

RESEARCH ARTICLE

And red flows the Koina river: Adivasi resistance to the ‘loot’ of their land and resources in eastern India, 1980–2020

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Abstract

This article documents Adivasi resistance to the ‘loot’ of their land and resources since 1980, especially during the Kalinganagar movement in Odisha, roughly between 2004 and 2010, and the Pathalgadi movement in Jharkhand, between 2016 and 2018. Using the lens of trauma and testimony, the article represents a combined effort by Gladson Dungdung, an Adivasi activist, journalist, and writer who has borne witness to events during these years; Felix Padel, an anthropologist; and Vinita Damodaran, a historian. The land grabs are mainly oriented towards mining and metals production, justified in terms of ‘development’, which leaves many dead and destroys landscapes that Adivasis have cared about for countless generations.

Keywords: Adivasis; loot; movements; resistance

Introduction

There is a growing rebellion taking place on the last resource frontiers of India as, in collaboration, the state and mining companies engage in one of the biggest land grabs in the post-colonial history of India.¹ Using the colonial Land Acquisition Act of 1894, the dispossession and proletarianization of many Adivasi or indigenous communities continues at a rapid pace in eastern

¹ This is a global process that has taken place in Asia and Africa in the period after 1991. Annelies Zoomers, ‘Globalisation and the foreignisation of space: seven processes driving the current global land grab’, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2010, pp. 429–447.

India—a ‘loot’ of resources (to use a Hindi word that entered the English language during the East India Company’s loot of West Bengal) in a region that was once regarded as a colonial frontier. The history of such commodity frontiers and the ongoing resistance by local communities to land alienation and displacement is one that needs to be better known.

In this article we document the transformation of eastern India in the post-colonial period and communities’ resistance to such changes imposed by the state, by focusing on three recent movements in Jharkhand and Odisha in the context of the long history of colonial and post-colonial exploitation of India’s Adivasi groups. The term ‘environmental defenders’ has recently entered academic parlance and it is useful to define some of the Adivasi movements we document as such. This history of indigenous communities is also an environmental history of both arable and non-arable parts of eastern India; of a ‘sacred’ landscape gradually put under forest reservations by the British and devastated, punctuated by resistance and state repression, from the 1830s to date. The Kalinganagar police opening fire in 2006, killing 12 Adivasis on the spot, who were protesting against a Tata Steel factory, became a symbol of this suppression, as did the Pathalgadi movement in 2016, when Adivasis, in hundreds of villages, erected inscribed stones in line with local traditions of memorializing ancestors and asserting their constitutional rights to the land. Mapping this story involves an environmental history of globalization and resistance.

This history broadly unfolded in three phases: 1800–1947, the period of colonial interventions; 1947–1991, when the post-Independence period saw a wave of development projects; and post-1991 when state-sponsored developmental activity gave way to corporate takeovers following the relentless pursuit of profit in a neo-liberal paradigm that carved up the forest into mining leases and other privatized resources, such as plantations, and involved the violent suppression of Adivasi struggles. This post-colonial history, and the contemporaneity of the movements we describe, must be seen in the context of this long history and an ongoing narrative of loss and resistance followed by more loss.

This article is a product of interdisciplinary research, drawing on the academic insights of Felix Padel, an engaged anthropologist; Vinita Damodaran, a historian; and Gladson Dungdung, a tribal rights activist and indigenous intellectual whose personal engagement with recent protest movements in Jharkhand and elsewhere focuses on bearing witness to the ongoing atrocities. As a ‘traveller witness’, Gladson’s contribution to this article could be called ‘witnessing on the threshold of life and death by foregrounding the story of “violence and precarity” of his community’.² His testimony in this article is about the ‘possibility of bearing witness’. Felman and Laub, in the context of the Auschwitz poetry of Paul Celan, have noted that the purpose of testimony is ‘to come out of the other side—of death, of life, of the limits of belonging, of history as total condemnation’.³ As Salgado writes, quoting them, they describe

² Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

³ Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Abingdon, Taylor and Francis, 1992, p. 117.

it as a kind of translation—a word etymologically rooted in the Greek ‘to bear across’—‘that incorporates a passage through death that takes the original off center’.⁴ Gladson can be said to occupy ‘the role of an evicted traveller in the throes of an ejection from his native country’ and its values.⁵

Celan writes in the context of unimaginable violence about the power of language,

Only one thing remained reachable, close and secure amid all losses: language. Yes, language. In spite of everything, it remained secure against loss. But it had to go through its own lack of answers, through terrifying silence, through the thousand darknesses of murderous speech. It went through. It gave me no words for what was happening but went through it. Went through and could resurface, ‘enriched’ by it all.⁶

Gladson has borne witness in numerous books and articles, on social media, on his website ‘Adivasi Hunkar’, with meticulous documentation in Hindi, English, and his own Kharia language, recording facts and statistics about atrocities committed against Adivasi communities, land seizures, displacement, forced migration, as well as rape, murder, mutilation, and torture by the state and its functionaries. The rape of women is precisely detailed in his works, including young girls grazing cattle being routinely molested and even murdered by the central reserve police.⁷ ‘Reality simply is not out there, it must be searched for and won.’⁸ The key question, as he notes, is: how will Adivasis survive?

Felix’s and Vinita’s encounter with Gladson was transformative. In his first book, *Whose Country is it Anyway?*, he rejects the very languages of ‘nationing’ that provide the ground for securitization and political violence in his homeland.⁹ In successive books, *Mission Saranda*, *Endless Cry in the Red Corridor*, and *Adivasis and Their Forests*, he describes in detail the destruction of Saranda forest, detailing the land evictions and corruption of the state and corporate companies, and the rape, torture, imprisonment, and extrajudicial killings of Adivasis—overall, a process that portends both the death of nature in India and death for local communities.¹⁰

⁴ M. Salgado, “‘Can only the dead speak’: terror, trauma and the witness traveller”, *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 52, no. 3, 2016, pp. 467–483.

⁵ Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, p. 117.

⁶ B. Rothfeld, ‘The thousand darknesses of murderous speech’, The Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/155169/the-thousand-darknesses-of-murderous-speech>, [accessed 24 June 2022].

⁷ Gladson Dungdung, *Endless Cry in the Red Corridor*, Ranchi, Bir Biru Omipay Media and Entertainment LLP, 2017.

⁸ Pierre Jorris, ‘Paul Celan and the meaning of language’, Flashpoint, https://flashpointmag.com/Doug_Valentine_Interview_with_Pierre_Joris.htm, [accessed 24 June 2022].

⁹ Gladson Dungdung, *Whose Country is it Anyway? Untold Stories of Indigenous People of India*, Kolkata, adivaani, 2013. See also Salgado, “‘Can only the dead speak?’”, pp. 467–483.

¹⁰ Gladson Dungdung, *Mission Saranda. A War for Natural Resources in India*, Ranchi, Bir Biru Omipay Media and Entertainment LLP, 2015; Dungdung, *Endless Cry in the Red Corridor*; G. Dungdung, *Adivasis and their Forest*, Ranchi, Adivasi Publications, 2019.

His telling and retelling of everyday oppression against men, women, and children, and his witness testimony of the terror and trauma of political and casual violence in this region by police and paramilitary forces of the state invited a reevaluation of our position within the ivory tower of a British university as Western-educated academics and demanded that we document and register the absent voices of ‘those who have been “disappeared” from the official record’.¹¹ It allowed us to acknowledge ‘the threshold of terror’ that Gladson crossed every day and translated for us.¹² His insightful documentation and vivid narrative in *Whose Country is it Anyway?* pointed to ‘a crisis of allegiance on the contested borders of national belonging’.¹³

I have seen my people discriminated against, exploited, subjugated, alienated and displaced. I have undergone this ordeal myself; my family was alienated from our prime agricultural land in the name of growth and development, and we were pushed to the forest for survival, but my father was booked in allegation of cutting trees and finally in 1990 my parents were brutally assassinated while they were fighting for justice... Why...? Whose country is it anyway?¹⁴

In an insightful article, Michael Feola outlines Judith Butler’s notion of precarity to highlight ‘how certain groups are rendered eligible for heightened, regularized violence and, by extension, how liberal subjects are rendered complicit with policies at odds with their universalist commitments’.¹⁵ As he notes, ‘life does not only rest upon material conditions; rather, this native vulnerability is heightened or diminished through decisions, by which some groups will find the care or protections they need to flourish, and others will be disproportionately exposed to risk ranging from market fallout to everyday violence to ostensibly natural disasters and illness’.¹⁶ It is in this context of promoting precarity that the deaths of Adivasis in casual encounters with the state need to be understood. Butler has persuasively argued that it is easier to kill someone whom we perceive as not fully human—‘there never was a human, there never was a life so no murder has taken place’.¹⁷ Elsewhere, she writes evocatively of the pain of others, which is actively demanded to reconstitute the integrity of

¹¹ Salgado, “‘Can only the dead speak?’”.

¹² Judith Butler, *Frames of War. When is Life Grievable*, London, Verso, 2009; J. Butler, *The Precarious Life. Powers of Mourning and Justice*, London, Verso, 2020.

¹³ Salgado, “‘Can only the dead speak?’”.

¹⁴ Dungdung, *Whose Country is it Anyway?*.

¹⁵ Michael Feola, ‘Norms, vision and violence: Judith Butler on the politics of legibility in comparative political theory’, *Contemporary Political Theory*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2014, pp. 130–148. He quotes Agamben, who noted that German death camps rested on the manufacture of populations that can be eliminated without the commission of legal homicide or as lives unworthy to be lived, and asks ‘what mechanisms permit this differential exposure to risk and violence if we avow a universal dignity to human life?’ (p. 131). See Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2005.

¹⁶ Feola, ‘Norms, vision and violence’, p. 131.

¹⁷ Butler, *Frames of War*.

a wounded nation.¹⁸ In India's frontiers, the precarity of these Adivasi communities, who historically were viewed by both the British and plains Indians as primitive and uncivilized, and who today are being forcibly rendered into 'coolie' labour with their lands dispossessed, becomes starkly apparent.¹⁹ This statement by the Odisha chief minister in 2005, 'No one and I mean no one will be allowed to stand in the way of Orissa's development and the people's progress', was a scarcely veiled threat by the state.²⁰

However, Deogi Tina, a 35-year-old Ho woman, did stand in the way and was one of the 12 Adivasis murdered by the police in the Kalinganagar shootings in 2006, where the Tata company was engaged in a huge land dispute with local communities in the name of development.²¹ Development for whom? As Dungdung asks, how indeed will Adivasis survive in the face of such coercive takeovers?

