Development-led Displacement in Tribal Areas of Odisha
An Overview

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Abstract

Large-scale projects like dams, mining, and industrial expansion, though often considered symbols of national progress, have disproportionately impacted tribal communities by stripping away land, livelihoods, and cultural identities. Since tribal communities inhabit their places for a longer phase of time, displacing them from their land not only creates problems in terms of settlement but also in terms of their identity, culture, and sustenance. Here, the idea of "internal colonialism" has relevance as displacement shows how tribal areas are exploited for raw materials, while the benefits of development are mainly seen in urban areas. The present article examines the relationship between development and displacement, with a focus on the concerns of the displacement of tribals in Odisha. It attempts a critical analysis of the dominant development policies and emphasises the need for inclusive frameworks that would protect tribal social and cultural traditions while addressing displacement and environmental risks.

Keywords: Tribal Rights, Development-Induced Displacement, Mega-Project, Indigenous Livelihoods, Sustainable Development

8.0 Introduction

Development, which is often equated with modernity, may be defined as a change in society through a mechanical advancement (Nabudere 1997) that leads to a novel system of reification and material production (Ziolkowski 2004). This process has changed the way of livelihood, shifting it from traditional patterns of living to improving the conditions (Calinescu 1993):

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which focuses on high production and integration into the macro model of national development. This connotation of development has been defined as the expansion of the economy, altering the manner of life, increasing productivity in all sectors (i.e., creating infrastructure): and so on. Nevertheless, development is characterised as growth in socio-economic, cultural, political, educational, scientific, and technical domains brought about by planned or programmed efforts for a peaceful transformation of society in a process that is constitutionally or nationally needed (Immanuel & Eunice 2013). These methods exacerbate the system of eco-degradation, naturally transcending towards the risk society[1], which increases the vulnerability of human life due to various disasters, epidemics, and calamities (Beck 1992). In the context of India, by guarantee civil, political and social rights welfare state ensure that every member feel like a full member of the society and participate in the common life (Singh 2010). The constitution envisages development as an instrument of social justice, ensuring equality of opportunity and safeguarding for the disadvantaged groups, i.e., the Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribe. Various articles of the constitution such as 15, 16, 46, 335, and others force the state to promote the economic and educational interests of the needy and prohibit exploitation (Ministry of Tribal Affairs 2018). Therefore, the state has developed policies of affirmative action and positive discrimination to ensure fair participation in the development process. However, the trajectory of India's development has been centralised, growth-oriented, and mega-project-driven, privileging macro-economic indicators, and despite the constitutional safeguards, the spirit of justice and sustainability has been overlooked, as this development process led to the displacement, exclusion, and marginalisation of the tribal people.

Displacement in India, a fundamental social consequence of extensive development projects that severely impacts underprivileged people (Verghese 2006). These activities are praised for helping the nation's progress, but they disproportionately displace the tribal people, causing widespread poverty and the breakdown of their cultural institutions (Asthana 2012). Tribe, as a social group, has a unique practice and a distinct way of life that has evolved through the ages, absorbing from both the positive and negative effects of modern development. Displacement from the original inhabited land greatly affected many tribal communities, mostly in a negative way. Relocation is not just an economic outcome, but it is also a very political process in which dominant groups make life harder for the marginalised, making inequality worse (Kaushal 2009). Within the larger frameworks of development, it is contended that the discourse of "national interest" frequently supersedes the rights of marginalised groups, especially tribal communities, who are disproportionately impacted (Kothari 1996). Since Independence, mega projects, especially those of dams and mining, have resulted in the displacement of millions of tribes, and efforts to help them are not proving sufficient, leaving these communities feeling unsafe for a long time (Mohanty 2005). These all-perspectives evidence that relocation in India is less an inescapable outcome of progress and more a reflection of who is prioritised and who is ignored in the pursuit of economic prosperity.

