

Weapons of the Weak

**Field Studies on Claims to
Social Justice in Bihar & Orissa**

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Report on Social Justice - I

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[With the publication of this issue of *Policies and Practices* (No. 13) we begin a series of short status reports on social justice in India. These reports use a variety of methods – ethnographic, legal analysis, historical, case study, etc. With the publication of this series, readers of *Policies and Practices* will hopefully get a varied yet comprehensive scenario of social injustice as it obtains in different parts of the country now. Readers will also see, as in this report, how primarily in the context of injustice (as perceived) the cry for justice originates, and the blindness of injustice makes the claim for justice visible. These reports will also show, how distinct from the philosophical and quasi-philosophical explanations of justice, concrete historical and political situations can give rise to equally specific ideas of justice. Readers will also see in some of the reports the constant effort of law to fully measure up to the standards or tests of justice. They will see how the tests of justice are defined in a range of ways as specified by contextual circumstances. Forms of justice vary also, often depending on different legal sensibilities. Finally, and probably this is the most significant aspect of the series, is the realisation that the demand for justice has to do above all with the dynamics of power. Situations of marginality produce incipient demands for justice. – Ed.]

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Globalisation, Patriarchal Development, and The Protesting Voices in Orissa

Amrita M Patel

Alia Majhi (A Woman Activist) - "You Collector, you Government, you Tahasildar, Have you given us this land, this forest and the treasure under the earth ? We have got this gift of the nature and have been enjoying for thousands of years since our forefathers. Who are you to snatch away these from us? We will not allow and fight to save our mother land till death."

Orissa: A Statistical Overview

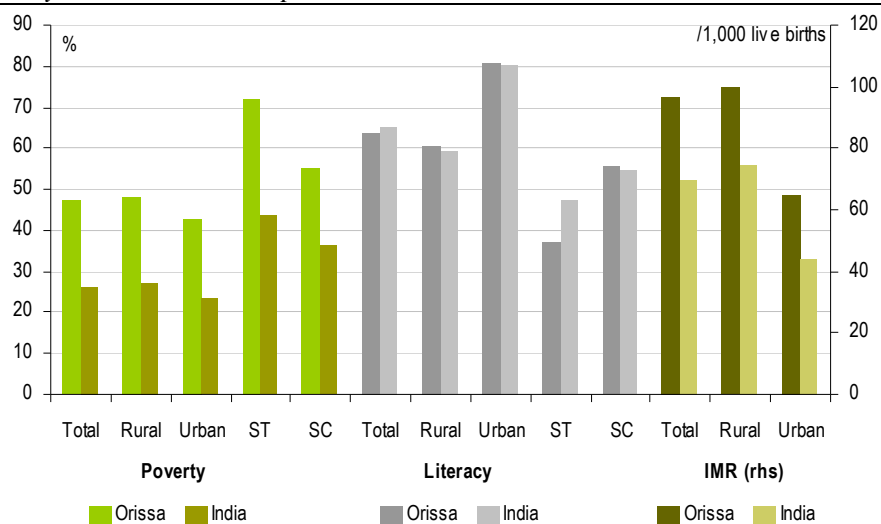
Orissa, one of the states of the Indian republic, occupies 4.74% of the country's landmass and houses 3.58% of the country's population spread over 30 Districts and 51349 villages. The population of the State is 3.68 crores. It supports one of the largest adivasi populations of India. According to the 2001 census, about 1.42 crores indigenous people (SCs and STs) account for 38.40% of Orissa's total population, and 12% of India's total adivasi population¹. The sex ratio of the state is 972, higher than the national 933 but it has declined by 65 points in the last 10 decades. The Sex ratio among the SCs & STs is however encouraging. As per 2001 census, the Sex ratio of the SC & ST population stands at 979 & 1003 respectively. There is wide district variation of sex ratio with 7 districts with high tribal population having more than 1000, according to the 2001 Census. The child sex ratio (0 – 6 years) of 950 in 2001 has registered a decline of 17 points over the 1991 data. In rural segment, the decline has been of 15 points; but in the urban segment, the decline has been higher; of 22 points.

A striking feature of Orissa's social structure is that it has a very substantial proportion of ST/SC population at the base, a very restricted elite at the apex of society superimposed above a highly fragmented caste structure in the middle. One of the central paradoxes of Orissa is that the tribal population is a defining feature of the state but the political and economic relations are not defined by them.

Poverty is the most intractable problem of the State. Orissa is the poorest amongst the states with 47.15% people Below Poverty Line as per the 1999-2000 estimates of the Planning Commission. The rural poverty is 48.01% while that in the urban it is 42.83%.² There has been a steady decline in the poverty ratio in Orissa between 1977-78 and 1993-94. Subsequently, poverty ratio has remained almost stagnant.³ There is regional variation, with the decline of poverty having occurred only in the coastal region of the state while it has increased in the southern and

northern regions. The State Government has constituted a Poverty Task Force to contain and subsequently eradicate poverty by adopting different policy measures⁴.

Poverty and human development indicators, Orissa vs all-India

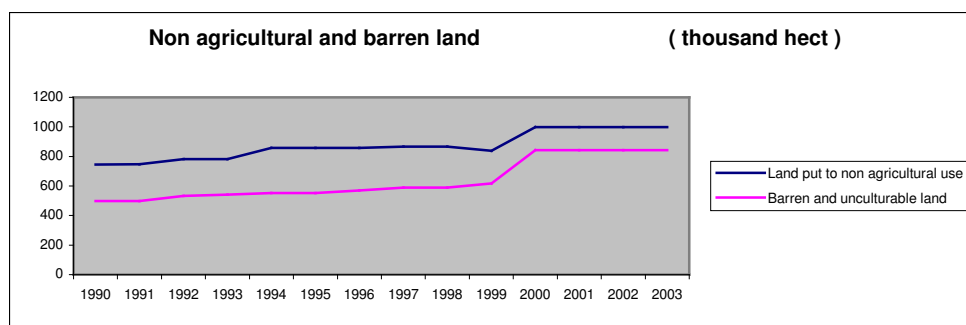


Sources: Economic Survey 2002-03, de Haan & Dubey 2004, Orissa HDR 2004, Census of India 2001, indiastat.com

The literacy rate of the State shows a gendered divide with 63.8% male literacy in comparison to 50.5% female literacy⁵. There is considerable regional variation in female literacy rates. There is a 50 point differential between the highest (Khurda – 71.06) and the lowest district (Nabarangapur – 21.02) level female literacy rates.

The occupational classification shows that total workers in the State constitute 38.7% of the total population and out of which cultivators account to 35.8% of the main workers with 21.9% being agriculture labourers. Agriculture continue to be the main stay of the State economy with the contribution of 25.78% to NSDP (2004-05).⁶

In the state, 37.3% of the land is designated forest area and 37.2% of the land is the net area sown (5796 thousand hectares). Under the category of ‘land put to non agricultural use’ there has been an increase from 746 thousand hectares in 1990 to 999 thousand hectares in 2004. Similarly ‘barren and unculturable land’ has also increased from 499 to 843 thousand hectares during the same period. The increase in the above two categories of land use has resulted in the decline in the ‘net area sown’ and ‘permanent pastures’.⁷



Source - Economic Survey of Orissa, 2005-06

There has been records of forest area being diverted to non forest use in the state. In the years since 2000, a total of 94 projects have been allotted forest area of 6207.08 hectares.