It is useful to understand the contemporary dynamics in eastern India through the lens of biopolitics, a term introduced by Michel Foucault in 1975 to 'understand how some human populations are "allowed to die"'.²² Many indigenous communities are being destroyed through disease and pollution. The justice system and health infrastructure also collude to render Adivasi lives as 'bare life', denied rights and dignity, to use a term of the philosopher Giorgio Agamben.²³ He outlines the distinction between 'bare life' and political life or the distinction between *zoē* and *bios*.²⁴ Using the biopolitical paradigm, he argues persuasively how the period after the First World War witnessed the gradual diminishment of democratic politics and the growth of autocratic and executive governance through the notion of exception. This allowed even apparently liberal democratic states to go in for practices such as 'extraordinary rendition' and the detainment and torture of 'unlawful combatants' in Guantanamo Bay. For Rifkin, while 'Agamben's concept of the

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Vinita Damodaran, 'Colonial constructions of the "tribe" in India: the case of Chotanagpur', *Indian Historical Review*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2006, pp. 44–76.

²⁰ Vinita Damodaran, 'The locality in the Anthropocene', in Alex Elliott, James Cullis and Vinita Damodaran (eds), *Climate Change and the Humanities*, London, Palgrave, 2017.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Cited in Eben Kirksey, 'Affirmative, indigenous bio-politics in West Papua', unpublished abstract, ASA conference, 2018.

²³ For Agamben, the generation of 'bare life' makes thinkable the consignment of those who do not fit the idealized 'biopolitical body' to a 'zone' outside of political participation and the regular workings of the law, but who still fall within the ambit of state power. Describing this possibility, he observes, 'The relation of exception is a relation of ban. He who has been banned is not, in fact, simply set outside the law and made indifferent to it but rather abandoned by it, that is, exposed and threatened on the threshold...It is literally not possible to say whether the one who has been banned is outside or inside the juridical order.' Quoted by Mark Rifkin, 'Indigenizing Agamben: rethinking sovereignty in light of the "peculiar" status of native peoples', *Cultural Critique*, no. 73, 2009, pp. 88–124. See also Thalia Anthony and Harry Blegg, 'Bio-power of colonialism in carceral contexts: implications of aboriginal deaths in custody', *Journal of Bio-ethical Enquiry*, vol. 18, 2021, pp. 71–82.

²⁴ Gordon Finlayson, 'Bare life and politics in Agamben's reading of Aristotle', *Review of Politics*, 25 February 2010.

exception has been immensely influential in contemporary scholarship and cultural criticism, such accounts largely have left aside discussion of Indigenous peoples'.²⁵ His revision allows for 'a reconsideration of the 'zone of indistinction' produced by and within sovereignty, opening up analysis of the ways in which states regulate not only proper kinds of embodiment (bare life) but also legitimate modes of collectivity and occupancy—what he calls 'bare habitance'.²⁶ It has been argued that it is these 'truths that shape disciplinary knowledge, cultures, and institutional practices that legitimize the exclusion, control, and mistreatment of Indigenous humanity'.²⁷

It is this that we hope to uncover in this article, by outlining the contexts of Adivasi exceptionalism, their resistance struggles, and state responses in the face of several post-Independence Adivasi movements. It is in this context that Indigenous intellectuals such as Dungdung can be seen to be 'engaging in tactical biopolitics by working to expose, derail, and rearticulate dominant practices for managing life,²⁸ in the process producing 'a temporary reversal in the flow of power'.²⁹

Violent environments

'Loot' is a Hindi word that entered the English language in the eighteenth century, when certain intellectuals, including Adam Smith, became enraged with East India Company 'Nabobs' for their looting of India. As Gladson sees it, if India as a whole was looted during British rule, India's tribal areas are being looted now, in the post-colonial period, by a wave of corporate landgrabs, facilitated by complicit elites within government. Since B. D. Sharma published his celebrated Commissioner's Report in 1989, it has been widely understood that the Indian Government 'is making war on its own people' in a system of 'internal colonialism'.³⁰

This is part of an ongoing process of accumulation by post-colonial elites and companies—'accumulation by dispossession'—in David Harvey's terms, through 'the commodification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of ... populations...and the conversion of various forms of property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusively private property rights, the commodification of labour power and the suppression of alternative (indigenous) forms of production and consumption'—what he calls 'colonial, neo-colonial, and imperial processes of appropriation of assets (including

²⁵ Rifkin, 'Indigenizing Agamben', p. 90.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Anthony and Blegg, 'Biopower of colonialism', pp. 71–82.

²⁸ Kirksey, 'Affirmative, indigenous bio-politics' argues this in the context of indigenous communities in West Papua who tactically manoeuvre to produce temporarily a reversal in the flow of power. See also Eben Kirksey, 'Lively multispecies communities: deadly racial assemblages and the promise of justice', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 116, no. 1, 2017, p. 200.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ B. D. Sharma (Chairman), *29th Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes*, Delhi, Government of India, 1989, pp. 287, 291.

natural resources)'.³¹ Such accumulation has always been accompanied, as Marx noted, by 'conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, briefly force'.³² Gaining access to the means of production often entails violence, as is evident in colonial practices. As Rosa Luxemburg writes, 'Capital, impelled to appropriate productive forces for purposes of exploitation, ransacks the whole world, it procures its means of production from all corners of the earth, seizing them, if necessary, by force, from all levels of civilization and from all forms of society.'³³

We would argue that such an appropriation is taking place in the Adivasi areas in India today where the ongoing process of dispossession of lands and forests impacts particularly on those groups that have hitherto been protected by colonial legislation on tribes in the early part of the twentieth century, partly in reaction to the sustained movements of resistance to such action from the 1830s.³⁴ The concept of indigeneity used in this article understands it as a historically constructed term building on this history of past dispossession and continuing colonial and post-colonial violence against these communities.

By the 1930s the term 'Adivasi' had become prominent as a form of self-identification of indigenous groups in eastern India. The increasing differentiation among Adivasis is well recognized in scholarship and the term itself has been debated extensively, especially as it embraces the idea of indigeneity. However, as we have argued elsewhere, the term must be seen as a political one and the Adivasi struggle as part of a struggle for recognition and rights over what is an ongoing takeover of lands and forests by private interests, including mining companies, over a long period.³⁵ Over time, many of the communities have experienced one of the biggest land takeovers in history. Such a nuanced understanding demands decolonizing the role of anthropologists and historians to uncover Adivasi, tribal, or indigenous voices, perspectives, and movements in the archive, transforming the objectifying tendency in colonial-era models of academic study and development discourse, and validating Adivasis as subjects of their own history and current reality. 'I am not your data' as Adivasi activist Abhay Xaxa expressed so poignantly.³⁶

³¹ David Harvey, *New Imperialism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 137. As he notes: 'The other aspect of the accumulation of capital concerns the relations between capitalism and the non-capitalist modes of production which start making their appearance on the international stage. Its predominant methods are colonial policy, an international loan system—a policy of spheres of interest—and war. Force, fraud, oppression, looting is openly displayed without any attempt at concealment, and it requires an effort to discover within this tangle of political violence and contests of power the stern laws of the economic process.'

³² Andrew Smolzki and Matthew Lorenzon, 'Introduction: violence, capital accumulation, and resistance in contemporary Latin America', *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 48, no. 1, 2020, pp. 4–27, p. 4.

³³ Rosa Luxemburg, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 358.

³⁴ Vinita Damodaran, 'History, landscape and indigeneity in Chotanagpur, 1850–1980', *Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2002, pp. 77–110.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Abhay Xaxa, 'I am not your data', *Adivasi Resurgence*, 13 January 2016, <http://adivasiresurgence.com/2016/01/13/i-am-not-your-data/>, [accessed 27 June 2022].

This article also offers a critique of the idea of post-colonial development by noting that a basic error in logic haunts the discourse on ‘development’. The editors of the text, *Cultivating the Colonies*, note that colonialism dramatically transformed the environment and destroyed nature through deforestation, agricultural projects, and building new settlements.³⁷ At the same time, as a response to this, states began taking an interest in nature protection through soil and forest conservation. British nineteenth-century ideas of cosmopolitan progress and improvement were built on a moral imperative and on utilitarian philosophy, the greatest good of the greatest number.³⁸ Technological understandings, as James Scott argues in his classic work *Seeing like a State*, brought the ideology of high modernism into play in the colonies.³⁹ The theories and ideas introduced by these large government-sponsored projects ignored the complexity of the locality, rendering it more manageable, while obfuscating local realities and ecologies. In the later stages of colonialism, the ability to transform nature on a large scale involved surveying different landscapes so as to produce more grandiose visions than any that had come before them. By the 1930s, the concept of development in the form of modernization had become ubiquitous. Everyone embraced the concept—from the Soviet Union to the United States to newly emerging post-colonial nations, including India. In the 1960s and 1970s, the United States embraced a Universalist modernization theory based on rapid industrialization. It was against this background that the period of high modernism was embraced by Nehru in India, propagating the ideology of a developmental state. In the decades that followed, big dam development and rapid industrial expansion led to deforestation, dispossession, and the displacement of India’s indigenous communities. In a recent article, the image of a Santhal teenager inaugurating the Damodar Valley Corporation dam project in Bihar in 1959 is contrasted to the life she then went on to lead, which was one of poverty and immiseration.⁴⁰

Throughout India, movements of land and forest-based communities aimed at defending livelihoods that evolved over many generations and centuries, which can be termed truly ‘sustainable’, in the face of invasion and displacement of their lands by large-scale industries. Rather than the common, self-justifying term ‘development-induced displacement’, it is more useful to talk of *investment-forced displacement*, since projects motivated by financial investment and profits for a tiny elite are being termed as ‘development’, when they in fact they devastate the livelihood and cohesion of long-established communities.⁴¹

³⁷ Christina Folke Ax, Niels Brimnes, Niklas Thode Jensen and Karen Oslund (eds), *Cultivating the Colonies. Colonial States and their Environmental Legacies*, Ohio, Ohio University Press, 2011.