The phenomenon of development-led displacement is most visible in Odisha, a state endowed with rich minerals and natural resources, but where significant social and economic inequalities are evident. Post-Independence, Odisha's development has been driven by state-led industries, mining, irrigation, and infrastructure growth. However, projects like the Hirakud Dam, Rourkela Steel Plant, NALCO, and many other initiatives have displaced thousands of families, mostly from tribal communities and resource-rich regions (Mohanty 2005). These projects have helped the economic expansion of the state, but on the other hand, also forced many people to lose their homes, jobs, and cultural identities. Based on this, the current study examines the nature, scope, and social and economic impacts of tribal displacement in Odisha

by analysing secondary data sources such as government reports and scholarly publications through the literature review. This study is an attempt to understand how development projects have affected tribal lifestyles and to evaluate current development strategies in relation to the principles of inclusive and sustainable development.

8.1 Developmental Approaches towards Tribals in India

The formulation of tribal development and administration policy in post-independence India can be contextualised by comprehending the various perspectives that conceptualise tribes (Sharif & Singh 2024). There is no unanimity among scholars regarding modernity-led development, and that's why, since the 20th century, the arguments for the development of tribes are divided into three major streams: Isolationist, Assimilative, and Integrative. Verrier Elwin (1939) was of the view that tribes have a very distinct way of life, and hence, no external interference should be made, and that's why he envisages developing a 'National Park' in the forest or mostly in remote areas, administered by a tribal commissioner. Outsiders can't enter these areas, and any government entities may strictly have prohibited from exerting direct control over the tribal commissioner (Sen 1992). The government in this area should permit tribal persons to live happily with full liberty as much as possible. For their welfare administration, power would be handed over to the traditional tribal council and the village headman, which would lead to their authority. To enter this area, non-tribal settlers must obtain a license, and religious missionaries wouldn't be allowed to influence the indigenous life. Tribal liberty and culture would be preserved and restored, and not destroyed. The economic development of the tribe should be given equal importance by providing basic needs and education. Hunting and fishing would be permitted for their daily livelihood, and local officials should be eliminated for their liberty (Purkayastha 2015).

Alternatively, Ghruye (1943): drawing inspiration from various countries, supports an assimilative model of tribal development. He pointed out how Russia applies the model of 'Russanise' for its nationalities; China integrates its minorities, and America 'Americanise' its diverse populations—all reflecting efforts to assimilate minorities as a path to their development (Singh 1982). Moreover, he categorised the tribe into three categories. The first is composed of *Rajgonds* and those who are warriors, forming groups and are considered to have high status within the Hindu fold system. The second category comprises a large section of society that has partially adopted Hinduism and has close contact with the rest of Hindu society, such as the Kandha, Gond, Munda, and Santhal. The third categories live in hill regions and is protected from alien cultures that have crossed their borders (Purkayastha 2015) and still conserves their old tradition, beliefs, and livelihood patterns.

In the post-independence period, tribal development was re-envisioned through Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's integrationist model, especially for the tribes of the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) (Rao, Rao & Narsaih 1990): which laid the conceptual foundation for subsequent state policies aiming to balance tribal autonomy with national integration. However, these two approaches, assimilative and integrative, affect both social and cultural identity; it has the potential to control and capture tribal land and forest by aliens (Rao et al. 1990). Nehru's idea of development was to increase agricultural production for food efficiency; for this construction of several mega projects were initiated, which affected the land of the tribal. Moreover, the Nehruvian ideas primarily focused on the integration of tribes into civil society, state, and market, to enhance the overall development of the country (Vaditya

2019). Similar to foreign policy, Pandit Nehru has given five principles (Tribal Panchseel) for the development of tribes, and to preserve their art and culture. He advocated that development should not be imposed on tribal people; their rights over land and forest should be respected; they should be free to run their administration; there should not be any interference in their institutions; and development should be evaluated not through statistics but through human character evolved (Rao et al. 1990).