Forest area diverted to non forest use in Orissa

Year	Number of projects	Area diverted to non forest use (in Hect)
2000-01	27	1219.06
2001-02	20	1711.74
2002-03	15	508.18
2003-04	23	1493.71
2004-05	9	1274.39
TOTAL	94	6207.08

Source- Economic Survey, 2005 – 06

As much as 50% of the total operated area of land falls under marginal and small category. In terms of operational holdings, 54% are marginal land holdings.⁸ Paddy is the major cereal crop of the State constituting 96.25% of the total food grain production. During 2004-05 rice production reached 6704 lakh tons. The net irrigation potential created by 2004-05 from all sources is 26.96 lakh hectares only which is about 46% of the estimated irrigable area of the State.

Area under different operational holdings (hect) in Orissa during 1995 – 96

Marginal	Small	Semi medium	Medium	Large	Total
< 1 hect	1 - 2 hect	2 - 4 hect	4- 10 hect	> 10 hect	
10,64,074	15,21,681	14,51,254	8,64,336	2,42,521	51,43,866
20.7%	29.6%	28.2%	16.8%	4.7%	100%

Source – Economic Survey, 2005 – 06, pp Anx 22 & 23

Number of different categories of operational holdings in Orissa during 1995 - 95

Marginal	Small	Semi medium	Medium	Large	Total
< 1 hect	1 - 2 hect	2 - 4 hect	4- 10 hect	> 10 hect	
21,45,245	11,06,337	5,43,791	1,55,921	15,195	39,66,489
54.1%	27.9%	13.7%	3.9%	0.4%	100%

Source – Economic Survey, 2004 – 05, pp Anx 24 & 25

Distribution of holdings among different social groups (in thousands)

	SC	ST	General and others	TOTAL
Marginal	373	587	1185	2145
Small	122	354	630	1106
Semi Medium	43	181	320	544
Medium	7	51	98	156
Large	1	5	9	15

Source – Economic Survey, 2004 – 05, pp 4/24

A Gendered Perception

Favourable sex ratio (more than 1000) indicates that female survival is not hampered and that the conditions are conducive for the overall growth and longevity of the girl child leading to womanhood. The sex ratio of Orissa has always been better than the national figure and as per the 2001 Census it stands at 972 while the all India figure is 933. However there is wide district variation. The child Sex ratio is in the decline though. (refer to section on Orissa)

The life expectancy of females at birth has increased from 53 years in 1981 to 56.6 years in 1996. yet the Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) that is defined by the number of maternal deaths in the age group 15-49 years per one-lakh live births has gone up from 361 in 1997 to 367 in 1998 in the state of Orissa⁹. The Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) in Orissa was 77 per 1000 live birth in 2004 and is the highest in the country¹⁰. The state has the highest proportion of women (48%) with a body mass index of less than 18.5, which is indicative of chronic energy deficiency. Overall 63 % of the women in reproductive age group have some degree of anemia¹¹. The Reproductive Health Index (RHI) (value of 0.55) of the state, which focuses on the reproductive health component of the populace suggests medium level attainment.¹²

Female literacy rates have increased in Orissa from 35% to 51% between 1991 and 2001. However there is considerable regional variation in female literacy rates. There is also wide variation in the female literacy rates amongst the social

groups of SCs and STs. There are clear signs of rise in crime against women in public and domestic sphere. Some of these e.g. rape as an instrument of revenge, disfiguring by throwing acid, sexual exploitation through blackmail are emerging crimes while some like dowry torture / murder are increasing rapidly¹³. Domestic violence has been experienced by 29% of women¹⁴. (NFHS-2). Trafficking is a sensitive issue, but a study reveals that there are as many as 559 cases of trafficking¹⁵.

Political participation of women is poor with the women representation in Lok Sabha and Rajyasabha being 9% (2 out of 21) and 20% (2 out of 10) respectively. In the Legislative Assembly, out of a total of 147 MLAs only 9 are women. Two women MLAs occupy Ministerial berths. Since the 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendment in 1993, a large number of women (as high as more than 30,000 in the 2002 elections) have found a place in the PRIs such as the Panchayat Samitis, Gram Panchayats and the Zilla Parishads. Politically, their impact on governance is too early to be assessed, but the potential is great.

Women are crowded in the low productive agricultural sector and within it they are concentrated as agricultural labourers where as men are the cultivators. Employment of women in the State is limited in the organized sector. As an example the number of females registered with different employment exchanges in the state is 20,487 (15 %) out of 1,30,586 persons registered. The organized sector has not more than 13 % women employees in the Public and the Private sector together¹⁶. The NSS (55th Round) survey shows a clear gender gap in wages in the state.

As the majority of the women in Orissa live in rural areas, their lives and livelihood and living conditions depend on traditional activities like agriculture, forestry and fishing. Besides wage disparities, there is also unequal distribution of activities and workload as well as in access to and control of resources. Women are involved in jobs involving maximum drudgery such as transplantation but they are deprived of ownership and control of resources and technical knowledge.

Forest is the main source of livelihood for the tribal women. Sal seeds and Kendu leaves are the two major Non Timber Forest Produce of Orissa. It is estimated that 6 lakh women harvest 35,000 tons of Kendu leaves¹⁷. Though they are the primary gatherers they get as little as 20% of the total value. The women of the coastal regions of the State are dependent on fishery and aquaculture activities along with agriculture.

It is estimated that in Orissa, 9.15% of the total number of households are headed by females¹⁸. Migration of male members from the families in search of work and wages to destinations away from native villages has led to situations where women are in charge of households taking care of the young as well as the aged.

Illiteracy, poverty, landlessness and high incidence of disasters make these women very vulnerable to exploitation even in their native village.

Challenges and Issues¹⁹ in Brief

- ☒ Declining Sex Ratio of the State
- Decline in Child Sex Ratio especially in the urban region
- Highest Infant Mortality Rate in the country
- High Maternal Mortality Rate
- Anaemia in women and children
- High percentage of girls marrying below the age of 18 years
- District level differential in female literacy rates
- Drop out rate of girls
- Violence against women – domestic violence, trafficking, apathy of law enforcement agencies
- Training and Capacity building of the Women PRI members
- Women engaged in the low productive sector
- Limited employment opportunities of women in the organized sector
- Livelihood issue of women – displacement, migration, privatisation, disaster
- Gender disparity in wages
- Shrinking resources
- Governance

Globalisation and Development Process in Orissa Since 1990's

Since the 1990s, with the advent of the New Economic Policy, one continuous premise that has been put forward by the Government is that Orissa needs rapid 'industrialization' to mitigate its poverty. Banking on the huge mineral resources that the state possess (90% of India's chrome ore and nickle reserves; 70% of bauxite; and 24% of coal reserves), mining based industries can alleviate poverty of the state. The mines are leased out to private investment, and land with adequate infrastructure put on offer for industrial houses, so that prosperity will replace poverty in no time. This understanding has led to a faulty analysis of the whole situation and thus, led to a skewed process of development in Orissa.

<i>Mineral Wealth of Orissa</i>			
Mineral	Reserves (million tones)	% of India's Reserves	Rank in India
Chromite	183	98.4	1
Bauxite	1,626	69.7	1
Graphite	1.5	32.6	1
Manganese Ore	49	31.8	1
Dolomite	563	12.2	1

Quartzite	-	-	1
Pyrophyllite	-	-	1
Fireclay	88	12.5	2
Quartz	15	1.9	4
Coal	44, 304	23.8	4
Iron Ore	3,120	26.0	5

Source: Coopers and Lybrand, Prospects for Industrial development of Orissa, 1996.