³⁸ Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism, Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

³⁹ James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, Newhaven, Yale University Press, 2020.

⁴⁰ Jinoy Jose P, ‘The poster girl from Dhanbad’, *The Hindu*, 12 June 2021, <https://www.thehindu.com/books/the-poster-girl-from-dhanbad-jinoy-jose-p-reviews-sarah-josephs-budhini/article34786678.ece> [accessed 24 June 2022].

⁴¹ V. Damodaran and F. Padel, ‘Investment-induced displacement in central India: a study in extractive capitalism’, *Comparative Studies in South Asia, Africa and Middle East*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2018, pp. 396–411. See also Jinoy Jose, ‘The poster girl’.

In the immediate post-colonial period, Adivasis were drawn into increasingly precarious dependence on 'the market', through cash crops and as poorly paid migrant workers in mines, plantations, construction sites, and factories.⁴² Rapid ecological and cultural change transformed identities. Yet 'the remembered landscape' persisted in collective memories, along with the idea that private property can be resisted, for example, in the Dongria Kond's insistence on common rights over the Niyamgiri mountain in preference to private plots of forest.⁴³ 'We need the Mountain, and the Mountain needs us',⁴⁴ as a Dongria woman expressed in relation to her mountain landscape, which has deep spiritual significance for her community.⁴⁵

Daniels and Cosgrove have argued that the term 'landscape' is a complex one and can be seen as a 'sociohistorical construct', a way of seeing projected onto the land which articulates a particular relationship with nature.⁴⁶ It can be argued that the landscape of eastern India was reclaimed and reconstituted by Adivasi communities in a similar fashion, defining their identity. In the context of Hawaii, Patrick Kirch and Marshall Sahlins have noted that 'the landscape and its legends inscribe a criticism of the existing regime. In current jargon, the landscape is text. Places and names evoke an alternate society older, truer and more directly related to the people.'⁴⁷ In this way were the landscapes of Niyamgiri and Singbhum organized by stories and legends of conquest and through memories of better times. As Sahlins notes: 'One cannot do "good history", not even contemporary history, without regard for ideas, actions and ontologies that are not and never were our own.'⁴⁸

In what follows we document several iconic recent struggles against imposed 'development' by communities resisting such land takeover on the basis of tradition and culture. This is not to romanticize these movements, only to pay careful attention to the contexts of their production. Ballard and Banks have highlighted 'the dangers inherent in oversimplifying or "sanitizing" the politics of local communities in conditions of conflict', and called for close attention to the contingencies of any given site and for the

⁴² Tens of thousands of Adivasis are among the migrant labourers so unjustly treated during India's recent lockdown. See G. Dungdung, 'Mining, Adivasis and the Corona pandemic', Adivasi Hunkar, 8 June 2020, and G. Dungdung, 'India's Coronavirus refugees are also development refugees', *Scientific American*, 20 June 2020.

⁴³ Quoted in Vinita Damodaran, 'Indigenous agency: customary rights and tribal protection in eastern India, 1830–1930', *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 76, no. 1, 2013, pp. 85–110.

⁴⁴ Dungdung, *Mission Saranda*.

⁴⁵ Amarendra and Samarendra Das, '*Matiro Poko, Company Loko* (Earthworm, Company man)', a documentary film in Odia with English subtitles, 2005.

⁴⁶ Dennis Cosgrove and Steve Daniels (eds), *The Iconography of the Landscape: Essays on Symbolic Representation, Design and the Use of Past Environments*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 6.

⁴⁷ Patrick Vinton Kirch and Marshall Sahlins, *Anahulu: The Anthropology of History in the Kingdom of Hawaii*, Vol. 1, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 25, cited in Vinita Damodaran, 'The politics of marginality and the construction of indigeneity in Chotanagpur', *Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2006, pp. 179–196.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

reclamation of the specific social and historical contexts for particular conflicts.⁴⁹ Such an approach allows us to consider a few movements in some depth in this article. It can be argued that in Saranda and Kalinganagar, given their historical engagement with the land and the forests, communities there understand the violent and silent deaths involved in destructive developmental projects in terms of cultural genocide and of annihilating their communities as cohesive cultures that are rooted in the land. These movements sustain momentum through phrases that epitomize a sense of a collective land-rooted life as of greater importance than the individual life of a protester: 'Jaan denge, zamin nahi denge' (We'll give our life but not our land), or in Odia 'Amoro rokto poribo, kintu jami ame debu nai' (Our blood will flow, but we won't give our land).⁵⁰

Development and its discontents

Travelling to the forests of Saranda from Ranchi in 2017 with Gladson Dungdung, we were saddened when a Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) officer blocked our entrance into the reserve due to continuing anti-Maoist vigilance. Dungdung had mapped the recent violent history of the forest whose green vista concealed a Conradian horror in his book, *Mission Saranda*. The largest *sal* (*shorea robusta*) forest in Asia, protected under British Forest legislation in 1878 and declared an elephant reserve in 2005, became a conflict zone in the long fight between disaffected Maoists, local communities, and the state over the right to control forest and mineral resources in a context of the growing deprivation in the region. Following the purging of Maoists in the region, the Saranda development plan sought to hasten the carving up of the forest reserve into mining leases.⁵¹ Yet mining brought little to the villagers. In 2011 when Dungdung visited Dubil village in Saranda the toll of a decade-long civil war was clearly apparent. 'The Adivasi faces in the village seemed to express hopelessness. The children playing near the stream were malnourished. The village was full of red mud from iron ore mining. Water in the stream that was fed by the Koina river was red too. The agricultural land had turned barren, and the entire region looked untouched by development.'⁵² Gladson's writings have documented the violence of this encounter with the state, which was not just confined to Jharkhand but also to the neighbouring states of Odisha and Chhattisgarh. This violence has dominated the post-colonial history of eastern India.

These three states possess some of the world's best deposits of the bauxite used in aluminium production, as well as iron ore, coal, and other minerals. They are currently at the forefront of a Klondike mining rush. Over 20

⁴⁹ Chris Ballard and Glenn Banks, 'Resource wars: the anthropology of mining', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 32, 2003, pp. 287–313.

⁵⁰ Dungdung, *Mission Saranda*.

⁵¹ Vinita Damodaran, 'The impact of the Anthropocene in the locality', in Shonil Bhagwat (ed.), *Conservation and Development in India*, London, Routledge, 2018.

⁵² Dungdung, *Mission Saranda*.

mountain ranges in the region are planned for exploitation by global mining companies. These are landscapes that are sacred to many Adivasi communities and have been identified as locations of International Union for Conservation of Nature-defined biodiversity 'hotspots'. The inland areas of Jharkhand and Western Odisha have long been considered a colony of the coast. The Hirakud dam, for example, has its submergence zone in the west but the putative benefits from flood control and irrigation go to the coastal plains. Since 1945, displacement of populations has been a striking feature of the region. Up to five million people (mostly Adivasis who make up 25 per cent of the region's population) have been forcibly removed and 'resettled' to enable dam-building and mining/industrial development, a forced migration rarely equalled globally in the twentieth century.⁵³ These movements were facilitated by the failure of the Odisha state to redistribute land or rights over the 60 per cent of the region which had originally been incorporated from the princely states in 1947.

The poorest districts of Jharkhand and Odisha, such as Singhbhum and Koraput, which have the highest percentages of Adivasi inhabitants, are also those with the natural resources and minerals currently most targeted by multinational corporations. The marginalization of communities in these districts in terms of their lack of access to non-arable parts of the land was brought about through the reservation of forests and enclosure of common grazing lands, which had a far-reaching impact on the rural economy and which the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act of 1908 sought to contain. But the pace and extent of forest enclosures has increased tremendously after Independence, and the politics of these resistance movements were now more clearly linked to both global and national arenas. For example, in recent years many ethnic movements have legitimized their claims to the land and forests by reference to a global environmentalism and by arguing that the local communities are the best stewards of the landscape and have the best claims to control it.⁵⁴ The narrative of the rights of indigenous peoples to their forest was an important part of the politics of Jharkhand parties. In the 1960s and 1970s, political parties such as the Birsa Seva Dal, Bihar Prant Hul Jharkhand party, and the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha were set up to challenge the ideology of developmentalism. These organizations participated in elections, while their activists were also involved in the forcible cropping of *diku* or outsider's lands, in sabotaging local transport lines, and in organizing new forest *satyagrahas*.⁵⁵ There was also a renewed attempt to preserve the sacred groves of the Adivasis, as well as growing protests against dam building, as at Koel Karo. The effort to prevent the flooding of tribal lands and groves under this project generated widespread support. The main outcry was

⁵³ Debashree De, 'Development induced displacement impact on Adivasi women of Odisha', *Community Development*, vol. 50, no. 3, July 2015, pp. 448–462.

⁵⁴ For example, 'Chomsky: World Indigenous People Only Hope for Human Survival', *Telesur*, 26 July 2016, <https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Chomsky-World-Indigenous-People-Only-Hope-for-Human-Survival-20160726-0040.html>, [accessed 24 June 2022].

⁵⁵ Vinita Damodaran, 'History, landscape and indigeneity in Chotanagpur, 1850–1980', *South Asian Studies*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2002, pp. 77–110.

directed against the destruction of the sacred groves where the gods were said to reside. The stage was set for a long and violent conflict between the state, corporate companies, Maoist groups, and indigenous communities from the 1970s, to which we now turn.