Besides three dominant approaches, the ecological approach to tribal studies emphasises how tribal communities' livelihoods, traditions, and issues are in tune with the natural resources and local environments. It acknowledges that disputes over forests, land, and water are not solely ecological but also social, since they reflect competing claims between local subsistence users and governmental or industrial players (Guha 1992 & 1997). From this point of view, tribal societies can't be understood solely through isolation, integration, or assimilation; instead, they must be viewed in connection to their ecological embeddedness. For example, movements like Chipko were centred on safeguarding the forest as a means of survival and cultural preservation, not merely because they are natural resources. (Guha 1997). In contrast, many projects viewed tribes as isolated populations to be assimilated, rejecting their adaptive ecological methods that maintained sustainability (Burman 1983). These ecological practices, whether in agriculture, forest usage, or water conservation, constitute various knowledge systems that challenge the concept of tribes as "backward." Thus, the ecological perspective complicates earlier policy debates. Isolation often overlooked the dynamic connection of tribes with wider ecosystems; assimilation imposed exploitative forms of resource usage; and integration, though more balanced, often sacrificed tribal needs to industrial advancement. For this instance, in the Baliraja dam, tribal displacement reveals how ecological considerations are disregarded for the sake of development (Rout 2009). Hence, from an ecological framework, it provides a corrective stance, emphasising that achieving environmental justice and sustainable development is inextricably linked to protecting indigenous rights.

8.2 Majoritarian Approach of Development: Development-Induced Displacement

In the classical tradition, which emerged after the Renaissance and Reformation, development is defined as an enhancement of the material prosperity of the society and nation (Harris 2007). It is influenced by the development and construction of infrastructure, such as dams and industries (Bharathi & Rao 1999). And progress is seen as the material prosperity of the nation (Harris 2007). However, with the passage of time and with the emergence of the democratic welfare state, a considerable change has been witnessed in the traditional definition, and it is also defined as a process by which the exact freedom that people enjoy is enhanced (Sen 2006). True freedom must be free of restraints that prevent it from being fully realised, such as poverty, authoritarian rule, inadequate economic infrastructure, systematic social disadvantages, negligence of public space, discrimination, excessive regulation, and repressive conditions (Sen 2006). According to the Human UNDP (2010): the primary goal of development is to broaden human choices, which are dynamic and possibly endless over time. While individual outcomes cannot always be guaranteed, indicators of development include economic progress, improved access to education and healthcare, improved livelihood security, protection from violence and crime, protection of political and cultural freedoms, and increased public participation (Swami 2011). Development is viewed as a natural process; it tends to take over or substitute relationships that stem from wisdom, wealth, and culture.

The traditional conception of development has a considerable influence in the early post-independence period, and the welfare of the majority looms large over the welfare of all. This resultant in to relative exclusion, a diminishing livelihood base, illiteracy, inadequate access to rights and entitlements, and existence within a subsistence economy. The tribal community in its various regions has remained susceptible to exploitation, forced migration, and debt traps, especially being a victim of majoritarian development discourse.

The forceful or manipulative removal and re-establishment of large populations without their consent due to land acquisition for various development projects, building roads, railways, dams, irrigation canals, hydroelectric plants, and mining of minerals and raw materials are examples of development-induced displacement (DID) (Sapre & Gori 2023) and implies for the development of the majority, minority have to sacrifice. In India, with the large tribal populations, these projects are promoted as national progress, yet they disproportionately damage vulnerable groups that rely heavily on land and forests. For example, mining in central India's tribal belts has created widespread land expropriation and ecological changes, affecting traditional socio-ecological systems (Padel & Das 2010). The socio-economic and cultural effects of DID are enormous, resulting in destitution, identity loss, and increased vulnerability. Displaced tribes lose access to essential resources, including forests and sacred sites, increasing marginalisation (Debasree 2015). However, India's frameworks occasionally fail to provide sufficient safeguards, which causes community backlash (Fernandes & Paranjpye 1997).

8.3 Mega Projects and Displacement

After independence, India prioritized infrastructure—power, irrigation, and construction—driving hydroelectric, mining, and quarrying projects aimed at public good but significantly disrupting tribal communities closely connected with nature. Hydro power projects, which are considered the 'temple of modern India' by J.L. Nehru (Kumar & Mishra 2019): have uprooted many from their traditional roots of living. India at present has the largest number of hydro-power projects, with a range of 695 to 960, as per different estimates. This aggressive push towards infrastructure development has led to one of the world's largest instances of development-induced displacement.