Such has been the intensity of this concerted campaign (See Box above), particularly after the mineral resources were opened to private capital, both national and foreign, that in no time it has caught the imagination of the global companies. 'Industrialization' will open up employment opportunities to the educated unemployed, will generate employment for the unskilled poor, the cash-strapped state will earn revenue through taxes, royalties, land-sales etc., and in the near future the poor land of Orissa will overflow with milk and honey. This is the message being disseminated from all quarters – the corporate media, the government, the international aid agencies, the World-bank etc.

In Orissa, the new buzzwords are - "foreign investments", "export promotion" and "privatisation". Orissa has emerged as the mineral hotspot of the subcontinent, and foreign investors are queuing up. The state has appeared on the investment map of India with a long list of investment proposals, largely backed by foreign investors. Today not a single day passes without the mainstream media accolading the Government for being able to attract the Ambanis and the Mittals.

<i>Mega Investment Proposals</i>		
Company	Proposed Project Location	Cost (Rs. crore)
Consolidated Electric Power	Power, Jharsuguda	16,000
Larsen & Toubro Ltd.	Steel, Gopalpur	7,000
TATA Steel	Steel, Gopalpur	6,500
Ganapati Exports Ltd.	Steel, Duburi	6,000
Hindalco Industries Ltd.	Alumina, Kalahandi	5,000
Indian Oil Corporation	Oil Refinery, Paradeep	5,000
Nippon Denro Ispat Ltd.	Oil Refinery, Paradeep	5,000
MESCO	Steel, Duburi	4,629
Oswal Agro Ltd.	Fertiliser, Paradeep	5,000
Utkal Alumina	Aluminium, Rayagada	3,000
Ashok Leyland	Oil Refinery, Haridaspur	2,400
Consolidated Electric Power	Power, Ib Valley	2,075

Neelachal Ispat Nigam Ltd	Steel, Duburi	1,525
Indian Seamless and Alloys Ltd.	Steel/Pig Iron, Duburi	1,377
Orind Steels Ltd.	Cold Rolled Steel, Duburi	1,150

Source: IPICOL, Government of Orissa

Majority of the new projects are solely attracted by the mineral resources of the state and therefore, are located in only mineral-rich regions which are also inhabited by the tribals. The state government is offering exceptionally huge subsidies to investors, in the form of guarantees, tax concessions and investment subsidy. The abundance of cheap labour further makes it an investor-friendly state. Orissa has so far attracted private investments of over Rs 4,00,000 crore for setting up mineral-based industries such as steel mills, power plants, and alumina refineries. Besides, the State is also attracting huge investments in IT, tourism, and education.

- In the steel sector, 43 MoUs have been signed for the production of 58 million tonnes of steel annually at a total investment of around Rs 1,40,000 crore. The 44th agreement is the Arcelor-Mittal MOU for a 12-million-tonne steel mill at an investment of Rs 40,000 crore. The rush to make steel gained momentum towards the last quarter of 2004 after officials of the Korean steel major, Posco, announced plans to set up a 12-million-tonne steel plant at an investment of Rs 51,000 crore, the highest ever FDI in the country.
- In the energy sector, apart from Reliance Energy, major companies that have come forward to set up power plants include NLC, Tata Power Company, Sterlite Energy, KBK Nilachal, and Monnet Ispat.
- With regard to aluminium, Vedanta Alumina is to construct a one-million-tonne refinery in Kalahandi at an investment of Rs 4,500 crore. Utkal Alumina is also supposed to construct a one-million-tonne refinery in Rayagada district at an investment of Rs 4,000 crore. The Aditya Birla Group has signed MoU to set up a three-million-tonne alumina complex with an investment of Rs 12,000 crore.
- Development of ports has also been taken up by private parties. In the IT sector, Infosys and Satyam are already operating in the State. Wipro, TCS, Hexaware, and MindTree, have inked MoUs to set up facilities.
- Education and tourism are other sectors attracting investments. The Anil Agarwal Foundation (a part of the Vedanta group) has announced the setting up of a multi-disciplinary University at an investment of Rs 15,000 crore. It will accommodate 100,000 students.

Besides investment, the other major feature is the privatization and some of the areas where privatisation has taken place in Orissa are as follows²⁰ :

1. Disinvestment of PSU shares
2. Out right sale of PSUs such as BALCO
3. Non payment of wages/ salaries (OTM,OSRTC)
4. Increase in course fees and reduction of grant in aid to colleges and Universities
5. Privatisation of certain services such as Capital Hospital, GRIDCO
6. Casualisation of labour
7. Employment through contractors
8. Sub contracting of work

Benefits – For Whom?

As far as economic benefits of new investments and privatisation programme are concerned, the state government boasts that the new investments will spur growth which, in turn, will help in poverty alleviation. But this argument finds little evidence in Orissa (and elsewhere) as growth in itself does not promise to "trickle-down" to the poor. For instance, Orissa has a surplus in power and is intending to be the "Powerhouse of India" but rural electrification of Orissa is still far away from universalisation.²¹

Further, the state government argues that by attracting foreign and domestic private investments and privatisation of its public sector units, it will put more resources for social sector spending to alleviate poverty. There is no correlation between decline in infrastructure spending and increase in social sector spending²². The job prospects are very bleak as many of new investments projects are heavily capital-intensive thus, likely to create fewer new jobs for the local population while the senior and managerial jobs in these projects are likely to be filled from persons outside the state.

Reducing Opportunities

In the decade of 1990s, in the Small scale industry sector, while there was an increase in investment, the employment fell by 5-10%.²³ During the period of 2000 to 2004, the number of vacancies notified through the Employment Exchanges fell from 3171 to 1760 (a decline of 44%).²⁴

The total organized sector employment during the period of 2000 to 2004 shows a decline from 798 thousands to 746 thousands (7% decline). Employment in the public sector has decreased from 6.80 lakh in 2003 to 6.57 lakh in 2004 registering a decline of 3.4%. Organised private sector employment, on the other

hand, has increased by 2000 in number over the period 2000 to 2004. “It is expected that private sector will provide more employment in the coming years”.²⁵

Visible Impact

One of the first impact of all the ‘developmental projects’ is land being lost by the people due to acquisition. The fate of these people is not different from other oustees who have been uprooted through large dams, mines, coal-based power projects and heavy industries, in the past, in the state they only received meagre cash compensation with no jobs and agricultural lands. According to Indian Social Institute, about 1.4 million people have been displaced or otherwise affected by developmental projects in Orissa, during 1951-1995²⁶. Looking at these new investment proposals, it can be well projected that not less than 100,000 people will face displacement in the near future. The state government has not examined the extent of negative impacts on their lives²⁷.

Tribals displaced by projects taken up in even in 1950s and 60s haven't been rehabilitated till date. Liberalization opened the floodgates for extractive industrialization of the tribal areas of Orissa, rich in minerals, water and forests, by the corporates, both Indian and Multinational. The benefit hypothesis put forward by the government becomes highly questionable when one assesses the socio economic condition of the tribals which is visible in their poverty, helplessness before local establishment, their physical and cultural displacement and their lack of rights over their livelihood resources.