Deforestation, dispossession, and resistance

Perhaps it was the first incident of such a brutal killing by the police in history, when the wounded protestors undergoing treatment were brought out of hospital, made to stand in line and shot.⁵⁶

One of the most popular movements in Singhbhum in the 1970s was against attempts by the Forest Development Corporation to replace *sal* by *sagwan* (teak), seen by the state as a more valuable commodity in the market. This had serious consequences for local communities, as *sal* products were important to them as a source of food and other needs. In 1978, resistance to teak planting in 2,000 hectares of the Sal forest grew as locals observed that little else grew under teak, in terms of the grasses, roots, and tubers on which the local wildlife and people subsisted. It was also believed that since elephants did not eat teak leaves, they would be forced to seek food in areas where crops grew, thus increasing their depredations on Adivasi lands. The agitators also argued that fruit-bearing trees were being cut down to establish teak nurseries, thus depriving Adivasis of another source of food. A detailed analysis of the forest *andolan* in Singhbhum district has been provided by Father Mathew Areeparampil, a Jesuit priest who had been working among the Hos for a period of time and who was actively involved in defending the court cases against them. He noted that 'the immediate cause for this sudden outburst were certain actions of the government which the tribals felt were detrimental to their interests'.⁵⁷ In 1973 the government nationalized the *kendu* leaves trade, in 1976 it took over the *sal* leaves trade, and in 1978 all the Minimum Forest Produce (MFP) was taken over by the government. In 1975 the forest development corporation was formed and a total area of 1.92 lakh hectares were leased out to the corporations for the purposes of clear felling and planting high-yielding varieties like teak. The first major incident of the uprising against these actions took place at Simdega on 4 August 1978, where police fired at a crowd of Adivasis, killing one person. As the *andolan* progressed, the forest issue came to acquire greater prominence. Forest officials were assaulted on a large scale. As part of the direct-action programme in support of the movement for a separate state, 2,000 Adivasis with their bows and arrows from the forest areas of Chakradharpur, Sonua, Goilkera, and Bandgaon took part.⁵⁸

Areeparampil has recorded that the *jungle katai andolan* began at the same time, when trees were cut in forest areas to create fields. The initial phase

⁵⁶ Dungdung, *Mission Saranda*, quoting journalist A. K. Sinha.

⁵⁷ Writ petition no. 371-375, 1983 in the matter of Mathew Areeparampil and others versus the state of Bihar, in the personal possession of Vinita Damodaran.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

of the movement included 67 villages in the Karaikela area, which attempted to reclaim lands which had *sasandiri* (burial stones) of their ancestors as evidence that these lands had once belonged to them. The resistance to teak plantations specifically targeted teak nurseries, and in some places, several huts, a pump set, and all the teak saplings were destroyed. The local Singhbhum *Ekta* newspaper described the reasons for the movement in the following manner: 'the planting of teak after cutting the natural forests is against the interests of the adivasis. Adivasi life depends very much on the produce of the forest like mahua, kusum, karanj etc....in many areas.'⁵⁹ In Singhbhum alone, 4,000 acres of forest were cut down. Areparampil notes, importantly, that this was mainly a hill Adivasi movement with both plains Adivasis and non-Adivasis against it.

The Bihar administration reacted by intensifying repression. Section 144 Cr. P.C. was imposed throughout the forest areas on 2 November 1978. On 3 November, Sub-divisional Officer Sadar and his party severely beat up several Adivasis, including women, at the Goilker market. Further shooting followed in Serengda and Goilker, killing five Adivasis. On the 5 November the leaders of the Jharkhand party, N. E. Horo, Haricharan Sinku, and Sohanlal Aneja, were arrested. However, the *andolan* was to come more firmly in the grip of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) as the Jharkhand party gradually distanced itself from it.

As the political leadership wavered, the Jungle *andolan* spread to other areas and continued to gain momentum until it climaxed in the Gua shooting where a peaceful demonstration of Adivasis was fired on by the Bihar Military Police and three Adivasis were killed immediately. What followed was indescribable. When the injured Adivasis were brought into hospital 'they were surrounded within the hospital, assaulted and shot dead. As per the official version 9 rounds were shot killing 9 adivasis within the hospital.' Gladson records the names of those killed as Jura Purty, Rengo Surin, Chaitan Champia, Bagi Devgam, Jeetu Sarin, Churi Hansda, Gonda Honhaga, and Ishwar Sardar. As the hospital staff cowered, the 'dead bodies remained there until darkness and with the blood until the next day'.⁶⁰

The police in southwest Singhbhum moved to arrest 4,100 tribals and non-tribals for unlawfully cutting down trees. As Gladson records, 'Gua will always be remembered for two things: iron ore mines and this brutal killing of innocent adivasis. Saranda forest is full of iron ore and every corner of the forest has also witnessed the bloodshed of adivasis.'⁶¹ The policemen who committed the terrible crimes remain unpunished to date. The JMM was driven underground, only to emerge again in new guises and locations. The Gua incident highlights the lack of protection and safeguards for these communities, who remained in a 'state of exception' to the legal order and its standards of care. These people's very existence seemed an aberration to state ideology.⁶²

⁵⁹ Damodaran, 'History, landscape and indigeneity in Chotanagpur'.

⁶⁰ Gladson Dungdung, *Mission Saranda*.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² A. K. Roy, 'Gua massacre of tribals', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 15, no. 38, 1980, p. 1123.

As the Indian state liberalized in the 1990s, the pace of change increased and the ideology of state-sponsored industrialization gave birth to corporate greed on a massive scale, specifically to do with mining. Several iconic struggles against imposed development in the period of neo-liberalism have erupted more recently, including against iron ore mining in Saranda forest and aluminium projects. In 2005–2006 Kalinganagar was seen as an iconic struggle throughout India.

A biography of the Kalinganagar resistance: ‘Development’ over dead bodies

The Kalinganagar killings, which took place on 2 January 2006, represent an extreme case of state violence in support of the corporate invasion of Adivasi lands.⁶³

When India adopted the New Economic Policy in 1991, this empowered national and multinational corporations to stage even vaster land grabs. Among an astonishing number of corporate land grabs of Adivasi territories, Kalinganagar in Jajpur district of Odisha is particularly notorious, on account of at least 20 Adivasis who were killed by police on 2 January 2006. Twenty years before, this area had been covered with paddy fields and undulating forest. The new Tata Steel factory was one of several in the area, symbols of ‘modern development’ in Odisha.⁶⁴

Land acquisition and industrial infrastructure in Odisha has been facilitated by the Industrial Development Corporation of Orissa (IDCO), set up in 1981–1982. A ‘Kalinganagar Industrial Complex’ was planned, to exploit nearby chromite deposits at Sukinda, and iron and manganese deposits to the north, which contained an estimated 96–98 per cent of India’s chromite, which is a significant component in steel. These mines, of which Tata Steel runs the largest,

⁶³ The information on Kalinganagar here was collected locally as well as collated from a wide variety of sources including: the People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), ‘Police firing at Kalinganagar’, a report prepared by the PUCL, Odisha, 2006, <https://www.businesshumanrights.org/en/latest-news/doc-police-firing-at-kalinganagar-india/>, [accessed 16 August 2022]; JMACC (Jharkhand Mines Area Coordination Committee) and JOHAR (Jharkhand’s Organisation for Human Rights), ‘Massacre of Adivasis at Kalinganagar on 2nd January 2006’, Ranchi, JMACC, 2006, <http://www.minesandcommunities.org/article.php?a=4574> [accessed 24 June 2022]; Harsha Trust, Xavier Institute of Management and District Action Group, ‘Empirical study on people affected and displaced due to Tata Steel in Kalinganagar’, Bhubaneswar, Harsha Trust, November 2006; Ramesh C. Nayak and M. Kunjur, ‘State aggression and tribal resistance: a case of the police firing at Kalinga Nagar’, Delhi, Indian Social Institute, 2007; Sans Serif, ‘Mysterious deaths in Kalinganagar’, *Countercurrents*, 25 April 2010; Samadrusti media items dated 2008–2012; Amnesty International India, ‘Authorities must ensure justice for victims of Kalinganagar shootings six years ago’, Amnesty, 1 January 2012.

⁶⁴ Tata Steel set up India’s first integrated steel plant at Jamshedpur in 1907, through extensive yet little recognized dispossession of Adivasi lands around Tatanagar. This was also the case with the Rourkela, Bhilai Steel, Bokaro, and Durgapur plants, all operated by the state-owned Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL) and being built in the 1950s–1960s, along with the dams and mines that supplied them with water, energy, and raw materials, displacing and devastating thousands of Adivasi farmers.

have been listed as among the ten most polluted places on earth by the Blacksmith Institute in the United States.⁶⁵ Untreated tailings from Tata's Sukinda mines have contaminated ground water, which contains 20 times the permitted level of hexavalent chromium (a pollutant with grave impacts on human health) over a large area.⁶⁶

The Adivasis in the Kalinganagar area, who are predominantly Ho, were invited from what is now Jharkhand by a local raja to bring forest areas under cultivation over a hundred years ago—a history often deceptively used to discredit their land rights, especially since 72 per cent were never granted title deeds⁶⁷—a widespread situation and basic problem in every land acquisition in tribal areas. The last land survey in the Kalinganagar area was done in the colonial period in 1927–1928. Acquiring land in the region has been a major factor for corporate companies located here since 1991. After Bhushan Steel and Power Ltd and Simplex Company tried but failed to acquire land, due to massive Adivasi protests, the public sector Neelachal Ispat Nigam Ltd (NINL) entered the region and started land acquisition procedures for a new steel factory in 1997. When some Adivasi landowners accepted offers, the company captured the entire area it wanted by constructing a boundary wall, destroying an estimated 639 houses in Serengsai, Khodyampur, Sarampur, Dokagadiya, and Sesakundi villages. Most of these families were not compensated or resettled, and protesting Adivasis were severely beaten up by police, with many arrested. More than 5,000 Adivasis lost their livelihood resources and homes to Neelachal Ispat Nigam, and became landless as well as displaced.⁶⁸

Other companies such as Mesco and Jindal built steel factories too, displacing many more Adivasi farmers, dumping most of them in Trijanga colony, where tiny plots of ten decimals were allotted for each displaced family. Resistance became more organized with the formation of the Bistapan Birodhi Jana Manch (BBJM—People's Platform Against Displacement) in 2004, which sent a letter to the chief minister in October outlining the injustice they faced and making certain demands, including a halt to construction on agricultural lands, recognition of land ownership for thousands of Adivasis without *patta*, and return of the land to the original owners. After widespread protest, NINL began to provide jobs and compensation to some, with direct employment for just 182 out of the 639 displaced families.⁶⁹

Violence escalated on 9 May 2005, during an Adivasi protest against a *bhumi puja* (earth propitiation) by Maharashtra Seamless, another company planning a steel plant. When the additional district magistrate (ADM) of Jajpur, Shri

⁶⁵ Felix Padel and Samarendra Das, 'Cultural genocide and the rhetoric of sustainable mining in eastern India', *Contemporary South Asia*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2010, pp. 333–341: Special issue on 'Rhetorics of Change in South Asia'.