The exact number of people displaced by these projects remains uncertain. Independent investigations have revealed that official government figures often significantly underreport the extent of displacement. Fernandes and Thukral (1989) highlighted this discrepancy in the case of the Hirakud Dam, noting that unofficial estimates put the number of displaced at 1.8 lakhs, whereas the official figure is considerably lower. A major limitation in estimating displacement from dam projects is the narrow focus on reservoir-related displacement alone. In reality, large dam projects displace people through multiple channels, including the construction of colonies, canals, downstream impacts, catchment area treatments, compensatory afforestation, and various forms of secondary displacement. In a review of the World Bank, it has been estimated that an average of 13 thousand people is displaced by each new large dam construction (Cernea 1996). By this estimate, around 39 million people have been displaced in India. The weakest and marginalised section of society has suffered the maximum in this process of displacement, much disproportionate to their population percentage. Renowned activist Arundhati Roy, in her work, emphasises the human cost of development (Roy 1999) and taking reference from the study of the Indian Institute of Public

Administration (IIPA): she equated the mass displacement to discovering a 'mass grave', highlighting the scale of suffering that often remains invisible in mainstream development narratives.

Between 1951 and 1990, over 8.5 million tribal people were displaced due to various development projects, accounting for nearly 60 per cent of the total displaced population in that period. Despite the large scale of displacement, there is a lack of reliable data on the actual number of displaced individuals and their rehabilitation status. According to estimates, out of 21.3 million (213 lakh) displaced, around 2.55 million were displaced by mining, 1.25 million by industries, and smaller numbers by other projects. Only about 25 per cent of the displaced tribal population received any form of resettlement, leaving approximately 35 per cent without any rehabilitation, highlighting a major gap in development planning and execution (Fernandes & Paranjpye 1997).

Each year, land acquisition for these projects results in the displacement or forcible removal of a significant portion of people from their homes (Mohanty 2011). Notably, there is a lack of precise data or official records on the number of displaced individuals caused by such development projects (Negi & Azeez 2022).

Nonetheless, many scholars have analysed and interpreted the displacement related to planned development. For example, Negi and Ganguly (2011) noted that fifty million people have been displaced in India over the past 50 years, while Fernandes (2007) stated that more than 60 million people were displaced/ partially affected from 1947 to 2000. Thakkar (1999) and Siddiqui (2012) also described how dam construction and mining have led to large-scale displacement in India.

In the tribal areas of India, the availability of rich minerals is a cause for ongoing mining, electricity, and industrial projects. More than lakhs of tribal people get displaced due to the present and forthcoming major developmental projects (Mohanty 2011). As per conservative estimates (table -8.1) during 1951-90, out of 213 lakhs, 85.39 lakhs of indigenous people were displaced, which is 25 per cent of the total. This dam construction, for both hydroelectricity and irrigation, displaced 164 lakh people, constituting 77 per cent of the total displaced population. Among these, 15.81 lakh were tribal, which accounts for 25 per cent of the displaced population. Following this, due to mining, 25.5 lakh people were displaced from their ancestral land, out of which 13.3 lakh are tribal which account for 25 per cent of the total displaced, as these areas are full of rich minerals, i.e., bauxite, coal, mica, etc. (Mohanty 2005).

Similarly, for the establishment of industry (both major and minor): a quarter of the tribal people have left their ancestral place. Mining activity not only causes direct displacement, but it also impacts the livelihoods of thousands of people by affecting the water table, putting too much stress on fertile agricultural land, and cutting down forests (Mohapatra 1991). The minor project (wildlife protection and other reasons) is also among the causes of the displacement category, where more than one-fifth of the tribal people became evacuees.

Table 8.1: Estimate of Persons and Tribes Displaced by Development Project During 1951-90 (in lakh) in India

Project's Type	All DPs	Percentage of DPs	DPs of Tribal People	Percentage of Tribal DPs
Dam	164.4	77	63.21	25
Mines	25.5	12	13.3	25
Industries	12.5	5.9	3.13	25
Wildlife	6	2.8	4.5	22
Others	5	2.3	1.25	20.2
Total	213	100	85.39	25

Note: DP stands for Displaced Person
Source: Mohanty (2005)

