



## **Decoding Environmental Politics: Industrialization, Indigenous Rights and Resistance Movements in India**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Purpose of the study:** To critically examine global discourse of development and its dismissive of indigenous environmental knowledge and role of international indigenism in giving space for debate on environmental politics. Based on case study of anti-POSCO movement in Odisha in India, it has tried to sort out dichotomy of openness to change in quality of life of local communities versus role of reactionary forces restricting development.

**Methodology:** This study is a qualitative anthropological study among the tribal and local communities displaced in three villages by the POSCO project in Odisha. Modernisation theory of development was critically examined through the use of both primary and secondary data; interview, observation, Focus Group Discussion of the community, policy makers and activists and content analysis.

**Main findings:** In India, modernization theory of development has pushed to the debate on the way of development “development from below” versus “development from above”. The anti-POSCO movement in Odisha reveals politics of truth; it’s just an extension of other popular movements and anti-development. The truth is of double edged, a confrontation of law of land versus rights of the people, and displacement of a section of population vs. development.

**Applications of this study:** This paper will help create positive hypothesis that the legal industrialization can be legalised for the sake of poverty eradication and livelihood promotion governance. Industrialization is not hegemony of developed countries rather relevance for economic growth and reduction of poverty to meet MDGs in underdeveloped ones.

**Originality of this study:** The theoretical issues raised are inter-disciplinary, pure economics of industry and economic growth, anthropology of modernization and philosophy of social facts and truth. It has also critically correlated the socio-cultural, environmental and agricultural basis of protest to industrialization. The methodology is fieldwork-based observation, interview and focus group discussion. Results have been analysed through dependent and independent variables in ecological anthropology.

### **KEYWORDS**

Development discourse, Environmental Politics, Indigeneity, Industrialization, Politics of Truth

## **INTRODUCTION**

Industrialization has been a major tool of modernization theory of development for social and economic change for the modern states. Parsons (1967) argued that it makes a nation wealthier and powerful. However, Industrialization and economic globalization as an area of modernization theory of development has been world-wide criticised gave rise to resistance movements on the ground of tradition, religion and environmentalism (Lipset, 1967; Skocpol, 1977; Tipps, 1973 and Chew, 2010). These movements have created a dichotomy of conflicting ideologies; critical of erosion of livelihood of the local peasants, displacement and environmental degradation vs. arguments centred on presence of several socio-economic problems like poverty, undernutrition and labour migration in spite of having huge natural resources (Innocent, Yusoff, & Eikojonwa, 2020).

This paper has three major objectives to sort out; firstly, a critical look at rise of politics associated with sovereignty over natural resources and identity of the indigenous people. How the United Nations and the International Labour Organization is involved in mediation between the indigenous people and the state of their residence. Secondly, it looks into the issue that how the contemporary development discourses easily dismiss the strength of indigenous knowledge especially of environmental knowledge of the local communities worldwide. Thirdly, based on ethnographic data on anti-POSCO movement in Odisha, it has tried to elaborate the quality of life indicators of the local communities and their openness to change versus the role of reactionary forces restricting development.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been called as the 'Era of Development' (Thomas, 2000). After World War-II and collapse of colonialism in the mid of twentieth century, all the nations, including the newly independent states realised that nation building can only be possible through bridging the gap between 'developed' and 'underdeveloped' nations after the collapse of colonialism (Rahnema, 1997; Browne, 1990; Nwabunze & Obi, 2020). Harry S. Truman in the UN said "We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas. The old imperialism - exploitation for foreign profit - has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a program of development based on the concept of democratic fair dealing" (Esteva, 1992).