⁶⁶ See www.blacksmithinstitute.org, [accessed 27 June 2022], and India Environmental Portal, 20 September 2007: Report on environmental issues of chromite mining in Sukinda Valley', http://www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in/files/Environmental_Issue_of_Sukinda_Valley.pdf.

⁶⁷ Harsha Trust, 'Empirical study on people affected and displaced due to Tata Steel in Kalinganagar'; Nayak and Kunjur, 'State aggression and tribal resistance'.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Santanagopalan, rushed to the site, where local police were providing security, local people reiterated their demands. Instead of listening, he ordered a *lathi*-charge, and clashes ensued, in which the ADM and officer-in-charge of Kalinganagar police station were slightly hurt, the ADM's vehicle was damaged, and at least one woman was killed.⁷⁰ In the face of people's rage, the police retreated from the scene that afternoon, but returned later with reinforcements, entering nearby villages on a rampage. Fearing retaliation, most men fled the villages and took shelter in surrounding hills, so the brunt of police violence fell on women, children, and elders. At least 25 women were arrested, and two children are alleged to have died, as well as an old man who had been badly beaten. The local administrators were taken aback by the spirited opposition from hitherto 'gullible' and peaceful tribals, while Maharashtra Seamless withdrew soon after.⁷¹

Conflict over Tata Steel's plans reached a new level. IDCO had forcibly purchased land from 20 tribal villages, which bitterly divided families who had their land records or *patta* and sold up to Tata from those who refused to sell. Those without documents were basically offered resettlement in Tata's new Kalinganagar colony, but with little monetary compensation. IDCO then sold Adivasi lands on to Tata at a far higher price than they had bought it for—Rs 350,000 per acre: over ten times what had been paid to Adivasi sellers. Tata continued to offer those whose land it wanted amounts ranging from Rs 15,000 to Rs 30,000 per acre, but most refused. After some non-Adivasi landowners accepted what was on offer, this provided an entry point for the company to seize further land. It was estimated that the state earned an income of approximately Rs 7.5 billion, while Tata reduced its outlay on land acquisition by about Rs 870 million.⁷²

Land acquisition was the main issue. Tata Steel had signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Government of Orissa for a greenfield factory to produce six million tonnes of steel per annum, involving an investment of Rs 1,540 million, on 17 November 2004, for which it required 6,000 acres of land. The Government declared 2,756 acres as 'acquired land', by using the provision of 'eminent domain' under the 1894 Land Acquisition Act, from 1,195 Adivasi families.⁷³ A notice was served for a public hearing at Jajpur Road on 27 July 2005. However, on 23 July, an estimated 3,000 local Adivasis protested against Tata's attempted *bhumi puja*, in the presence of the district Collector. It was cancelled and the district administration lodged cases against protestors. On 7 October, Sir Ratan Tata himself, chairman of Tata Steel, visited the project site with police and administrators to perform the *puja*, but again, protests prevented it.

⁷⁰ Das and Das, 'Matiro poko'.

⁷¹ Harsha Trust, 'Empirical study on people affected and displaced due to Tata Steel in Kalinganagar'; Nayak and Kunjur, 'State aggression and tribal resistance'.

⁷² Divya Gupta, 'Moral minefield', *Caravan*, November 2011.

⁷³ Tata claimed that Adivasi landowners had been compensated in 1992, but since they still occupied this land, acquisition was now carried out by force. The villagers had almost lost hope of retaining it, since most had no *patta*.

The protest continued until December.⁷⁴ The BBJM let the district administration know that any move towards construction would force them to resist as a matter of life or death. On 1 January 2006, local people came to know, through a 'leak in the administration', that Tata would initiate boundary wall construction the next day, without the landowners' consent. This fuelled local anger and the villagers decided to oppose this. The district administration had deployed heavy security in the proposed project site at Champakoil Nuagaon and on 2 January, the Jajpur district administration, including the district magistrate and superintendent of police (SP), with 12 platoons of armed police, reached the site, along with Tata Steel officials and earth-levelling machines to start boundary wall construction.

Any act of violence tends to be difficult to write about, and very different versions exist of the Kalinganagar police shooting on 2 January 2006. For Adivasis, the event immediately became symbolic of all the repression and violent intimidation they had been facing in the name of 'development'; for the government and corporate entities, the portrayal is of violence started by Adivasi protesters who were standing in the way of 'development', in which vast financial investments were at stake. The Adivasis carried their traditional weapons—bows and arrows, and axes—a customary mode of showing their identity and power. Angry that construction work was going ahead without their agreement on what they saw as their own land, they sent four people as a delegation to meet the district authorities. When these refused to hear this plea, villagers went to stop the construction work. As soon as they neared the foundation trench of the boundary wall, a policeman blew a whistle and without warning there was an explosion. According to some reports, dynamite had been tied to a low cordon to keep protestors out. Immediately after this, police started firing live and rubber bullets and lobbing tear gas canisters.⁷⁵

When Adivasis surged towards the construction site, the explosion badly injured several people, including a man named Birasingh Gop, whose foot was blown off. It is alleged from the police side that enraged Adivasis hacked a *havildar* by name of C. P. Mohanty to death. This death is said to have triggered the police firing, which continued for about an hour, killing and wounding men, women, and children, including Champa Deogi who was shot at a distance of five feet.⁷⁶ On hearing the explosion and firing, more villagers from the nearby settlements apparently rushed to the site and started pelting stones and firing arrows, despite the continuous police firing.

Of the 12 Adivasis first reported as being killed in the shooting, some early reports alleged that six were taken away alive by police and killed in custody. When these bodies were returned, their hands were missing. No full post-

⁷⁴ On 25 October, Rabindra Jarika, a prominent Jana Manch leader, was arrested by Jajpur police while attending a conference in Bhubaneswar. On 27 October, people *gherao*-ed the Kalinganagar police station protesting against his arrest, while police tried unsuccessfully to arrest other BBJM leaders. On 23 December, rumours started flying across the villages that the district administration and the company would try to possess their land soon.

⁷⁵ Harsha Trust, 'Empirical study on people affected and displaced due to Tata Steel in Kalinganagar'; Nayak and Kunjur, 'State aggression and tribal resistance'.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

mortem examination was done that included the hands of these six bodies, suggesting that their hands had been tied and they were killed in cold blood. The breasts of the body of a woman named Mukta Bankira from Chandia village were cut off, and locals reported the genital mutilation of several bodies.⁷⁷ Supported by a national outcry at the police violence, the Kalinganagar Adivasi organized themselves with strength and solidarity through the BBJM in the days following the massacre. On 4 January, a cremation was held at Ambagadia village in a spot declared as *Bir Bhoomi* (land of heroes). The first 12 people killed included two women and a child, and came from seven villages. Later, seven injured protestors also died. In all, 19 Adivasi protestors lost their lives in the Kalinganagar shooting and at least 38 were seriously injured, and one policeman was also killed. In these killings, we see, in Agamben's terms, state law suspended and a sovereign form of power re-emerging in the form of a unilateral, unaccountable, arbitrary 'state of exception' that turns on its own people through intimidation, imprisonment, and extrajudicial killings.⁷⁸

The BBJM maintained its economic blockade on the Daitari-Paradip National Highway, along which iron ore is transported from Keonjhar, until it was called off after negotiations on 9 March 2007, over 14 months later. The blockade was lifted only after the Orissa High Court intervened and the chief minister showed a conciliatory response to BBJM demands, including no use of force under any pretext to evict Adivasi villagers from their land; no construction to start without consent; and dialogue. Only after Chief Minister Navin Patnaik formally agreed to these terms in writing on 8 March, and his letter was read out to protestors in Kalinganagar, did the people decide to dismantle the blockade.

These promises were not kept, however, and coercive police action against protestors intensified, with arrests on fabricated murder charges and false allegations of belonging to the banned Communist Party of India-Maoist. People were harassed and arrested from the market, their homes, or ponds. When 120 protestors were behind bars, police told them their cases would only be lifted if they stopped opposing the project. Leaders of political parties were also used to convince people to surrender their land. Chakradhara Haibaru, a key movement leader, was told that he would be 'taught a lesson' unless he stopped opposing the project. When he refused, he too was put behind bars.⁷⁹

When most leaders were cornered in this way, villagers began to surrender their land, and 5,000 Adivasis of Sanchandiya, Baiburu, Champakoya-1 and -2, Kalamati, Chandia, Baligotha, Gobarghati, Bamiagotha, Ambagadia, Sasogotha, Gadapur, and Bandgadia villages were displaced. Houses in these villages were

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Lord Sowah, 'What is the true meaning of Giorgio Agamben's bare life Homo Sacer?', unpublished paper, University of Alberta, https://www.academia.edu/4091646/What_is_the_true_meaning_of_Giorgio_Agamben_s_Bare_Life_Homo_Sacer, [accessed 24 June 2022].

⁷⁹ Harsha Trust, 'Empirical study on people affected and displaced due to Tata Steel in Kalinganagar'; Nayak and Kunjur, 'State aggression and tribal resistance'.

razed by bulldozers and the families were dumped in transit colonies. According to the company account, of course, these Adivasis voluntarily surrendered their land and became proud members of the Tata family.⁸⁰

From the beginning of 2010, police collusion with Tata was starkly apparent, with more police shootings and mass deployment to forcibly construct a 'common corridor road' through disputed villages, to facilitate the construction of Tata's factory. On 10 January 2010, 300 rounds of LALA 76 rubber bullets were fired on protesting villagers. Disputed villages were now under siege, and another police shooting took place in Baligotha on 30 March. Rubber bullets and *lathis* were used to disperse Adivasi protestors, severely injuring about 30 people. They could only be taken for medical treatment after the intervention of High Court Judge P. K. Mishra.⁸¹ Villagers in urgent need of medical help could not get to a hospital, and a number died, including a woman named Baslema Goipai of Gobarghati village, who died of probable malaria fever on 5 April 2010, and a man named Ghanshyam Kalundia.⁸² A Dalit man named Rasananda Patra of Bandragadia village, known to be opposed to displacement, was killed on 22 April, the day after his colony was destroyed. His body was dumped at night by a tractor in a field near Gadapur village. Police supported another team from IDCO who came to Baligotha to demolish houses on 29 April.