8.4 The Case of Odisha

In Odisha, most of the development projects have been constructed in rural areas primarily inhabited by tribal communities, leading to displacement (Asthana 2012). Thousands of impoverished rural tribal people have been forced to leave their homes, which served as their main source of income and a means to preserve their traditional identity. The Planning Commission reports that over 40 per cent of families displaced by development projects in Odisha are tribal, and they have lost control of their livelihoods (Government of India 2002). As evident from the table 8.2 the Hirakud project results in the largest displacement, with 26,501 families affected, including 1,636 tribal households, which make up a small share of 6.17 per cent. The Rengali project displaced 11,289 families, with 1,328 tribal families, accounting for 11.76 per cent. Trends in the Upper Kolab and Upper Indravati projects show that tribal groups bore a much larger portion of the displacement (Mishra 2002). In Upper Kolab region, 1,431 of 3,067 affected households, constituting 46.66 per cent, were tribal, while Upper Indravati displaced 5,344 families, with 2,260, which is 42.30 per cent of displaced families are tribal. The impact is even more pronounced in Malkangiri district, in these two projects, Balimela and Machkund Dam Projects.

Table 8.2: Displacement of Tribal Families in Multipurpose Dam Projects in Odisha

Sl. No.	Project's Name	All Displaced/ Affected Families	Displaced/ Affected Tribal Families	Percentage of Tribal Families Displaced/ Affected
1	Hirakud	26,501	1,636	6.17
2	Rengali	11,289	1,328	11.76
3	Upper Kolab	3,067	1,431	46.66
4	Upper Indravati	5,344	2,260	42.30
5	Balimela	2,500	1,450	58.00
6	Machkund	2,938	1,500	51.00
7	Salandi	945	893	94.5
Total		**52,584**	**10,498**	**19.96**

Source: Dalua 1993, Nayak 2013, and GoI 2014 as cited in Panda & Dash 2018.

In the Balimela projects, where tribal share more than half of those displaced, i.e., 1,450 out of 2,500 households, which is 58 per cent, and for Machkund this share is 51 per cent. The Salandi project represents the most severe case of displacement, with 893 of 945 families, or 94.5 per cent, belonging to tribal communities alone. In total, these seven Multipurpose Dam projects studied displaced 52,584 families, of whom 10,498 were tribal alone, representing about 20 per cent of those affected. This clearly shows that although tribal families made up only about one-fifth of the overall displaced population, they were impacted far more heavily in certain projects. Among the tribes in Odisha, the Pauri (Paudi) Bhuyan, Munda, Kolh, Bhuiyan, Juang, Saanti, Bathudi, Gond, Santhal, Orang, Kondh, Bonda, Koya, Paroja, Gadaba, Dongria Kondh, Binjhal, Abujhmaria, Bhatra, and Maria tribes are among those who have been most adversely affected (ST & SC Development Department, Government of Odisha 2004) by these Multipurpose Dam Projects.

Table 8.3: Displacement of Tribal Families in Major Irrigation Projects in Odisha

Sl. No.	Project's Name	All Displaced/ Affected Families	Displaced/ Affected Tribal Families	Percentage of Tribal Families Displaced/ Affected
1	Subarnarekha	9,044	5,352	59.18
2	Ong	3,977	2,049	51.52
3	Lower Indra	6,181	1,314	21.25
4	Lower Suktel	4,160	1,255	30.16
5	Kanupur	3,617	2,243	62.01
6	Manjore	1,065	192	18.02
7	Rengali Irrigation	1,009	10	0.99
Total		**29,053**	**12,415**	**42.73**

Source: Same as table- 8.2

Similar to the multipurpose dam projects, the major irrigation projects also have strongly affected the tribal lives and livelihoods (table-8.3). The Subarnarekha project had the highest percentage of tribal displacement, with 5,352 out of 9,044 families belonging to tribal groups, making up 59.18 per cent of the total affected. A similar situation is evident in the Ong irrigation project[2], where out of 3,977 relocated households, 2,049 were tribal, accounting for 51.52 per cent. The Kanupur project shows an even bigger share, where 2,243 out of 3,617 displaced families, or 62.01 per cent, belong to tribal households. In contrast, the share of tribal displacement is significantly in the Lower Indra and Lower Suktel projects, where 1,314 out of 6,181 families (21.25 per cent) and 1,255 out of 4,160 families (30.16 per cent) were tribal, respectively. The Manjore project displaced 1,065 families, of whom 192, or 18.02 per cent, were from tribal communities. In this same category, the least impact on tribal communities is reported at the Rengali irrigation project, where just 10 out of 1,009 displaced families, which is less than 1 per cent, were tribal. Overall, the seven projects jointly displaced 29,053 families, of which 12,415 were tribal, constituting 42.73 per cent of the total. These numbers make it obvious that approximately half of the displaced people in these projects belonged to tribal groups. Santhal, Ho, Gond, Kondh (Kandha): Sora (Saora): Juang, Munda, Bhuiyan, and Kolha are the principal tribes affected by these irrigation projects (ST & SC Development Department, Government of Odisha 2004): that reflecting the unequal burden placed on indigenous communities in the course of the state's development process.

