilized be returned to the original owners.
- d) Stop discrimination on the basis of caste in the displacement policy of government. It may be mentioned that, the villages inhabited by General Caste people like – Baragadia, Duburi, Nadiabhanga, Siaria, Jakhapura, Mantira, etc. have not been included for evacuation. Hence, the State Government is practising untouchability, which is unconstitutional.
- e) The government is hunting only the Tribals' and Harijans' lands all over the state, which must be stopped.

Demands for already displaced people:

Provide at least 100 decimals of land of each family instead of 10 decimals. There will be need for land when the family disintegrates, families will have their cowsheds, place for other domestic animals harvesting yards. Tribals cremate the dead in their own land for which they require extra land.

1. Displaced people's heart and soul burns when some structure is built over the skeletal remains of their ancestors or these are thrown away indiscriminately. Cremation place is sacred to Ho-Munda Tribals. So, let the buried remains of the dead be recovered carefully and handed over to the families or, if not claimed, the same may be given to our organization for cremating the same in a common place. It is really a pity that when a roadside idol (kept for religio-business purposes) is respected by government. A sensitive cultural heritage is disrespected. We want, the government to honour our culture.
2. Provide 5 acres of cultivable land to each displaced family.
3. Suggestions may be invited from this 'parisad' while displacing or resettling the people.
4. Adivasis and Harijans have not been given due compensation for their lands. On the other hand, the government has a business motive on such sensitive issues.

The land is sold at a very high cost to the industrialists while a small portion is passed on to the sufferers. Further, no compensation is given for the lands, which were acquired for the last several decades. It should have been first settled in their names before displacement. Hence we demand appropriate compensation for both patta and non-patta lands.

5. There is rampant corruption in the matter of providing jobs to the displaced families. No job is provided as was committed by the government. People from distant places are given jobs in the plants while local people have been completely neglected. Hence priority has to be given to displaced/local people; otherwise the industrial units have no legal and moral right to run in our place.

The Kalinganagar agitation is still on, the roadblock in continuing, victims' families have not accepted government's ex-gratia amount (Rs. 0.5 million each, quite a big sum) except one woman whose acceptance is shrouded with controversy. In view of absence of an acceptable negotiation proposal from both sides: the agitators as well as the state government, the impasse seems to prolong. Agitation leaders are quite adamant not to respond to the government's gesture of compromise unless the compromise is on their own terms. The government is equally adamant not to succumb to the pressure. However, political bickering in the state especially between the ruling Biju Janata Dal (BJD) and the opposition Congress Party is the main reason for the continuous impasse. The fact that tribals have refused to accept the compensation, substantial money indeed, for those killed in police firing indicates the magnitude of their anger against the government. There is an apprehension that this may lead to major explosion in future if the issue is not resolved at the earliest. Orissa has many instances when common people have resisted the state's efforts to terrorize them at Gandhamardhan, Baliapal, Gopalpur, Chillika, Kashiapur, Niyamgiri and Lower Sukhtel.¹³

Meanwhile, the state government has constituted a one-member inquiry commission under a sitting High Court judge on 21 February 2006, which was expected to submit its report on 9 August 2006. The commission has not been able to complete the inquiry, thus, the government has accorded another six months extension to complete the inquiry. The commission is entrusted to analyse the sequence of events and circumstances leading to the police firing; measures taken for preventing or handling situations;

responsibility for acts of commission and omission on the part of the administration; the role, conduct, and responsibility of the organizations, group of individuals or persons influencing, precipitating or escalating the incidence. The commission has received 128 affidavits by the concerned parties including Tata however; proceedings for cross-examination of these affidavits are yet to begin.

A significant fallout of the tragic incident is that the state government promptly (May 2006) came out with an R&R policy, which has some very progressive features such as: to avoid displacement wherever possible or minimize it exploring all possible options; to recognize voices of displaced persons and empathize with the needs of the indigenous communities and vulnerable sections; to ensure environmental sustainability through participatory and transparent process, etc. The policy on the contentious issue of land acquisition is quite liberal, it states, “ *The project proponent may opt for direct purchase of land on the basis of negotiated price after issue of notification requiring acquisition of land under the relevant Act. If acquisition of land through direct purchase fails, other provisions of the relevant Act may be invoked. Land not utilized by the project within the prescribed limit and for the required purposes shall be resumed.*”¹⁴ This is a distinct departure from the earlier policy. The policy also commits that no physical displacement shall be made before completion of resettlement work. The collector is required to issue the certificate of the completion of resettlement work. The policy also talks about additional compensation to the extent of 50 per cent of the normal compensation in case of multiple displacements.

Regarding benefits to displaced indigenous families and primitive tribal groups the policy promises that their socio- cultural norms will be respected while developing the resettlement plan for them, they will be given preference in land allotment, they would be resettled in a compact area close to their natural habitat and in case of being resettled outside the district, they would be given 25 per cent higher R&R benefit in monetary terms.