Yet another police shooting took place near Chandia village on 12 May that left 35 people injured and one dead. The police had been trucking in resettled villagers who were now living in Tata's colony, having accepted compensation, and were now set to demolish their homes. But they also started demolishing the homes of families who had refused compensation, who were soon trying to defend their homes and possessions against the demolition squads. A woman who was wounded trying to defend her family's possessions against the looters attested the next day: 'I saw police and pro-Tata people carrying bags of rice out of our houses.'⁸³

Trying to fend off the attack amid police beatings, women called the men, who had stayed outside the village to avoid trouble. When they entered Chandia, police fired, and the violence and looting escalated. Another woman described how her family's money and other valuables were stolen and their home demolished, with police support, by a bulldozer. The Collector had promised that the displaced people could demolish their own homes, while the homes of people who had not accepted compensation would not be touched, so this was taken as a serious betrayal.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ 'Tata sponsored green hunt in Kalinganagar to destroy democratic tribal movement', *Sanhati*, 2008; 'Tata goons attack activist and gun down villagers at Kalinga Nagar', *Samadrusti*, 1 May 2008', Bhubaneswar, 2 May 2008, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJgr3b8P_JA, [accessed 27 June 2022]; 'Bloody steel', *Hard News*, 3 June 2010 (Delhi), <https://archives.hardnewsmedia.com/2010/06/3573>, [accessed 15 August 2022].

⁸¹ Iqbal Iqbal, 'Kalinganagar: development, death and despair', *The New Indian Express*, 27 April 2010.

⁸² *Ibid.*; *Samadrusti*, 27 April 2010.

⁸³ *Samadrusti*, 27 April 2010.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

Lakshman Jamuda was shot dead while fleeing from police and goondas, carrying his granddaughter, who had received a bullet wound on her cheek. Lakshman's body was cremated in secret by police, destroying evidence of how he was killed. On 30 May 2010, Swarnalata Banara of Gobarghati village was attacked by a mob and arrested by police for her opposition to Tata Steel.⁸⁵

The massed deployment of several hundred police acting on behalf of Tata Steel and other mining companies against village people whose land they want has become a recurring, grim feature of 'industrial development' in India in recent decades. The violence and intimidation continued as construction gathered pace, with huge financial pressures forcing the pace of construction.⁸⁶

Environmental defenders pay with their lives

Vibha... doesn't know where her mother has gone. She cries in search of her mother to breast feed. And of course, she cries in search of her mother's love and compassion...where does the buck stop for the violation of the right of the Adivasi?⁸⁷

The Kalinganagar killings in Odisha in 2006 were mirrored in Jharkhand. Gladson's fact-finding missions have exposed a succession of horrific human rights violations against Adivasis caught in the cross fire in the civil war against Maoists. In June 2010 he investigated the death of an Adivasi woman, Jasinta, in Ladi village in the dense forest area of Barawadih in Lathehar district. 'There was complete silence in the village. It seemed like an empty village. No one would even smile. They were living with fear, agony, anguish, uncertainty and anger...After a few minutes Jairam Singh appeared before us with his two kids—Amrita and Surhit.' Jairam could not speak—he was still in a state of shock—but his younger brother Bishram Singh had witnessed the incident, which took place at 7.30 pm on the evening of the 27 April. He said that as they were preparing for bed, they suddenly heard the sound of shooting. Someone shouted 'Come out of the house otherwise we will set your house on fire.'⁸⁸ Twelve well-dressed security force members with guns entered the house and started firing. 'One bullet hit Jasinta's chest as she was coming out of the house with Puran Singh the cattle caretaker, another bullet hit Puran Singh's left hand. Jasinta fell down and died in the spot.' He writes poignantly 'I can understand the pain, suffering and agony of losing parents. But here the story is different. I was old enough to understand and bear the pain, suffering and anger of this heinous crime. But these children don't, especially baby Vibha doesn't. She doesn't know where her mother has gone. She cries in search of her mother to breast feed. And of course, she cries in search of her mother's love and compassion...where does the buck stop for the violation of the right of the

⁸⁵ 'Waiting for justice', *Samadrusti*, 1 January 2012.

⁸⁶ *Samadrusti*, 14 May 2010.

⁸⁷ Gladson Dungdung, 'I have seen her crying', *Adivasi Networking and Solidarity*, 24 August 2010.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Adivasi?’⁸⁹ His narrative includes several such stories documenting the horrific abuse, routine assault, and molestation of Adivasi women and children, and the victimization of those who protest against the injustices by police, paramilitary forces, and the courts.

It was in this period that the Adivasis became enmeshed in the war between the Government of India and the Maoist guerrilla uprising that created India’s red corridor. The rape of resources in the name of development was paralleled by the rape of Adivasi women, and the torture, imprisonment, and extrajudicial killings of innocent civilians on an unimaginable scale. As eastern India disintegrated in this period, the war between the lawless state, violent Maoist splinter groups, security forces, and mining companies manifested itself in fake Naxal surrenders, the arming of local Adivasi men, massive corruption at every level of government, and the suppression of all legitimate forms of protest.⁹⁰ Such violence, as Butler notes, leaves a mark that is no mark. This is an erasure of those who do not qualify as fully human—an erasure that makes the violence invisible to us and convinces us ‘there never was a human, there never was a life and no murder has therefore ever taken place’.⁹¹

As the Kalinganagar narrative has shown, the war for eastern India’s resources was a war fought by corporate companies in league with the state against communities, a situation that was taken advantage of by Maoist rebels. Following the purge of the Maoists in the region, a further programme of ‘development-induced displacement’ has become part of the structural violence: for those displaced, ‘development projects’ often devastate traditional ways of living and indigenous paths of development. What is incontrovertible is the financial investment that constitutes the moving force behind big industrial projects and clearly pays for the police intimidation of protestors: investment-forced displacement.⁹²

The Pathalgadi movement

More recently, a new movement erupted in Jharkhand. Gladson, who had visited Kalinganagar and interviewed people involved in the movement there during the first half of 2006, and along with Padel visited the *Bir Bhoomi* standing stones that commemorated those killed in the police shooting, now participated in the erecting of inscribed *pathalgadi* stones in over a dozen villages in Jharkhand, and has written a book about the Pathalgadi movement in Hindi.⁹³

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Dungdung, *Endless Cry in the Red Corridor*.

⁹¹ Butler, *Frames of War*, quoted by Marti Rurti, ‘The ethics of precarity: Judith Butler’s reluctant universalism’, in M. van Bever Donker *et al.* (eds), *Remains of the Social: Desiring the Post-Apartheid*, Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2017.

⁹² In the case of the Kalinganagar steel plant, its construction from 2006 was obviously not unrelated to the acquisition of Corus (British Steel) by Tata Steel at the end of the same year.

⁹³ G. Dungdung, ‘Pathalgadi se kyo baybheet hai raajsatta’, Adivasi Hunkar, 2019; in English: ‘Criminalization of the Pathalgari movement’, International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 3 September 2021.

As he notes: '*Jan Denge, Jamin Nahi Denge*' (We'll surrender our lives but not land) is not just a slogan but a deeply felt philosophy for Adivasi movements, as the link with the land is the central value in Adivasi culture. Today's Adivasi resistance movements seem to have defined for themselves a clear continuity with those that confronted British colonial rule, such as the Birsa Munda movement in 1899. The Pathalgadi movement is based in the same Khunti district that Birsa came from, reasserting his same essential demand for autonomy 120 years after his death.

The BBJM is one of many Adivasi groups that have organized local people to resist the land grabs; others include the People's Platform Against Police Atrocities (PPAPA) in the West Midnapur district of West Bengal, Chasi Mulya Adivasi Sangha (CMAS) in Koraput district of Odisha, and Niyamgiri Surakhya Samiti (NSS). These have all been misrepresented in the media and government sources as Maoist fronts,⁹⁴ even though each tried hard to persuade administrators to respond to their initiatives.

The core message of Birsa Munda in 1900 was that '*Ulgulan ka ant nahi hoga*' (Revolution will not end)—a guiding force and inspiration for present-day Adivasi movements. Adivasis today argue that when they are fighting to protect the natural resources where they live, this is neither selfish nor anti-development, as their movements are actually attempting to protect the ecosystems that will support human life in future generations. This can only happen when the Indian state recognizes Adivasis as the rightful, original owners of the lands they live on and accepts their autonomy, in accordance with India's Constitutional provisions of the Fifth and Sixth Schedules, supplemented by recent legislation, including the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) 1996, the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006, the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013, and numerous judgments of the Supreme Court, as well as international legislation, including the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Hence the significance of inscribing lines from India's Constitution on *pathalgadi* stones. The Pathalgadi movement is a prominent example of Adivasi villages asserting the principle of self-rule guaranteed in this legislation. *Pathalgadi* (stone 'orders') has roots in a centuries-old custom among many tribal groups of erecting large stones in memory of ancestors, which took on new life after the passing of the PESA, when B. D. Sharma, with former senior police officer Bandi Oraon and others, started erecting stones in tribal villages recording tribal land rights formalized in India's Constitution and laws, especially provisions that delegate authority to the *gram sabha*.⁹⁵

A new phase of this movement started in 2016, with about 200 Munda villages in Khunti district of Jharkhand erecting *pathalgadi*, asserting the self-rule regulations enshrined in the Fifth Schedule, often banning government officials from entering these villages without permission. In 2017–2018,

⁹⁴ In the case of the PPAPA and CMAS there was some coordination with the Maoists, but only after the Government proved completely unreceptive to just demands at the initial stage. In the case of the BBJM and NSS, these organizations were clear in refusing Maoist support.