Along with the multipurpose dam and major irrigation projects, medium irrigation projects also have impacted on tribal lives, as half of the displaced households alone from the tribal, i.e., 4557 families out of 9,153 (Panda & Dash 2018). Besides the dam or irrigation

project, the vast mineral resource base of iron ore, bauxite, and ferromanganese in Odisha attracted several local and multinational mineral-based heavy industries. Prominent among them are POSCO[3] (Korea): Vedanta Aluminium (UK): BHP[4] Billiton (UK–Australia): Rio Tinto (UK): Alcan (Canada): Sterlite, Hindalco, Jindal, and Tata. It is estimated that approximately five per cent of the displacement caused by development projects in the region is attributed to mining (Behera & Padhi 2022): which plays a significant role in displacing tribal people from their ancestral land (Samal 2025). In the IB valley[5] mining areas of Jharsuguda district, a total of 90 families were displaced, of which 52 belonged to scheduled tribes (Asthana 2012). By the establishment of Utkal Alumina International Limited (UAIL): with the help of the Industrial Development Corporation (IDCO) of Odisha, 5000 tribal people were affected (Priyadarshini & Dulla 2023). The National Aluminium Company Limited (NALCO) operations in Damonjodi and Panchpatmali hills have affected 597 families, where 254 are from the tribal community (Stanley 1996).

8.5 Displacement and PESA Act

Tribal displacement is particularly devastating for their lives as it removes communities from their ancestral lands, which are abundant in natural resources. This separation undermines their cultural identity and disrupts traditional livelihoods that are deeply connected to forests, rivers, and shared natural resources (Nayak & Jena 2022). Unlike other groups, tribal seldom benefit from the mainstream development while disproportionately enduring its burdens, confronting landlessness, food insecurity, and cultural marginalisation due to insufficient rehabilitation efforts. (Mohanty 2005). After displacement, persons often lose their prior status and face identity issues, along with unfamiliar treatment from the host community in their new society. Consequently, they may be classified as refugees by the state, which carries a lifelong stigma (Hartonen et al. 2021). Moreover, the government frequently fails to recognise their plight, develop supportive policies, or provide compensation to those displaced (Mohanty & Mohanty 2009). Nobody wants to risk underprivileged tribes losing their land and means of income, but everyone views development from a public perspective. Land and forests are core resources, customary rights, and vital for tribes' daily livelihoods, but negative displacement, loss of traditional occupations, environmental changes, disturbed community life, marginalisation, and psychological trauma all result (Sahoo & Jojo 2020). The modern concept of development focuses on material progress, which often disrupts the lives of marginalised groups due to displacement. On one hand, industrialisation promotes overall national growth, but on the other hand, displaced or marginalised people face significant challenges in their specific situations (Bartolome 1984). The uprooting of the tribal people is not just a change of the residential place; rather, it destroys the whole ecosystem of the tribal life and tradition, which they have carried out through the ages. That's why, whether resettled or not, every identity and associated life cycle of tribes gets disturbed due to displacement

The provisions of the PESA act to an extent, address the concerns of the tribal, especially in terms of their land rights. Also, along with the state support to the private players in mega projects, led to violation of their rights for '*Jal, Jungle and Zamin*'[6]. The principles of decentralisation, devolution of authority, and participatory decision-making have historically been essential to the governance traditions of tribal communities in the Indian subcontinent (De & Jana 2007). In the post-independence period, the Indian state worked to institutionalise these ideas through constitutional provisions and legislative measures, which aimed to expand democracy and ensure administrative effectiveness. Also, the Constitution of India has

mentioned certain safeguards for tribal and scheduled areas under the Fifth and Sixth Schedules to support tribal development and protect their diverse socio-cultural traits (Ambagudia 2010). Building on this foundation, the state launched several developmental programs aimed at empowering native groups. A key milestone was the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1992 and 1993, which advanced local self-governance through reserved seats and decentralisation (Dandekar 2016). At the heart of this system is the Gram Sabha, which is empowered to increase democratic participation at the grassroots level.