	Projects	No of people displaced	No of People Rehabilitated	%	No of people who have not been rehabilitated	%
1	Irrigation	325000	90000	27.69	235000	72.31
2	Factories	71794	27300	38.03	44494	61.97
3	Mines	100000	60000	60	40000	40
4	Others	50000	15540	31.08	34460	68.92
	Total	546794	192840	35.27	353954	64.73

Source: Development Induced Displacement and Rehabilitation in Orissa 1951 to 1995 by Dr. Walter Fernandes and Md. Asif

There has been a clear and persistent bias of the state which is favourable to corporate entities at the cost of its own people. The state has not given any consideration to the affected people. Chronic negligence, forced displacement, lack of compensation and marginalization of resources have pushed people to starvation and extreme poverty. There has not been any visible positive impact on the people who are compelled to give up land for the ‘larger interest’. The Lok Shakti Abhijan

of Orissa²⁸ has called it ' a day time robbery of Orissa's natural resources for which the traditional custodians of such resources are being forced to pay a heavy price'.

Besides the 'developmental projects', shrimp monoculture has evicted thousands of poor peasants and fisherfolk from their homes and hearths, and deprived them of a livelihood, in the last few years. Conversion of agricultural land and land under salt production to shrimp farms is a common practice. These farms also often block off free access to the seashore for villagers. In coastal Orissa, farmers have been practising traditional rice and shrimp rotating aquiculture. However, over two decades ago, this kind of farming has been replaced by the more intensive shrimp monoculture. However due the highly fluctuating international market and the instability of the production process, many have been rendered bankrupt.²⁹

Ms.Nirupama Badapanda³⁰ says that almost all 'development' projects have been initiated mostly on the tribal hinterlands of Orissa, where people depend on forest for their survival and for household work. In case of displacement, they are usually taken to far-off barren lands where they neither get any firewood nor water at a reasonable distance. People are left like animals where health or educational facilities are not available. Girls were trafficked due to displacement and the non availability of work led them to migrate to other states, and marriage of the growing girls became a problem. She goes on to say that the issue is, what *we* can do against displacement, state's repression and on the other hand what we can do for the people and the state.

Protest Movements and Women

Against such a back ground, Orissa has been the pioneer in many of the social protest movements such as the Balco protest, Gandhamardan protection movement, Tata movement, Chilika Bacchao Andolan, Mada Mukti Andolan, Utkal Alumina protest which have been aimed at the 'developmental projects' These movements have been spread in all parts of the state in Sambalpur, Gopalpur, Kashipur, Banpur etc. In the last one decade the social protests have been accentuated and women have progressively played an important role in it. Women have played a decisive role in all of these protest movements in not only joining in large numbers to make the movement a success but also leading from the front line and facing the brutalities from the State agencies.

The Land Acquisition Act of 1894 (Amendment 1984) does not give the owner of land (seller) the right to say 'no' as the land is acquired for 'public interest'. The owner can only contest about the price fixed by the buyer (the government) and take the matter to the court of law and has to accept whatever the court of law (again, the same government) decides about the price of land. Whereas, when dealing with a private buyer one has the option to negotiate the price and say 'no' if the price

doesn't suit him/her. The irony is the land acquired by the government, under the LA Act, for 'public purpose' is actually meant for private companies.

In the absence of an effective rehabilitation policy at the state and centre level, the peoples' hostility against the projects is increasing which not only cause delays in the execution of the projects but, more importantly, raises the basic question- Development for whom? Anticipating an uncertain future, project-affected people have organised themselves which can be seen in the cases of *TISCO project in Gopalpur*, *TATA project in Kalinga nagar*, *Utkal Alumina project in Kashipur* etc. In a collective show of defiance, the affected villages in Orissa have been resisting projects which threatens to displace them and completely ruin their livelihood.

Though the New Economic Policies of the State Government has had ramifications in all sectors be it health, education, food etc, the people at large particularly the rural and tribal communities have risen in protests against the 'developmental projects'. Women are a vibrant part of it. It would be only justified to look into some of the ongoing struggles in the various part of Orissa..

Vedanta Project at Lanjigarh, Kalahandi District

In a clear cut disregard for democratic norms and violation of the Constitution, the Government has ignored the voice of the people through Palli Sabha and Gram Sabha which is mandated to give its approval for the project site, land acquisition etc. In the case of Vedanta project at Lanjigarh, the district administration particularly the Collector has been conclusively proven to have coerced the Gram Sabha to give its seal of approval to the project. Kalahandi is one of the most economically backward districts of Orissa. However, it has rich deposits of bauxite over its hill ranges. The thickly forested and riverine region of Lanjigarh in Kalahandi is under severe pressure from mining development for bauxite deposits and alumina processing, by the British Vedanta Group. It is to establish a one million tonne per annum capacity alumina refinery project together with the 75 MW coal based captive power plant at an estimated cost of about Rs. 4000 crores at Lanjigarh, Kalahandi and the associated bauxite mining project at Niyamgiri Hills.³¹ Vedanta violates the Samata decision of the Hon'ble Supreme Court.³² It's interesting to note that Vedanta has signed a MoU with the Govt of Orissa to establish the largest University at the cost of 150 billion dollars. It is to be set up on an area of 10,000 acres in the Puri – Konark marine drive.

A highly endangered primitive tribe – the *Dongaria Kandha* whose population is less than 6000 reside in the Niyamgiri hills. They depend on farming / agroforestry and have no other source of livelihood. Niyamgiri Hill is a sacred one for the Dongaria Kandha tribe. The entire tribe with its unique custom and practice will become extinct if Niyamgiri hills are diverted for mining"³³. Beginning January 23, 2004, four adivasi villages, Borobhota, Kinari, Kothduar, Sindhabahili, and their agricultural fields, in south east Kalahandi district, have been razed near Lanjigarh.

The villagers, forcibly evicted, without requisite compensation or rehabilitation, are living in camps under police 'guard', their right to life placed on hold.

Protests under the banner of Niyamgiri Suraksha Samiti³⁴, an organization of one thousand tribal people of the area has been on to protect the forest, land and water of the area, giving the slogan, 'Vedanta Hatao' (Remove Vedanta). Another organization known as the Green Kalahandi is also active in the area. Sandhya Devi, activist of Niyamgiri Suraksha Samiti says that the protests are on though with the entry of political figures like Bhakta Das³⁵, there is a tension within the movement. Women like herself are in the forefront and the movement is primarily a struggle for ones' right to survival and livelihood.³⁶

Utkal Alumina Project at Kashipur Block, Rayagada District

On December 16th 2000, police opened fire on a non-violent gathering of adivasis in Maikanch village killing three and wounding several others. Here, the Paraja-Kondha adivasis have been resisting a bauxite mining company, which threatens to displace them and completely ruin their livelihood. The state government has done little to address the just demands and needs of these communities and has pushed for forced rehabilitation which will throw these communities out of their homes with no where to go.