⁹⁵ Vincent Ekka, 'Pathalgadi, tribal assertion for self rule', Delhi Social Institute, 2018.

opposition to the repeal of land rights enshrined in the Chota Nagpur and Santal Parganas Tenancy Acts, which seemed designed to facilitate corporate land grabs, was a major motivating force for this movement.⁹⁶

Strangely, the first ‘martyr’ of this movement was actually named Birsa Munda, after the iconic leader who died in jail in 1900. He was from Chamri village, one of the first to erect *pathalgadi* stones in Khunti in 2016. Soon after Ghagra village erected a *pathalgadi* on 26 June 2018, police beat up some of those involved. These say they went to the house of Adivasi MLA Karia Munda in Chandidah/Charidih village, where, in his absence, they made his three Adivasi security guards come with them, to try and make administrators open a dialogue. Instead, the next day, about 500 police came to Ghagra, searching for these abducted guards. The shooting that killed Birsa and wounded several others occurred when 2,000 villagers opposed police entry to the village.⁹⁷ All this happened in the wake of an alleged gang rape of women actors on 19 June after they had performed at a Catholic school near Kochang village (about 50 kilometres from Ghagra). One of those who allegedly abducted and raped these women was Baji Samad, of the pro-police armed splinter group PLFI (People’s Liberation Front of India). Yet among those arrested for the rape were a number of Adivasis who were undoubtedly innocent, including Joseph Purty and John Junas Tidu (of Udburu village), a relative of one of the actors, and apparently a Pathalgadi leader, whom the police were searching for when they opened fire at Ghagra. They also arrested the principal of the school who had invited the actors to perform, a Christian priest named Alfonso Aiend.⁹⁸

On the basis of blaming the alleged rape on Pathalgadi leaders, the police started arresting and bringing charges against Pathalgadi activists on a large scale, portraying the movement as Maoist-instigated and ‘anti-national’. As many have commented, this is absurd, considering that its essence involves quoting constitutional provisions that establish tribal rights.⁹⁹ On 9 December 2018, the murder of Amit Topno, a Hindi-language journalist covering the Pathalgadi movement in Khunti and its suppression, greatly escalated fear and anger in the region.¹⁰⁰ Pathalgadi by this stage had also spread on quite a large scale to northern Chhattisgarh and Odisha, where similar misrepresentations began to portray it as Maoist.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Santhosh Kiro, ‘In Jharkhand BJP makes thinly veiled attempts to shift spotlight from changes in land laws’, *The Wire*, 24 August 2018.

⁹⁷ Javed Iqbal, ‘Jharkhand gang rape survivor’s account upends narrative of Pathalgadi role’, *The Wire*, 26 July 2018.

⁹⁸ ‘Interpreting the Pathalgadi movement’, CPI-ML New Democracy press release, 2 August 2018.

⁹⁹ Stan Swamy, ‘Does raising questions on the rights of Adivasis, make me a deshdrohi?’, *The Wire*, 31 July 2018.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Adivasi journalist covering Pathalgadi movement went missing. Now found dead’, *Groundzero*, 11 December 2018.

¹⁰¹ Neeraj Mishra, ‘Tribal resistance in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh’, 2018, <https://indigenous-peoples-sdg.org/index.php/english//ttt/677-tribal-resistance-in-jharkhand-and-chhattisgarh-stonewalling>, [accessed 15 August 2022]; Meera Mohanty, ‘Pathalgadi a naxal act to spread violence:

It is also important to understand that the Pathalgadi movement started in the face of the Jharkhand government 'Land Bank' project, coordinated with a 'zonal development' programme involving the takeover of Adivasi lands for newly defined 'smart cities'. Between 2016, when the Jharkhand government opened this 'Land Bank' portal with a view to attracting investment,¹⁰² and January 2019, it included over two million acres of Adivasi lands,¹⁰³ with a similar phenomenon in Odisha¹⁰⁴ and other states. In this situation, portraying the Pathalgadi movement as extremist-inspired served as a cover for militarization and land grabs on an ever-increasing scale. The movement's violent vilification and suppression by some administrators and police is offset by several prominent administrators, police, and politicians having taken part in the erection of *pathalgadi* stones, from B. D. Sharma until 2018.¹⁰⁵

In December 2019, one of the first actions of the newly elected JMM-led Jharkhand government was to withdraw charges against Pathalgadi activists and protestors against the dilution of the Chota Nagpur and Santal Parganas Tenancy Acts—though many of these remain in jail at the end of 2021.¹⁰⁶ Adani's coal-fired power station project in Gadda district (northeast Jharkhand), like its coalmining projects threatening Adivasi-preserved forest lands in central Chhattisgarh and near Talabira in northwest Odisha,¹⁰⁷ the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act 2016,¹⁰⁸ and the land bank scheme, all strike at the heart of Adivasi rights over the resources they have long lived in symbiosis with.

'Zones of exception' and Adivasi visions of alternative development

To reiterate the point made in our introduction, Adivasi areas have become, in Agamben's terms, zones of exception for the Indian state. Despite Adivasis' strong constitutional rights and their affirmation in laws, India appears to have a two-tier legal system, with thousands of Adivasis jailed on false charges

Jual Oram', *Economic Times*, 19 July 2018; Sandeep Sahu, 'Why Odisha's Pathalgadi movement is CM Patnaik's next big worry', *The Quint*, 23 June 2018.

¹⁰² 'Jharkhand Land Bank Portal inaugurated', *Times of India*, 5 January 2016, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/good-governance/jharkhand/jharkhand-land-bank-portal-inaugurated/article-show/50448318.cms>, [accessed 24 June 2022].

¹⁰³ G. Dungdung, 'Memorandum to the governor of Jharkhand', Adivasi Hunkar, 2019.

¹⁰⁴ Ishan Kukreti, 'Odisha govt lures industries by land banks, alienates people from commons', *Down To Earth*, 14 September 2018.

¹⁰⁵ Vincent Ekka, "'Pathalgadi": tribal assertion for self-rule', *Legal News and Views*, October 2018, pp. 7–11.

¹⁰⁶ 'In maiden order, Hemant Soren drops Pathalgadi cases', *The Hindu*, 29 December 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/in-maiden-order-hemant-soren-drops-pathalgadi-cases/article30427378.ece>, [accessed 24 June 2022].

¹⁰⁷ Chitrangdha Choudhury, 'Taking over fertile land for Adani Group from protesting farmers, Jharkhand Government manipulates new law meant to protect them', *India Spend*, 1 December 2018; C. Choudhury, 'If we give Hasdeo forest, where will we go?', *Caravan*, 25 February 2019; and C. Choudhury, 'We believe 15,000 trees have already been cut', *Rural India*, 18 December 2019.

¹⁰⁸ C. Choudhury, 'A Rs 56-cr afforestation fund threatens India's indigenous communities', *Business Standard*, 25 June 2019.

while corporations and police seem able to commit serious abuses, including rape, with impunity as if they are above the law. In such a context, state-sponsored development is a tool of violence and erasure by the state. Real development for Adivasis, as they demand it, has to start from justice, which involves implementing existing legal safeguards of their rights, in the face of vested interests from corporations and individuals who are seeking to take over Adivasi lands and orchestrating the loot. The investment-forced displacement by ‘development projects’ we have outlined above compounds a sordid history of illegal land grabs. For example, in Jharkhand alone, 2,608 cases of illegal land transfer were registered in 2003–2004, jumping to 5,382 cases in 2007–2008,¹⁰⁹ indicating a rapid increase in illegal land alienation. Even more shocking statistics show how poorly the FRA has been implemented for Adivasis and other forest dwellers throughout India,¹¹⁰ including in Kerala.¹¹¹

Justice is demanded in countless cases of human rights abuse, including killings, rape, torture, and arrest on false charges of innocent Adivasi men, women, boys, and girls. As Gladson records, from 2001 to 2016, 2,000 innocent Adivasi villagers were murdered by security forces: 1,000 in Chhattisgarh, 700 in Jharkhand, and 300 in Odisha. Similarly, at least 2,000 Adivasi girls and women have been sexually abused by men wearing government uniforms: 1,500 women in Chhattisgarh, 300 in Jharkhand, and 200 in Odisha. According to various reports,¹¹² Adivasis form the vast majority of 27,000 arrested as ‘Maoists’ and ‘encroachers on government land’ in these three states, under various laws, including the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) 1967, Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) 2002, Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2013, Arms Act 1959, Explosive Substances Act 1908, and the Forest Conservation Act 1980: 17,000 in Chhattisgarh, 8,000 in Jharkhand, and 2,000 in Odisha. The Indian state regularly refuses to take action against perpetrators in uniform, despite several commission reports.¹¹³ Justice seems a distant dream, despite the work of many human rights organizations, lawyers, and judges in documenting abuses in the face of political pressures.

Justice aside, the obvious need is for ‘development’ to be in the hands of Adivasis themselves is reiterated, as a process controlled and conceived by

¹⁰⁹ Dungdung, *Whose Country is it Anyway?*, p. 123

¹¹⁰ Dungdung, *Adivasis and Their Forest*.

¹¹¹ Nisha Subramaniam, ‘Kerala govt should withdraw its order to convert forest land titles to revenue titles: Adivasi rights activists’, *Maktoob Media*, August 2020; G. Dungdung, ‘An unrest in Mundas’ Country’, *Adivasi Hunkar*, 5 January 2019; G. Dungdung, ‘Land grab in Kochang’, *Adivasi Hunkar*, 6 January 2019; and G. Dungdung, ‘I was forced to sign on the land acquisition papers: Sukhram Munda’, interview with the headman of Kochang village, *Adivasi Hunkar*, 5 March 2019.

¹¹² Jharkhand Human Rights Movement (JHRM), *Jharkhand Human Rights Report 2001–2011*, Ranchi, JHRM, 2012.