The Panchayats Extension to the Scheduled Areas Act (PESA): implemented under the Fifth Schedule, even consolidated the role of the Gram Sabha, which outlines two specific provisions: first, land in scheduled regions cannot be transferred without its approval, and second, mining activities cannot start without its agreement (Parida 2013). PESA thereby developed a legislative framework through which native tribes could take control over their resources, safeguard the environment, and retain their cultural and social identity. Section 4(d) of the Act underlines its electoral responsibility, while Section 4(e) grants authority to organise and execute socio-economic development programs and to select recipients for poverty alleviation measures (Deepa 2015): and Section 4(i) directs negotiations with the Gram Sabha before any land acquisition or resettlement in Scheduled Areas. These laws strive to ensure that relocation cannot occur without the free, prior, and informed consent of affected tribal groups, thereby incorporating participatory governance into the development process (Choubey 2015). The implementation of PESA has promoted improved knowledge among indigenous people of their legal rights, generally encapsulated in the word 'hamara kanoon' (our law). Although it is envisioned as a platform for self-rule, its enforcement remains inconsistent, limited by state control over property and governance (Menon 2007). Nevertheless, the Gram Sabha continues to serve as a core institution for maintaining customary practices, protecting cultural identity, and preserving socio-economic rights (Patnaik 2007). However, PESA empowers tribal communities by granting Gram Sabhas authority over land and resource decisions, ensuring self-governance, protecting against exploitation, and preventing involuntary displacement through community consent and participatory development.

Ironically, the same has not extended to the tribal dominated region of Odisha, and they are still placed into the role of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and ground administration, devoid of their rights of 'Jal, Jungle and Zamin'. Although PESA was aimed at upholding tribal land and resource rights, its implementation in the state has been inconsistent. Despite the legal provisions, large-scale mining, industrial, and irrigation projects such as Hirakud, Rengali, and Suktel have displaced thousands of tribal families. While this Act enables Gram Sabhas to accept or reject projects impacting their territory, in fact, bureaucratic control and inadequate institutional procedures have limited such autonomy. Therefore, the proper functioning of PESA in Odisha is crucial to prevent involuntary relocation and to realise the constitutional ideal of self-governance and sustainable development for the indigenous people (Mohanty 2014 and Nayak & Jena 2022).

8.6 FRA and Tribal Rights

Tribal communities in India have traditionally been neglected, and despite decades of freedom, their socio-economic indicators remain weak (Bandi 2014). Successive governments implemented initiatives to alleviate these inequities, i.e., the Indian Forest Act of 1865, revised in 1878 and 1927, categorised forests into reserved, protected, and village types (GoI 1927):

where reserved and protected forests were placed under state jurisdiction (Kothari et al. 2011): and village forests were neglected. This exclusion reflected the colonial interests of timber extraction (Bandi 2014 and Rosencranz 2008) and caused continuous tensions between the state and local communities. Later, conservation regulations such as national parks severely restricted indigenous access to forests. Although designed to address deforestation and biodiversity loss, they raised socio-economic risks (Kothari et al. 2011).