As an extension, in the 1960s, the modernization theory of development was advocated by the American Economists, who argued that the model of development based upon classical

liberalism as adopted by the present developed countries is the best one. The philosophical basis of this model is based on modern technology, free trade, market fundamentalism and individuality. The developed countries would assist the underdeveloped ones for socio-economic and structural transformations for their growth. The most important one is to go for transformation in intentional industrial policy and large-scale industrialization. On the role of industrialization for development, the United Nations has also agreed that industrialization is correlated to increase Gross Domestic Products (GDP) and per capita income for increasing standard of living in the underdeveloped countries around the world. The gap between developed and underdeveloped countries can be reduced.

Recently, several studies have found advantages of industrialization in reducing poverty and inequality in underdeveloped countries around the world. Fischer (2015) and Storm (2015) found that the late industrialized countries, even if they argue against capitalist logic or favour activism for modernization, mobilised their resources in favour of it for the sake of development. In Indian context, several studies have found benefits in modernization theory of development (Kohli, 2009; Chatterjee, 1993 and Ghosh, 1999).

However, very recently industrialization as a part of modernization theory of development is not neutral to criticism. Escobar (1995) saw it as fundamentally neo-colonial process. He argued that in this process the developed nations impose their industrial and economic structure upon the underdeveloped ones and consequently the underdeveloped countries are trapped in consumerism of goods and services of the developed countries. But, protest to this neo-colonialism and consumerism is seen in contemporary post-developed mentalists' rejection of this form of development. They see this as a form of western cultural imperialism, which hurts the poor people as well as the environment they are living in. Findlay and O'Rourke (2009) observed that the imperial powers encouraged industrialization to benefit their consumers of primary products and to reduce colonies demand for independence. In India, it is argued that the colonial industrial policy of the British government has given rise to a long term process of de-industrialization (Gupta and Roy, 2017) as well as support to anti-imperial movements (Bonfatti and Brey, 2020).

The contemporary development paradigm concentrates on reduction of poverty with people's dignity, people's participation, appropriate development, sustainability and capacity building. Kaushal (2009) argued that industrialization has both positive and negative impacts at the community level; provides employment to raise living standard and forced displacement and involuntary resettlement of affected people. There is large scale resistance to industrial projects by the displaced and potentially displaced people particularly the indigenous

communities in India. They argue that industries adversely affect socio-cultural institutions, religious sentiments, agriculture and environment (Corbridge & Harriss, 2013; Aandahl, 2009; Das, 2006; Da Costa, 2007). However, the major issues of criticism are displacement, rehabilitation and compensation for the people affected with the projects.

One of the major issues of opposition to the industrial projects is development induced displacement of the local communities. It is argued that though the development projects are relevance for economic growth and reduction of poverty, it is also responsible for large scale displacement. There is no reliable data on displacement, resettlement and rehabilitation of the people affected due to large projects. In one study on dam projects, Mohanty (2005) reported that the official sources are underestimating the displaced people. Kumaran (2013) estimated that every year, more than one crore people belonging to marginalized section of the society are displaced across the globe by coal mining, dams, roads, defence and irrigations projects. Another study found that as many as 60 million persons have been displaced, and significantly most of them have been displaced multiple times throughout their life in India (Fernandes, 2007).

The development projects are responsible for large scale changes in pattern of utilization of land, water and natural resources. These are also responsible for large scale displacement of people from their original habitations (Mehta, 1999; Pandey, 1998; Parvez, 2008 and Nayak, 2013). Pandey (1998) observed that most of the projects have not followed proper resettlement and rehabilitation policy. Lack of transparency is another serious issue in these projects. For instance, in the case of Hirakud dam in Odisha, Viegas (1992) revealed that the actual number of persons displaced was 1.6 lakhs, while government reports show it as only 1.1 lakhs. Nayak (2013) found that the rehabilitation packages do not have the provision of land for land compensation, which adversely affect the agricultural and forest dwelling communities displaced by the industrial projects in India. The displaced people are given only monetary compensation in exchanges loss of land, house, and other assets. Further, even if they are given land for land as compensation, they are not given legal ownership over it.