¹¹³ Dungdung, *Endless Cry* is an extensive survey of human rights abuses in the ‘red corridor’. Its evidence is corroborated by Nandini Sundar, *The burning forest: India’s war in Bastar*, Delhi, Juggernaut, 2016, a detailed analysis of the Maoist situation in Chhattisgarh, and by Patrick Hoenig and Navsharan Singh (eds), *Landscapes of Fear: Understanding Impunity in India*, Delhi, Zubaan, 2014, on the pattern of abuse with impunity by security forces in several other parts of India.

members of these communities. This was certainly the intention behind the PESA, whose poor implementation is notorious. Dr Ramdayal Munda, a key Jharkhandi cultural activist, once described the true character of the Adivasi community as ‘casteless, classless, based on equality, community based economic system, co-existence with the nature, consent-based self-rule, dignity and autonomy’.¹¹⁴

Over 70 years after Independence, Adivasis remain one of India’s most politically voiceless as well as vulnerable communities, despite political representation by 47 members in Parliament and over 500 members in state Legislative Assemblies, elected from the reserved Scheduled Tribe constituencies. Due to compulsions of corporate pressure and party dynamics, Adivasi issues are rarely raised properly in the corridors of power. Most *gram sabhas* and other traditional bodies are too often under the control of political parties, which constricts the freedom of Adivasi leaders to speak out, and offers many inducements to facilitate corporate interests. The state and national education system has created a tribal middle class and elite, who are often alienated from rural communities and adopt many mainstream cultural, political, and economic practices and values. For instance, individualism is placed above community, and discrimination increases on the basis of ethnicity, caste, colour, status, race, or gender, compounding alienation from land, community, and resources. India has well over 1,000 tribal languages.¹¹⁵ Most of these, because of the undeclared assimilationism imposed through schools, which either forbid these languages altogether or use them in token form as stepping stones to immersion in the state language, are facing a devastating decline, along with the knowledge and value systems implicit in them.¹¹⁶

Could this decline be reversed? The Maori in New Zealand have shown the way towards decolonizing education¹¹⁷ through *Maori kaupapa*, and similar movements in Canada and several Latin American countries that are promoting multilingual, multicultural, ‘plurinational’ models, where education and local development are devolved back into the hands of local indigenous communities. For example, New Zealanders are proud to call their country by its official Maori name Aotearoa; and indigenous consciousness replaces ‘Latin America’ with Abya Yala.¹¹⁸ As with education, so with tribal health, which has been woefully neglected by mainstream healthcare systems, which also

¹¹⁴ Ramdayal Munda, *Adivasi Astitva aur Jharkhandi Asmita ke Sawal*, Delhi, Prakashan Sansthan, 2001.

¹¹⁵ Ganesh Devy (ed.), *Being in Bhasha: People’s Linguistic Survey of India. General Introduction*, Delhi, Orient BlackSwan, 2014. See also the implications of diverse knowledge systems implicit in tribal languages in Geoffrey V. Davis and K. K. Chakravarty (eds), *Knowing Differently: The Cognitive Challenge of the Indigenous*, Delhi, Routledge, 2014.

¹¹⁶ Malvika Gupta ‘A Critical Analysis of Policy on Tribal Education in India’, MPhil thesis, Central Institute of Education, Delhi University, 2016, p. 71.

¹¹⁷ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd edn, London, Pluto, 2012 [1999].

¹¹⁸ ‘From Latin America to Abya Yala: the new awakening of indigenousness’, Envio, <https://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/4422>, [accessed 24 June 2022].

falsify industrial diseases such as silicosis and denigrate well-attested traditional healing practices.¹¹⁹

The idea of real development for tribal communities has thus taken a back-seat in India. Dropout rates from schools are reckoned to be as high as 70 per cent and literacy remains low, due to this failure to integrate tribal languages fully into most schools, despite repeated attempts, with assimilationist education promoted in the name of raising literacy levels. Health facilities, educational endeavours, and rural development programmes are all defined top-down in a way that has conspicuously failed to enhance the overall life of Adivasis. For Gladson it seems obvious that development or social transformation should take place in the Adivasi community on the basis of its philosophy—‘according to its own genius’, as Nehru’s Panchsheel policy puts it. For him, Adivasi philosophy advocates a symbiotic relationship of coexistence with nature, and emphasizes values of sharing, autonomy, freedom, and equality, including equality between the sexes. For example, female foeticide, rampant in ‘highly developed’ states such as Gujarat, is unknown to tribal society. However, Adivasi society is still a patriarchal society and women have been made scapegoats and attacked as ‘witches’—as many as 1,500 Adivasi women seem to have been killed as witches between 2001 and 2016. Alcoholism is another major problem. While alcohol is a traditional part of Adivasi culture, its marketization since being taxed in British times has been a key source of debt and land alienation; and in recent decades the liquor mafia appear to be working hand-in-glove with government officials, in contravention of the provisions in the PESA that allow local councils to control alcohol sales.¹²⁰

‘Tribal development’ is supposed to be funded through the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP), but these funds are notorious for being siphoned off. The TSP needs a strong monitoring system with community involvement.¹²¹ Sensitive education, including higher education for Adivasi youth, needs adequate funding. Any development should be oriented towards drawing on traditional skills rather than making people dependent on the government or market. Examples of the kind of tribal autonomy envisioned in the TSP and PESA abound, which can be learnt from, such as Mendha-Lekha village in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra, which established self-rule more than two decades ago with the slogan ‘Our government is in Mumbai and Delhi, but we are the government in our village’.¹²²

Historically, Adivasis have had their own system of governance, without police. This still exists to some extent as the Manjhi-Pargana system among

¹¹⁹ Expert Committee on Tribal Health, *Tribal Health in India: Bridging the Gap and a Roadmap for the Future*, Delhi, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, 2018; F. Padel, ‘Health and identity in tribal India’, in Nirmalya Mukherjee and S. Nagarathinam (eds), *Achieving Healthy Tribal Communities in India*, Delhi; Kolkata, Excel Publishers for MANT [Manbhumi Ananda Ashram Nityanda Trust], 2014.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Virginius Xaxa, ‘Is the Pathalgadi movement anti-constitutional?’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 54 no. 1, January 2019.

¹²² Neema Pathak Broome, ‘Mendha Lekha: forest rights and self-empowerment’, in *Alternatives in a World of Crisis*, Brussels, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2019.

Santhals, Manki-Munda among Mundas, Doklo-Sohor among Kharias, and the Parha system among Kurukh (Oraons). The Adivasi agitation against proposed changes to the Chota Nagpur and Santal Parganas Tenancy Acts (1908 and 1927) were in defence of these, among other customary legal systems, which were validated by colonial laws.

Above all, a prime long-term political vision of the Adivasi community demands the establishment of autonomy in governance in tune with local traditions and according to principles of self-determination and self-rule. The idea of inclusive development emphasizes models from nature, rather than from capitalist competition. Correcting the historic injustice shown to Adivasis demands an impartial implementation of justice, whereby law enforcers and powerful corporations should submit to the rule of law on an equal footing with villagers who lack money for bribes or legal fees. Anyone, including the police, who is responsible for jailing Adivasis on false charges, or injuring them, should obviously face proper punishment. As resource scarcity grows, and competition increases for control of mineral and other resources in tribal areas, environmental consciousness and Adivasi rights need to go hand in hand, with a vision of protecting nature for future generations. The Adivasi vision of development is one of re-energizing culture and community in symbiosis with nature, to offer the world an example of long-term sustainability which is at the heart of Adivasi culture and Adivasi economics. Recognition of this has spurred many Adivasi struggles in modern India, often forgotten, which need proper documentation. This article is a contribution to this endeavour.

The Adivasi resistance movements covered in this article highlight the crisis resulting from competing visions of development. Despite terrible state repression and violence, protests continue. From Gua in 1980 and Kalinganagar in 2006 to Pathalgadi in 2016, Adivasi communities are fighting to be heard. In Kalinganagar, as we have seen, Deogi Tina was executed in cold blood by the Orissa police in the presence of senior government officials and subsequently the bodies of others killed in the protest were mutilated. 'She joins the ranks of other environmental defenders, Ken Siro-Wiwa, activists in Nigeria, Ecuador, Columbia, Peru and the Amazon who stand in the way of extraction of minerals from their homelands by multinationals, who depend on the state as their middleman to legitimate or force the handouts of lands they need to extract minerals.'¹²³

As we write, police repression is being used in a heavy-handed attempt to suppress an Adivasi movement against a Birla company subsidiary mining bauxite on Mali Parbat in Koraput district.¹²⁴

How do we conceptualize the nature of the violence by the state against the resistance by the tribals? The struggles by Adivasis today in eastern and central India are pitted against the extreme violence of global capital as effected by local political processes. In this light, the mutilation of

¹²³ Damodaran, 'The locality in the Anthropocene'.

¹²⁴ Priya Ranjan Sahu, 'Mali Hill bauxite mine: villagers reject project as Odisha govt extends Hindalco's mining lease', *Down to Earth*, 8 November 2021.

Kalinganagar victims takes on a particular brutal significance. As India bends over backwards to modernize, the question of 'Development for whom?' hangs in the air. There is little doubt that mineral extraction has profound effects upon, and beneath, a specific piece of land, while its ecological footprint may spread over many square miles. From the moment of its first entry into an area, a mining company create problems for those living or dependent on its territory and resources. As Roger Moody notes, 'there are few commercially attractive mineral deposits on earth which are not occupied or claimed by a self-identified community or communities...Whether it be from the coalfield of Bihar, the gold fields of Guyana, Indonesia, Peru or the killing fields of Sierra Leone...we hear the same basic demands: Show us how we will be better off if a big, open pit mine is constructed where we live...?'¹²⁵ Many multinational companies have conspired with states in the killings of environmental activists. Such a violent trajectory and the connections between the economic agents of landscape degradation and the human agents behind incidents involving the killing and mutilation of Adivasi peoples are compelling. Because the resource frontier impinges on Adivasis, an understanding of economic choices through globalizing resources is linked to the issue of the Adivasis' future. Similar understandings of this dynamic have been outlined by Michael Watts, in the case of oil drilling in the Niger delta, as part of the effects of the 'resource curse' on 'indigenous peoples'.¹²⁶ Increasingly Adivasi organizations assert 'minority' identities by promoting landscape and historical sites of significance in resistance history as places of sacred historical importance for state protection even in the face of unimaginable state violence.

The concept of indigenous peoples is now upheld in international law and this new indigenousness draws on international debates and environmentalist and climate change agendas. They claim control over resources in regions as far-flung as Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nigeria, and for mineral globalizers it has become important to crush these ideas of internationalized indigenousness. At the same time, such narratives of indigenousness may potentially provide a major check on globalized environmental destruction, especially in South America and South Asia. In the context of the current debates on climate change, these movements of resistance take on an even greater importance. This article will be useful to activists and scholars developing an alternative model of development and conservation appropriate not only to the poor majority of eastern India but also in the context of our current climate change debates that allow us to think of alternatives to an extractive-industry based model, which has predominantly brought poverty, environmental degradation, and killings of Adivasis in eastern India in the age of the Anthropocene.

Competing interests. None.

¹²⁵ Roger Moody, *The Risks We Run. Mining Communities and Political Risk Insurance*, Utrecht, International Books, 2005, pp. 10, 11.

¹²⁶ M. Watts, 'Resource curse, governmentality, oil and power in the Niger delta, Nigeria', *Geopolitics*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2004, pp. 50–80.

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