The Post-independence initiatives aimed to reinstate some tribal privileges. Madhya Pradesh acknowledged possession rights over marginal forest produce (MFPs): while Gujarat attempted minimal land redistribution (Bandi 2014). Yet the drive for industrialisation and timber commercialisation in the 1960s generated extensive deforestation, heightening ecological stress and damaging livelihoods (Bose 2011). Despite growing environmental awareness, official policy rarely balanced conservation with tribal survival. A major shift came with the Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006, following the UPA government's 2005 commitment to stop forcible evictions (Relan 2010). The FRA enabled Gram Sabhas to manage forests and created multi-level committees to resolve claims. In principle, it marked a recognition of community-based forest governance. However, its promise has been undermined by bureaucratic impediments, political resistance, and competing industrial and conservation interests (Relan 2010). As a result, implementation remains inconsistent, with limited transfer of rights to native groups. The FRA offers a critical attempt to remedy historical injustices, but structural inequities in governance continue to block its revolutionary potential. Thus, the struggle between environmental protection, economic growth, and indigenous rights endures as a defining dilemma of India's forest policy. Collectively, these rules form a powerful legal framework that preserves tribal populations against forced displacement stemming from development activities or conservation projects (Oskarson 2018).

In Odisha, the FRA holds particular significance because of the state's considerable tribal population and extensive forest lands that preserve their livelihoods. While great progress has been made in recognising individual and community forest rights (CFRs): implementation across the state remains uneven and is occasionally challenged by bureaucratic delays and administrative interference (Sarap et al. 2013). As Mohanty (2014) points out, despite the FRA's goal of democratising forest governance, the state forest department continues to exercise controlling influence over forest resources and decision-making. The persistent institutional dominance of the state forest department continues to undermine the authority of Gram Sabhas, thereby weakening the FRA's capacity to serve as an effective safeguard against displacement (Sarap et al. 2013). To realise the transformative potential of the FRA in Odisha, it is imperative to ensure its transparent and accountable implementation. Strengthening the autonomy of Gram Sabhas, promoting active community participation, and reinforcing institutional responsibility are essential steps toward achieving the Act's core objectives, i.e., tenure security, democratic self-governance, and the sustainable protection of tribal livelihoods and cultural heritage.

8.7 Challenge Ahead and Possible Ways

To overcome the plight and loots of the colonial period, India, on the eve of independence, adopted the path of rapid development, but more in the western connotation, and that's why large-scale projects like dams, highways, and railways have been undertaken to serve the 'common' interest. However, this 'common' interest has grossly overlooked the interest of

peripheral communities, especially of those who bear the most of the cost that is involved in these projects, especially the suffering and trauma of development. Tribal communities are communities that suffer heavily due to development-led displacement.

Driven by economic liberalisation, priority has been given towards industrial expansion and market-oriented reforms, thereby reinforcing a materialistic model of growth. This approach has frequently resulted in the displacement of the indigenous population, depriving them of their traditional means of livelihood, autonomy, and natural resources-based assets. The development of the some of the centres on the cost of the margins creates a condition of colonialism within the country. This state of Odisha is one such state whose considerable section of the indigenous population has suffered the pain of displacement in different phases of time due to various developmental projects. Also, they hardly benefited from the projects of development or mining, which even uprooted them from their traditions. The subsequent migration towards the cities added salt to their seats as they encountered systematic discrimination, exploitative wages, and poor wage rates.

No doubt that a country like India needs a rapid pace of development, which much reply on the development of infrastructure. However, the stakes of those affected areas be overlooked, and a midway must be chalked out for the development of all. Effective development strategies are required that simultaneously safeguard those traditional models of sustenance while facilitating equitable integration to the modern development system. This should be backed by a comprehensive legal mechanism, and backed by efficient administrative machinery, and an effective grievance redressal system. Growth is important, but growth with equity should be prioritised for the development of all. To advance the development of tribal communities in India, a comprehensive administrative framework is essential. This should include the elimination of caste-based discrimination, legal and cultural protection of tribal socio-religious practices, and the resolution of displacement caused by materialistic development models. Equally important are the provision of quality education to promote socio-political awareness, accessible healthcare services, safe drinking water and sanitation facilities, and a specific focus on tribal women's health and nutrition. Only through such multidimensional and inclusive measures can tribal development be meaningfully realised.

Endnotes

1. A society deeply concerned with the future and safety, leading to a heightened sense of risk.
2. The Ong dam project at Pujaripali in Padampur block of Bargarh district of Odisha.
3. POSCO stands for Pohang Iron and Steel Company
4. BHP stands for Broken Hill Proprietary Company Limited
5. The coalfield is named after the River Ib, a tributary of the River Mahanadi.
6. Stands for Water, Forest, and Land, respectively.

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