Similarly, POSCO, a South Korea based steel company was targeted by the local resistance movements in the state of Odisha, India. It had the target of 26 million tonnes annually by 2019. It has pushed to the debate on the style of development: “development from below” versus “development from above”, and its corollary, “development from within” versus “development from without”. Again, these movements have created a dichotomy of conflicting ideologies; critical of erosion of livelihood of the local peasants, displacement and environmental degradation vs. arguments centred on presence of huge socio-economic

problems. The state of Odisha is infamous for the issues like starvation deaths, labour migration, and high scale maternal and infant mortality in spite of availability of abundant natural resources.

## **RESULTS**

### **POSCO in Odisha: An Overview**

POSCO is the third largest multinational steel company in the world. It had signed a MoU with the government of Odisha, India to set up a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Jagatsingpur to manufacture steel in 2005. As per the memorandum<sup>1</sup>, the company was allowed to build a 4 million dollar per annum steel plant during the first phase in 2011-12 and could have expanded to 12 million tonnes/annum consequently. The government of Odisha was supposed to provide assistance in relation to water, electricity, use of ports and to issue environmental clearance. Consequently, POSCO-India Private Limited was registered with the Registrar of Companies, Odisha under the Companies Act, 1956 on 25<sup>th</sup> August 2005.

### **POSCO in Contemporary Odisha: Conflicting Ideologies**

The POSCO like steel projects can be cited as harbinger of development ideology, as they have serious understanding and considerations for three areas of society; the causes of conflict within the community, underdevelopment of the project affected population and historical injustice upon the people. The major concern is development with cooperation, which has developed between the company and the community. The development approach goes beyond the legal and orthodoxy of modernization theory of development. Rather it focus on the criteria of development indicator defined in Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); discourse of poverty, poverty vs. destitute, discourse of the government and recognition to the voice of the people who wants change. Escobar (1995) rightly argued that the development of the community is not always centred on “state theory of development”, rather it should be propelled through “discourse on poverty” between the community and the agencies like the outside companies coming to invest in underdeveloped countries.

The POSCO’s intervention to increase livelihood of the community has given rise to two basic conflicting arguments in a backward state like Odisha in India. First one is the distinction between Above Poverty Line (APL) and Below Poverty Line (BPL). The project affected population is basically poor and expects a lot from the state initiated development projects for their better livelihood. Both the betel vine farmers who were supposed to be displaced and the state government agree that this project would be beneficial. However, the compensation package has been such that the same people who were better off or Above

Poverty Line (APL) before the project becomes destitute after taking the compensation. One Report by the government of Odisha shows that the potential project affected betel vine farmers are mostly above the poverty line, but when they give away their land for the project and accept the compensation, they come down to Below Poverty Line (Planning Commission, 2011). Thus, the issue of poverty and destitution arises because of the project.

Another issue is of lack of distinction between “poor” and the “destitute”. The official conception of poverty is solely based on statistical figures. Contrary to it, POSCO like projects see above the concept of poverty and think of eradication of poverty and to liberate the destitute. It would have created more than fifty thousand employment per year in the next thirty years and would have contributed around 1.3 percent of state’s GDP. Escobar (1995) illustrated that poverty eradication through industrialization is an imposed one by the top on people who do not relate to it. Citing Foucault (1975), he further says that poverty is a disease, which can be cured only through intervention of others’ knowledge, resources and pity.

### **Quality of Life Indicators and Making of Resistance Movement**

In the proposed POSCO site in Odisha, several pro-POSCO groups have voiced their concern of change within the discourse of development. Their statements reveal both the creation of and the challenges of hegemony. They feel that their poverty and miserable livelihood can be sorted out only if big projects like POSCO would function in their locality. Most of them are betel vine farmers and economically APL families. Still they were in favour of POSCO, as they visualize poverty not only in terms lack of finance but see multiple notions of it. The hegemony of the projected benefits of development, make them regard their current lifestyles as ones lived in poverty. They were also confident that they will be able to get essential skills required by the project to get technical jobs within the plant. They also say that they will train their children to be fit for the company jobs. Hence, their perspective is that they are poor and need better life. Another significant issue is that none of the project affected families are qualified to have claims under the Forest Rights Act, 2006. They said that even if they had met the conditions, they would have supported the said project. It is with a hope that the earning through job would have been more than the traditional cultivation of betel and fishing. They were also happy with the offer of *pucca* housing, motorboat for fishing as part of displacement package.