Another fallout of the tragedy is that Tata’s venture is hanging in uncertainty till the commission of inquiry submits its report and the state government completes the formality of action taken on the recommendations of the report after due discussion in the State Assembly. POSCO, the other major investor for the steel plant in the state (approximately 500 billion rupees) is facing stiff people’s resistance at their project site. However, they have not gone whole hog for acquiring

land, rather they are trying to win people to their side. In their scheme of things they are currently preparing a comprehensive plan of action on corporate social responsibility. Meanwhile they have organized cleft lip surgery camps, selected meritorious students for scholarships, etc. POSCO has envisaged a 'villager's friendly programme' to address the immediate needs of the displaced and affected communities in order to ensure a contented co-existence. It proposes to establish a vocational training centre for the displaced in the near future.¹⁵

V

MARGINALIZATION OF TRIBALS IN ORISSA

The scenario of development induced displacement in Orissa since the introduction of planned development in the early 1990s indicates a very grim picture of displaced persons. Several development projects relating to industry, irrigation and mining, which have been implemented to improve the economy of the state, have displaced large numbers of families (around 81176 families from 1950-93), particularly the marginalized section (mostly) tribals, pushing them into the vicious circle of poverty. Tribals, the world over, are the worst sufferers of aggressive development paradigms. It is a matter of serious concern for all development practitioners that in spite of forewarning about tribals' plight at several fora in the wake of displacement, they continue to meet the same fate whenever a new project is implemented in tribal-inhabited areas. It will suffice to quote the UN statement in this context: "Often uprooted from their traditional lands and ways of life and forced into prevailing national societies, indigenous people/Adivasis face discrimination, marginalization and alienation. Despite growing political mobilization in pursuit of their rights, they continue to lose their cultural identity along with their natural resources. Some of them are in imminent danger of extinction".¹⁶

Contrary to the general perception that Adivasis constitute small, localized groups, there is considerable variation in their numerical strength. A majority of the population regards them as primitive and government programmes aim at integrating them with the majority society rather than emphasizing their distinctiveness. Fifty years after independence in the absence of a clear policy framework for the Adivasis, the destruction of their economic base and environment poses grave threats to those who are still able to follow the basis of a traditional way of life and may result in cultural extinction of many of the smaller Adivasi communities. In the process of sweeping change, the marginalized section of Adivasis are getting more marginalized.

The Adivasi scene in Orissa, according to the Adivasi sub-plan 2001-2002, reveals the fact that the Adivasi population according to the 1991 census is 70,32,214, which accounts for 22.21 per cent of population of Orissa. The report suggests that there are 62 Adivasi communities including 13 primitive Adivasi groups, which inhabit the state and they are spread over 12 districts namely: Malkangiri, Koraput, Nawarangpur, Rayagada, Kalahandi, Gajapati, Phulbani, Mayurbhanj, Sundergarh and Sambalpur districts. These Adivasi communities exhibit great variety in languages, culture customs and practices. The state has some of the most populous tribes such as Gond, Santal, Oraon and the Kondh and typical tribes like Juang, Bondo, Bhuiyan are found only in the state of Orissa.

During the last few years, the Adivasis' identity is at risk in Orissa. Owing to mushroom growth of industries, modernization and the spread of the consumerist market economy, the Adivasis are getting increasingly marginalized. Various government programmes like Adivasi Sub-plans, Special Component Plans, Primitive Adivasi Micro Projects, Modified Area Development Agency, Cluster and Dispersed Adivasi Development programmes and the special education plan for their development have failed to achieve the desired results. Poverty and backwardness have become the constant companions of the Adivasis. In view of the growing marginalization, deprivation, oppression and their unique social, economic, political character and livelihood systems, there is an urgent need for developing a policy keeping in mind a long-term sustainable human development perspective.

In Orissa, in spite of several major development projects implemented over the years, about two-thirds of the total number of rural families (90 per cent of the state's population live in rural areas) live below the poverty line as per PRI estimates. **In 1999-2000, 73 per cent of the Scheduled Tribes in Orissa were below the poverty line as compared to 55 per cent and 33 per cent respectively of Scheduled Castes and general castes.**¹⁷ In an official estimate, while there has been a slight reduction in tribal rural poverty at the national level from 58.4 per cent to 50.3 per cent between 1983-84 and 1993-94, however, during the same period in Orissa it registered an increase from 68.9 per cent to 71.4 per cent.¹⁸

According to the NSSO's consumer expenditure data (50th round), the incidence of poverty is as high as 64 per cent among the Scheduled Tribes. Various studies at different points of time have revealed that the incidence of indebtedness has been increasing at an alarming rate among Scheduled Caste communities because of their shrinking access to livelihood sources on the one hand and their inability to gain access to the various anti-poverty, social security and food security programmes on the other.