The government in return for taxes and royalty gave 2700 hectares of land to a multi-national bauxite mining venture by UAIL (Utkal Alumina International Ltd), a consortium of Norsk Hydro of Norway, ALCAN of Canada and Hindalco of India. The venture is 100% export oriented. At no stage of the project were the people who owned the land consulted or their participation sought out. This is against the Constitution of India and the Samata judgement. More than 2100 families in 25 villages stand to lose their land, including 370 families who would lose all their lands. The negative impacts of this project go well beyond just the human toll. The local environment will be seriously affected. Hills will be flattened and rains can sweep silt into a huge reservoir that provides water for the region. Several streams that feed the Indravati river would be destroyed. The most visible impact on the environment of mining for alumina is effluent discharge. Dumping discharge into the streams and rivers would raise the pH level causing severe contamination. Several perennial sources of river would dry up and thousands of people will lose their land and livelihood to displacement. Agricultural land will no longer be cultivable. When confronted by the people on questions of environmental impacts of the mines and the refineries, UAIL claims to have conducted several studies. However, even after several requests, the documents have not been made public³⁷.

The anti-mining movement in Kashipur is lead by two voluntary groupings of local people known as "Prakrutika Sampada Suraksha Parishad" and "Baphlimali

Surakhya Samiti". People have organized themselves to participate in rallies, road blockades and demonstrations. The affected villages have been resisting this project since they first learnt about the possible ill effects in 1993.

The conflict between the people and the pro-company forces culminated in the firing at Maikanch village on 16 December 2000. Around 4000 people were in a meeting to discuss their next road blockade when armed police descended upon them and opened fire. The local police killed three unarmed innocent adivasis and wounded several more. These killings further antagonized the locals who see the use of force as a violation of their basic human rights. Local resistance to the UAIL project has only increased after the violence. During this research many women who have been active in protesting the ongoing were *interviewed on the roles of the women in the agitation*.

Sumani Jhoria³⁸ & Mukta Jhoria opined "*For us the lands, forests, hills and the rivers of Kashipur are the source of livelihood and also our Gods. We worship these lands... If you take away our natural resources from us, then we cannot live and the money given to us for the land is of no use. We only know about land. What will we do with money ?.... Till now there has never been any consultation with the people in our Panchayats on the mining companies..... The government has taken our votes to come to power but now forgotten us....The government is using guns to drive us away from our own homes.... We will continue to protest*".

Lachamma Majhi, from Kucheipadar, one of the first woman activists was asked certain questions which she answered with clarity. When asked, *When did the women get involved?* She responded that in the beginning, the women talked among themselves about their concerns about the mining project. Along with a few others, I organized a separate women's meeting. The women became convinced that the company would only increase oppression in the area. They initially started in small numbers and as their confidence grew, women took up strong leadership positions in the struggle. *When asked what special implications were there for the women, once the company moving in in the village?* She responded saying that today there is a strong sense of community and this makes it safe for women. We can move around even at 2 AM and nobody can harm us. Strangers are accountable to no one. In the case of the company moving in, we will lose our independence. We will need someone to accompany us. After the company moves in, there will be more pollution and mosquitoes (malaria is already prevalent in this area). Men will end up drinking more, since joblessness will be higher. Gambling will increase. We have seen this after visiting other areas. We will suffer the most -- much more than men. *On the question of the different ways in which the women participated in the protest,* She said women, including her, stopped surveys, destroyed survey equipment and rallied support from women in other villages. Whenever the women saw a survey person, they would announce his/her presence with a conch to alert other villagers. On enquiring whether *the women physically abused during protests or not,* she responded in positive saying we were lathi-charged many times. Hemalata, myself and several others were lathi-charged during the gate blockages we had organized.

Women leaders of the movement have been vocal and indeed very steadfast in their participation. Infact, the Kashipur struggle is one of the classic cases when actually the women have taken up vantage positions and leadership roles. According to Vidya Das³⁹, the tribal women have proved their might to fight for their community, their life. Women have marched, taken to the streets along with the men. However a subtle difference is to be noted, women in this struggle have realized that they have much more at stake than men.

TATA Steel project at Gopalpur, Ganjam district – The Gopalpur steel project was being proposed to be set up when steel plants were closing down in major industrialized countries. The plant was not meant for domestic consumption but for the international market. The Govt signed a MOU with TISCO in 1995 after which the protest movement started. The plant was to be built in more than 6000 acres of land destroying the socio economic fabric of 25 villages. About 25,000 people were being forced to vacate the area and sacrifice their homes and livelihood.

The agitation at Gopalpur reached its peak when in August 1996, there was a violent clash between the agitators and the police in which two old women Laxmiana and Yerramma died due to tear gas and lathi charge. The villagers continuously stalled the survey work but again in 1997, there was police firing on unarmed villagers.

The Gopalpur movement under the leadership of Gana Sangram Samiti was able to stall the project and the success of the protest movement proved a point about the resilience of the people. Women's participation was the key to the success. The TATAs have abandoned the project though the land is in their possession.

Kalinga Nagar, Jajpur District

Kalinga nagar Complex is a massive industrial park with an area of over 12000 acres set up by IDCO in Jajpur District where industries are being allocated land. IDCOL has already acquired the land in the area through the Land acquisition act.

IDCO compensation package has only provisions of providing compensation for patta land and 10 decimal of land for homesteads for the landless. However, the local tribal people have been mostly cultivating non-patta land due to faulty survey and settlements and non-regularization of land. Even though they are absolutely dependent on these lands for their livelihoods, they are neither being offered compensation or land in return for the land cultivated for them. The threat of forced displacement without any alternative livelihoods and loss of ancestral lands have led to a strong resistance- as long back as in 1996, when the local people had successfully stopped the establishment of a plant by Bhushan Steel at the same site.

In 2004 an organisation to protect the interest of the people affected by the industrial complex was formed; it called itself Sukinda Upatyaka Adivasi-Harijan Ekata O Surakshya Parishad, which was later renamed, and remains such till date, as Visthapan Birodhi Jan Mancha, Sukinda.

Subsequently, the organization with the support of the local community have been successful in protesting. A major protest was held on 15th May, 2005, where the tribals foiled the proposed Bhumi Puja⁴⁰ of Maharashtra Seamless Steel limited. In the complex, Tata Steel plans to set up the 10-million tonne greenfield steel project in four phases with a cumulative investment of Rs.200-300 billion. The Tatas had originally planned to set up the plant at Gopalpur in Orissa where land was acquired from private parties (refer section earlier) but the plan was abandoned later due to the strong protest movement there.

Matters came to a head on 2 January, 2006, when the Orissa state police opened fire and killed at least 12 adivasis who had gathered to oppose the Bhumi Puja being conducted by TATA at the proposed plant site. Initial visits by civil society fact finding teams indicate that the incidence was precipitated deliberately by the state and district administration; to crush the consistent resistance of the adivasis of Kalinganagar against setting up of industries on their lands⁴¹.

The road blockade at Kalinganagr by the Visthapan Birodhi Jan Mancha continues till date, one year after the incident in 2006. The first meeting of the Mancha with the State was held in Jan 2007 with no tangible success. There is a High Court case pending directing the Govt to remove the road blockade by March 2007.

Lower Sukhtel Project, Bolangir District

Lower Suktel Irrigation Project is a major irrigation scheme, proposed across river "Suktel", a tributary of river "Tel", a major tributary of river "Mahanadi". The proposed dam of the project will be located near village "Magurbeda", 20 kms away from Bolangir town in Bolangir district of Orissa state.

As a result of construction of the reservoir, 16 villages will be fully submerged and 10 villages will be partly submerged in Bolangir district. As per the survey report prepared in 1997, 4160 families comprising 14380 persons will be displaced from their habitation. Out of the 4160 families losing house under submergence, 1222 are scheduled tribes, 575 are scheduled castes and 2363 are from the general caste.