This can be viewed through Talcot Parson’s theory of modernization (1967) to argue that industrialization brings transformation in livelihood and social change. The community

would be wealthier, powerful and achieve higher standard of living. Since the local communities are open to change and saw reactionary forces as restricting development, hence maintaining tradition for tradition's sake would be harmful to progress and development.

### **POSCO *Pratirodh Samiti* as an Idea of Problematization of Truth**

In the *Use of Pleasure*, Foucault (1978) proposed the study of ‘problematization of truth’ – that is the processes by which a situation or behaviour becomes a problem, thus ongoing and shaping a field of experience and intervention. In locating the ethnography of the POSCO project and as carrier of the models of “development from above” and the “outside”, Foucault’s idea can be a source of interpretation of the historicity of formation of “POSCO *Pratirodh Samiti*”, and involvement of academicians and activists in it. Again, it can be hypothesised that these movements are just extension of other popular movements. The truth is of double edged; a confrontation of the law of the land vs. the rights of the people, and secondly, displacement of a section of population vs. creation of vast number of jobs.

Again, the state had given forest clearance for the proposed project within the parameters of Indian law. At the same time, the POSCO affected villagers are empowered the Land Acquisition Act, 1894 and the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 to take their own decision to control over natural resources surrounding them. Thus, there is the “double movement of law”, which has been a major obstacle to development policy of the state. It has also created uncertainties over a new livelihood of the project affected people.

### **CONCLUSION**

The modernization theory of development which was built upon Classical Liberalism and the belief in individuality, industrialization, capitalism, free trade and the market fundamentalism has been criticised on the ground that it is harmful for both humans and the environment. The POSCO-India steel project to be set up in the eastern state of Odisha has been targeted by the local resistance movements since its beginning in 2005. These movements have created a dichotomy of conflicting ideologies; critical of erosion of livelihood of the local peasants, displacement and environmental degradation vs. arguments centred on presence of chronic poverty, starvation deaths, massive labour migration, displacement, under-nutrition, high maternal and infant mortality rate in spite of having huge minerals and forests in the state. However, it was found that the projected populations to be displaced are mostly pro-POSCO who wants a change in their life, freedom from poverty. The resistant movements are just extension of other popular movements. The truth is of double edged, a confrontation of the

law of the land vs. the rights of the people, and secondly, displacement of a section of population vs. creation of vast number of jobs. POSCO steel Project can be cited as a harbinger of development ideology. But again, there is uncertainty over a new kind of livelihood of the project affected people.



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## END NOTES

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<sup>1</sup>Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Orissa and M/s POSCO for Establishment of an Integrated Steel Plant at Paradeep. available at <http://www.orissa.gov.in/posco/POSCO-MoU.htm>. Some clauses in Section 6 of the MOU are this: "(xiii) The Government of Orissa will assist the Company in obtaining all clearances, including forest and environmental clearance and approval of the State Pollution Control Board, and the Ministry of Environment and Forest, Government of India under Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 and Environmental (Protection) Act, 1986 for opening up the iron ore mines, laying roads, constructing township, etc. (xiv) The Government of Orissa agrees to provide all possible assistance to the Company for acquiring mineral concession for limestone and dolomite within the ambit of the MMDR Act and MC Rules. (xv) Govt. of Orissa will make best efforts and provide all possible assistance to POSCO for expeditious clearance of applications relating to mining lease and related matters such as forest, environment etc. so as to enable POSCO to start its mining operations in time to synchronise with the commissioning of its steel plant."