In spite of strict legal measures, introduced of late, to control transfer of tribal land to non-tribals, land alienation has been taking place among Scheduled Tribes. However, in the absence of any legislation to restrict the sale of tribal land till 2001, approximately 8550 acres of tribal land have been sold through official permission during the period 1957-1997. A Tribal and Harijan Research and Training Institute (THRTI) study conducted during 1978-80 covering all tribal sub-plan areas highlighted that approximately 23 per cent of tribal households were landless, whereas approximately 41 per cent owned less than 2.5 acres each.¹⁹ The average landholding of tribal household in tribal districts indicate a abysmal picture i. e. 1.06 slandered acres, with approximately 20 per cent of households being landless and 65 per cent small and marginal farmers.²⁰

In addition, a sense of uncertainty about their occupation is further aggravated by deforestation, which has deprived them of their livelihood. The forests in Orissa, which were traditionally the main survival base of the tribals, had been fast depleted over the years. The total forest area as a percentage of the total geographical area of the state was 30.15 per cent in 1997, which was lower than the 33 per cent as stipulated under the National Forest Policy of 1988. There had been a continuous decline in the forest cover since 1990-91. Similarly, the proportion of closed forest area to the total forest area, as well as the proportion of closed forest area to the total geographical area, declined continuously over the years. According to the Forest Survey of India (covering different years), the rate of deforestation is much higher in Orissa than all over India. Such a high rate of deforestation in the state adversely affects the symbiotic relationship that traditionally existed between the forests and the tribals. The safety net role of the forest is also being adversely affected. The availability of forest items, particularly food items, has largely declined. As a result, the nature of the overall dependence of forest dwellers on the forests has changed – from gathering food items to collecting non-food items, and cultivation of forest land. Thus, they have been facing continuous marginalization with no visible respite in sight in the near future.²¹

The Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, constituted an expert group on 'Prevention of Alienation of Tribal Land and its Restoration' to review the implementation of existing laws/ regulations on the alienation of tribal land in the country and recommend measures for prevention of alienation of tribal land. The expert group in their final report made very critical comments on the sorry state of tribals in the country. In the Foreword, the report states: 'The quality of life of the tribals has failed to improve as per their expectations despite the constitutional commitments, and efforts in this regard...' The expert group was astonished to find that in the resource-rich

tribal areas, the tribal inhabitants are resource-poor. Their access to resources is severely restricted. The tribal communities suffer not only from “capability poverty” but from “income poverty” as well, despite major industrial complexes (both in the public and private sectors) having come up in tribal areas. ...Traditional access and rights over resources and forest produce have become restricted and converted into government and private monopolies. Land and life, which are synonymous, have become precarious and the title to land has been reduced to a very complex, remote and outside procedures, disturbing the sense of legality and justice among tribals. Consequently, there is abundant potential for all-round damage and unabated tension in the area and amongst its inhabitants’.²²

The Draft National Tribal Policy, 2006 circulated by the Government of India for comments from various institutions, agencies, concerned individuals and scholars for the first time indicates the simmering discontent among tribals due to the long history of their being victims of exploitation and neglect. The document says:

“Scheduled Tribes, over a period of several years, have begun to feel a deep sense of exclusion and alienation, which has been manifesting itself in the form of tribal unrest in various tribal pockets. The increasing violence is due to various of reasons – social, political and economic, which combined together have created a sense of severe dissatisfaction, a feeling of having been neglected and deprived of what is rightfully theirs. The factors leading to the spread of the violent movements include the existence of acute poverty, severe disparities in living standards, lack of economic and livelihood opportunities and being treated as offenders and even criminals when they exercise their traditional rights. A situation is thus developing where the Scheduled Tribes view the state as their exploiter and enemy, and the preachers of violent actions as their protector and friend. Tribal people tend to support these violent movements as they feel that it would help them to get their rights, protect them from exploitation and redress their grievances.”²³

The Kalinganagar tragedy indicates loudly that further marginalization of tribals in Orissa will not be smooth sailing for the government as has been the case in the past. The events unfolding in the aftermath of the tragedy are extremely volatile and unless tribals are consciously brought into the central focus of the development paradigm, the vision of rapid ‘industrialization’ and ‘development’ of the state will remain a mere policy statement.

The ongoing people’s resistance in Kalinganagar against not only TATA’s but against several other investors in that region and also in other parts of the state symbolizes the growing perception that people will not agree to

part with their land unless the compensation is negotiated with them on their terms and also ensuring them entitlement in the dividend of the project.²⁴ The often-repeated official claim, "The interests of the displaced will not be compromised in the industrialization process" does not hold ground any more owing to government's repeated failure to safeguard the interest of the displaced persons in the past. The development practitioners – the planners, the public or the private sector investors, the concerned members of the civil society organizations need to value the emerging voices of the displaced and accordingly evolve their future course of action.

Endnotes

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- 24 POSCO in Jagatsinghpur, Vedanta and Utkal Alumina (UAIL) in Rayagada district are some of the notable projects where people are engaged in a long drawn protest.