There is an ongoing agitation to stop the irrigation project. There is no comprehensive planning to understand the implementability of the R & R process starting from acquisition of private land onward, no clear administrative will to disseminate information to people from the very beginning and adoption of a clear unified stand from the state to the district level onwards. Representatives of people and people in general of Bolangir feel that the project is a must for drought prone Bolangir but the affected groups have been actively protesting against the dam. A forum called 'Lower Suktel Budi Anchal Sangram Parishada' is leading the protests. They are distributing leaflets titled 'Listen to Us"(Aama Katha Suna).

They cite instance of Hiraakud oustees and other projects where project execution prolonged to unforeseeable time as measure of their lack of trust in state

sponsored R&R. They deeply distrust printed materials, which have been circulated as excerpts from the R & R policy. People of the area of submergence have a suspicion that this is a deliberate method of adverse income redistribution by passing on benefits to selected families in the command area – influential families that possess large holdings of land either in their own name or as ‘benami’⁴². The causes of the resistance relate not so much to the R&R policy issues but to people not accepting a displacement causing major irrigation project and their idea of a smaller people friendly option not being considered at all⁴³.

Posco-India Steel Plant at Paradip, Jagatsinghpur district - The people of Jagatsinghpur district in coastal Orissa have been actively engaged in a protest movement against Posco, a South Korean company planning to set up its Rs 51000-crore steel plant. The company has also a plan to open a new private port of its own in order to avail the facilities of special economic zone. The memorandum of understanding with the South Korean major was signed on June22, 2005 by the state government. It is proposed that the company would be given mining lease of 600 million tons of iron ore for which a separate MOU has to be signed, even to the extent of permitting the company to export iron ore. The Posco Pratirodh Sangram Samiti, an organization of the local people, has been spearheading the movement.⁴⁴

The state government would acquire 435 acres of private land for the plant which involves displacement of 20,000 to 25,000 people. 22 villages of three gram panchayats of Ersama block are likely to be displaced after the work starts. Since then the villagers of three gram panchayats such as Kujang, Dhinkia and Nuagaon have been restive over the issue. The Samiti has raised a brigade of 1200 people who are ready to keep the movement alive. At times there have been violent clashes between the supporters of the proposed plant and the people, calling for intervention of the police. In one such incident which took place on April11, 2006, at Dhinkia village 11 persons were injured and nine activists were rounded off by the police. More than 30,000 people have pledged not to obey any rule which the state government may enforce, pressing for their displacement. The Sangram Samiti has also involved the children and women of the locality. They have put up barricades at the entry points to these villages which are guarded by women and children to prevent entry of government and POSCO officials.⁴⁵ POSCO officials announcement that the proposed plant would recruit 97% Indians in its labor intensive project and would extend employment benefits to 48000 people directly has not made any dent in the resolve of the people. They strongly object to the setting up of the plant on several grounds- environment degradation, excess utilization of the waters of river Mahanadi would affect the cultivators and the fishing folk; illegal mining lease.

Baliapal Project, Balasore District

Nilu Rani Patra, is best known for motivating villagers, including several women, to force the government to scrap plans for a missile base in her home district, Balasore. She had played a commendable role in organising the common people in general, and women in particular, against the missile base in Bhograi-Baliapal block in the district of Balasore. During the early 1980s, Baliapal, a very fertile part of the state, was selected by the government for a missile base. Over 100,000 people from 132 villages were to be evicted for the missile base. But the people decided to resist this decision and launched a unique protest. They did not allow any government officers to enter the whole area of several hundred square kilometres. The people created physical or human barriers and kept vigil day and night. Nilu was attacked by the police several times during her involvement with this movement, but she stood firm, leading the others by example. Women came out of their houses to block the entry of police and officers who were to reach the places where missile centers was to be built. Sarada Giri, another poor marginal farmer led women exemplarily.

The government finally withdrew the plan to set up the missile base. In recent years, the Baliapal agitation is considered a true example of how people's power can resist even the government's actions.

Gender Dimension of Displacement- An Empowering Process

It is true that due to the displacement while women are one of most affected but they are also empowered with regard to the participation in the protest movements. This is visible in revolutionary zeal projected by the women. It was the women who led the struggle against the setting up of the Ib thermal power plant in the 1990s⁴⁶. In the protest movements, the women blocked the highway and stopped the traffic affecting the road transportation. As a result of this move, they were tortured and arrested by the police. The police abuse went as far as arresting the mothers with their children including infants. Women along with their children were jailed for a month or so. The protest movement did not yield any result with regard to the demands of the villagers i.e. stopping of the thermal power station but it certainly did bring to notice of the plant authorities as well as the administration about the fighting spirit of the women. The impending displacement was avoided. Now most of them have become very old and aged but while they speak about the struggle, they are very proud and nostalgic about their past.

In another case of the Adhapada⁴⁷ camp village, the ill-fated community, once displaced due to the Hirakud project, were again struck by the so-called development process when the Ib thermal plant was to be established in the nearby area. Again their land was acquired in the 1980s. There was the threat looming that they might be again displaced from Adhapada. But this time they didn't shy away from confronting the Government and the company. They united under the banner of Budi Anchal Sangram Samiti⁴⁸ which was previously set up by them to fight for their

rights in the Hirakud case and the new organization named Ib thermal Jana Seba Samiti⁴⁹. Women were in the forefront and all women protesters were arrested. They were jailed in the Sambalpur District HQ jail for more than a month. They were successful in causing a stir and caused ripples among the administration and life came to a stand still for some time.

In another instance, women under the leadership of Ekta Parishad were actively engaged in a protest movement against the violence perpetuated by the state agency particularly the CRPF in the reserve forest area of Banpur. It was a tribal women's protest movement against state violence although men participated. The main goal was however to stop CRPF violence and was not to oppose other forms of violence such as domestic violence. But it had a positive effect on women's empowerment process although it was not the sole reason.⁵⁰

Final analysis- According to Nayak⁵¹, it is interesting to note that while the earliest Gandhamardan movement as well as Baliapal was against a public sector project, the later Chilika movement was against a public-private project, while the more recent Kashipur movement was against an MNC project. The current agitations are all against MNCs.

Local people have got organised spontaneously due to a perceived threat to livelihood and environment; outsiders have later joined the movement. Political allegiance among people has not stood in the way of their getting united and involved in the movement, but the role of the leaders of political parties has been suspect. The role of local media and newspapers has not been that encouraging for the movements; it is rather the national newspapers that have brought the movements to public attention. Similarly, the local intellectuals have been quite apathetic to the movements while outside Orissa intellectuals have been quite interested.

Women's participation in protest movements particularly against the developmental projects in the state was being contextualized in a workshop organized by ISED at Bhubaneswar. Women leaders shared their frustrations and chalked out future strategies to get their due. It was acknowledged that the female factor had its usefulness and was utilised to the hilt by the male leaders. When the armed forces came to quell the agitation in Baliapal, the women said, "We are your mothers, come kill us". The soldiers left them alone and returned. But when the decision-making time came, these same brave women were given the go-by. In the Baliapal agitation, the decision-making steering committee had a lone woman member - mere tokenism. In the ongoing struggle by Visthapan Birodhi Jan Mancha, there are two women who are never available for interviews. Underplaying the contribution of women is obviously deeply entrenched. Most women who actively participated had gone back to domesticity. Besides, they tended to underplay their own invaluable contribution to the struggle, speaking more of the movement than their role in it. In fact, after the TATA withdrew from the proposed Gopalpur steel

plant in Orissa after facing fierce opposition, the male leaders told the active women: "Now go back home, your services are no more required."

Issues of Food Security

The policies of the Government in the last one decade and more has affected the food security aspect of the communities especially the tribal poor.

Rights Over the Forest Produce

Collection of Non-Timber Forest Products is a very labor intensive, low-returns activity and is hence taken up by the poorest sections having the lowest possible opportunity cost of their time. In complete disregard to subsistence and economic dependence of local people and their ethnic/natural rights, Forests and all the products growing therein are treated as State Property and gatherers are treated as mere labor force.

In Orissa, apart from the three nationalized forest products, trading rights for almost all-marketable NTFPs are given away as monopoly leases. This situation is peculiar to Orissa, and has been termed as "illegal" after almost ten years of existence by the High Court. forests and forest products are very important for millions of people in Orissa. Of the total revenue earned from the forest sector in Orissa, around 80% comes from non-timber forest products (NTFPs) or Minor Forest Produce (MFP's)⁵². Here, it must be remembered that the ban on timber has greatly reduced revenues from timber products. The collection and trade of NTFP's has until 2000 been controlled by a few agencies which lease the rights to the produce from the State. Local people who collect NTFPs have had no rights to store quantities of the produce, sell it on an open market or process it in order to add value. Announced during 2000, the NTFP Policy gives rights over NTFPs to Panchayats, and what was previously a monopoly trade is now decentralised, with a minimum price back-up from the State. The communities can now freely trade and undertake value addition of NTFPs. This was to ensure that primary gatherers would achieve a fairer price for the products gathered by them. While products like *sal* seed have remained under state control, exclusive control for a further 68 non-timber forest products, including *mahua*, has been given to the *panchayats*.

The case of Mandibisi Mahila Mandal has brought forth starkly the hypocrisies of the State and the Development process. After a long struggle Ama Sangathan, an apex forum of Mahila Mandals (women's groups) including Mandibisi Mahila Mandal has got the lease to trade in broom grass and hill brooms. The very

fact that tribal women had to *fight* for a right to sell freely broom grass and tie up brooms in this era of “liberalization” expose the inconsistencies in the Government Policies.

Seed satyagraha- Another issue which has been highlighted by the tribal women is that of indigenous seeds. They have launched the seed satyagraha. The GM seeds and the high-yielding crops have pushed them into a cycle of poverty, indebtedness and hunger. They are protesting to ban the GM seeds. Recently, more than 3000 tribal women made a bonfire of hybrid and genetically modified seeds of cotton and other crops. They announced that they have already declared 200 villages in the tribal belt of the State as "organic villages" and are presently cultivating indigenous seeds in more than 17,000 acres in the state.

The charter of demands that the tribal presented emphasised that "due to the rampant use of chemical inputs in agriculture and mechanization of agriculture, the unemployment problem has become acute, which in turn may precipitate extremism and violence in our beautiful peace-loving state of Orissa". The demand for organic foods, forest produces and herbal products is increasing at the rate of at least 20 per cent annually in the world market. So, there is a great scope for earning foreign exchange by promoting organic farming in the state and exporting the produces, even if one thinks materialistically; though food should not be produced primarily for commercial purposes as per the cannons of the Vedic culture of India, the charter said. The New Seed Bill in the offing, they said, runs counter to the Plant Varieties Protection and Farmers' Right Act (PVPFA), 2001. The Government had given the right to farmers to sell and exchange their seeds through the PVPFA. But those rights are now being taken away through the Seed Bill. This clearly demonstrates that the government is being run by the multinational seed companies. Orissa Nari Samaj (ONS), the tribal women organisation with a membership of close to 200,000 has been demanding the scrapping of the proposed Seed Bill, and want government to recognise the rights of the people in respect of indigenous seeds.

Land Rights

Land rights for women which is an issue taken up by many grass root organizations. Recently the Govt. of Orissa has asked the Zilla Parisads to pass resolutions to change the Orissa Scheduled Area Tribal Immovable Property Act (OSATIP) which is protective act to save the tribal land. Under this Act no tribal land can be transferred to non tribals. But the Govt, is keen to lift this act so that the industrial and land mafias can easily take the land from the tribals. This is to benefit the industrial lobby. A massive advocacy campaign has been initiated to protect the Adivasi land by organizations such as NAWO Orissa. NAWO is a confederation of organizations working on women's issues.

Ekta Parishad, a grassroots movement defending the land rights of the rural poor, has started in Orissa a large mass action in the form of a Yatra (foot march) in order to document human rights violations cases, mobilize the communities affected and demand urgent action from the government on issues of jal (water), zameen (land) and jungle (forest).

Conclusion

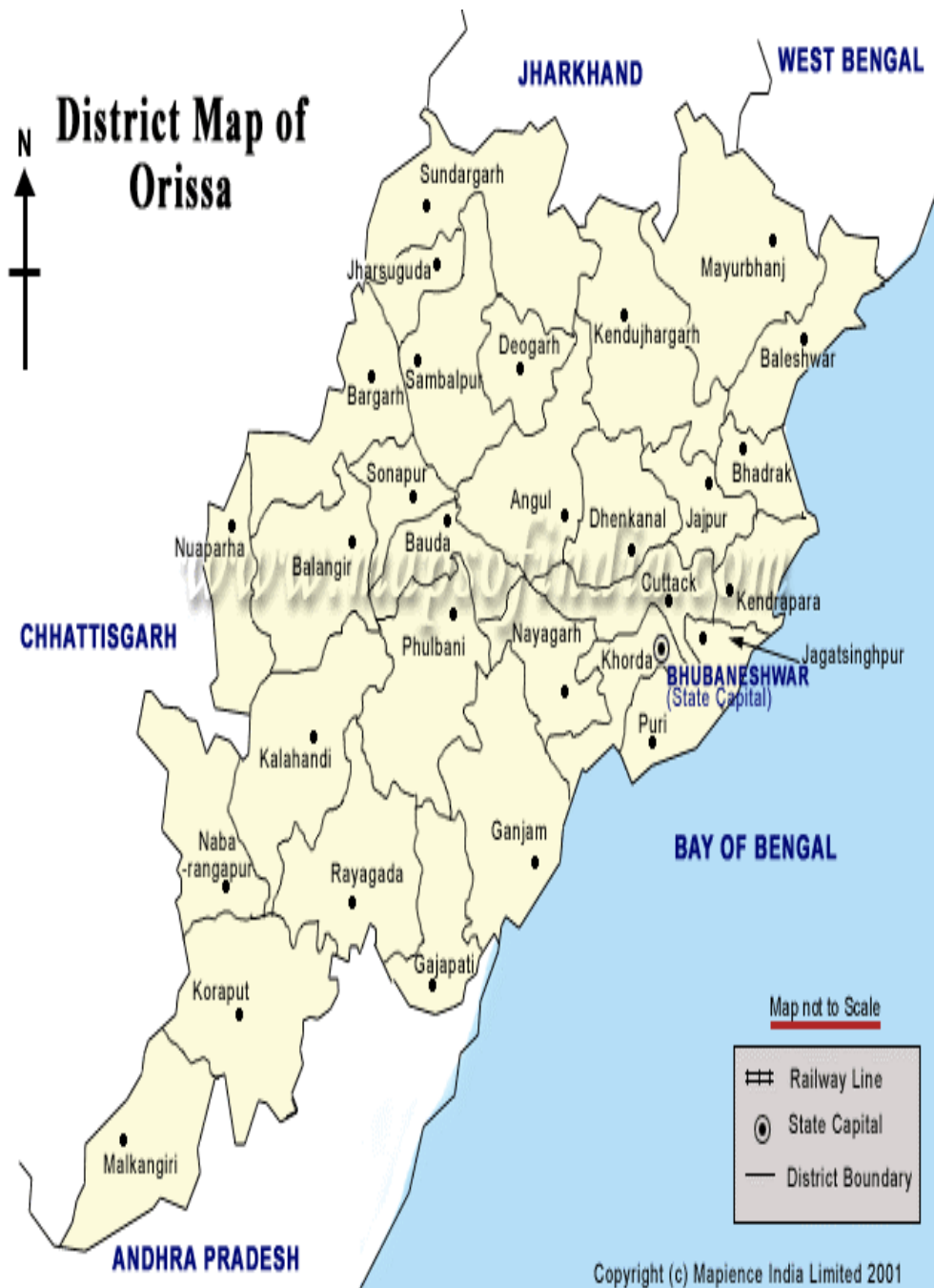
Against this background, the resistance movements of the local people against industrial units need to be probed deeply for the future of industrialization of the state. Voicing protests against industrialization by the people affected by it is not new in the state but the ongoing movements are different in that they have worked out an unprecedented unity among the tribal and backward masses against the industrial establishments as well as against the state government, making all the major political parties watchful of the situation to derive political mileage.

During the last two decades there were major people's movements which questioned the decisions on new projects in Orissa and demanded alternative projects that would provide employment to local people, protect the environment and reduce poverty. The Baliapal movement in the mid-1980s mobilised people in Balasore district against the central government's decision to locate a national missile test range there, which would have displaced people in this agriculturally prosperous block. The movement succeeded to the extent that the test range was moved to a nearby location. The leadership of the movement, which represented all the main political formations, was slowly absorbed into the main parties and the programme of seeking an alternative strategy receded to the background. The movement against a planned steel plant in Gopalpur, near the coast, which would have displaced a large number of people and disturbed their sources of livelihood. One positive result of this movement was the emergence of a new set of political workers in public life who carried on their campaign for an alternative path of development in their own small ways. Current movements, one in Kashipur against the Utkal Alumina Project in Rayagada district and another in Lanjigarh against another bauxite mining complex in Kalahandi district, and those against POSCO and TATA in Kalinganagar have attracted national attention. The Orissa government and the three major parties – the ruling BJD/BJP alliance and the opposition Congress – have supported the projects despite a determined campaign by local people. The campaigns have been led by socialists and Gandhians and have remained peaceful even though they have experienced severe repression. The latest agitations- ones of Kalinganagar and against POSCO have posed more questions.

The movements have taken on the processes of liberalisation and globalisation which have induced the state to invite foreign capital to exploit Orissa's natural resources without due regard for the displacement of tribals or the natural environment, and which have ushered in the commercialisation of public resources such as water and forest produce at the expense of developing agriculture, forestry and local industries which would generate employment. They have exposed a nexus between the state administration, local NGOs and the governmental and corporate international agencies which exert their influence over the administration of the state in the formulation of budget proposals which underpin their own strategic interests, scale back public employment and make the economy and administration more and more dependent on the global agencies. Other issues affected by the process of

globalization such as food security, reducing job opportunities, unavailability of welfare health services have also been taken up by the people. The voice of protest in these cases have been strong though wide spaced in time.

Participation of women in all these protest movements have been strong and also played an important role in achieving the goal. Women have given their support to the male leaders and in some cases also led the protests. They have been daring even to the extent of getting shot by the police or jailed for days. Decision making powers have however eluded them. The protesting voices of the women against the developmental projects could be placed as a part of the women's movement in Orissa. But the women's movement in Orissa is very weak. Overall the gender dimension of the protesting voices in Orissa is weak yet very articulate.



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Notes

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- ²⁰ Samal, K C. 'Globalisation and its impact on Orissa economy' Paper presented in IAWS regional conference at Bhubaneswar. 2001
- ²¹ The number of villages electrified upto 31.3.2005 are 37744 i.e.73 % of the total villages in the state.
- ²² Patel, Amrita, Asha Hans & S B Agnihotri. 'Gender Budget analysis of Orissa' SWS. Bhubaneswar. 2003
- ²³ Samal, K C. 'Globalisation and its impact on Orissa economy' Paper presented in IAWS regional conference at Bhubaneswar. 2001
- ²⁴ Economic Survey. of Orissa 2005-06
- ²⁵ Economic Survey of Orissa 2005-06.
- ²⁶ Economic Survey. of Orissa 2005-06
- ²⁷ To do an impact assessment study in the POSCO acquired area in the district of Jagatsinghpur, a study funded by TISS has been stalled by the people particularly the women since the last 1 year.
- ²⁸ This forum has been in the forefront in many of the agitations which has intellectuals and activists in its fold. Former speaker Rabi Ray, activist Prafulla Samantara are prominent among them.
- ²⁹ Patel, Amrita. 'Globalisation and women's economy- a case study of the fisher women of the Chilika lake in Orissa'. SWS. Utkal University. Bhubaneswar. 2001
- ³⁰ Activist and educationist from Sambalpur
- ³¹ Vedanta has obtained clearance for the refinery project though clearances for the mining component are still pending
- ³² Samata, an NGO working in the scheduled area of Andhra Pradesh, filed a case against the Government of A.P for leasing tribal lands to private mining companies in the scheduled areas. The SLP [special leave petition] filed in the Supreme court led to a historic judgement

in July 1997 by a three judge-bench which declared that government is also a 'person' and that all lands leased to private mining companies in the scheduled areas are null and void.

³³ Observations of the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) of the Supreme Court. The CEC was constituted by the Supreme Court in 2002 with the approval of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) and the Solicitor General of India.

³⁴ Chronology on Tribal struggle for livelihood rights and globalisation by Niyam Giri Surakshya Samiti

³⁵ Ex MP of Kalahandi

³⁶ Personal interview by the author

³⁷ Samantara, Prafulla. "People's struggle for right to livelihood". Lok Shakti Abhiyan, N Delhi.2000

³⁸ Sumoni Jhoria was chosen as Advisor to the late Chief Minister of Orissa Biju Patnaik in the 1990s.

³⁹ Agramee, Kashipur

⁴⁰ A ceremony to start the construction work

⁴¹ PUCL report and personal interview with Tapasi Praharaj, AIDWA, State President

⁴² Agnihotri, Anita. Short note on Lower Sukhtel irrigation project, unpublished. 2003

⁴³ Personal interview by the author with Balgopal Mishra, ex MLA of Loisingha, district Bolangir.

⁴⁴ The Times of India. June 25. 2006

⁴⁵ The Sambad. June 22 &24. 2006

⁴⁶ Field visit to Baragad village in Oct 2005 as a part of the Voices project of MCRG. The Baragada villagers who had lost land due to Hirakud were affected again when the Ib thermal power plant acquired their remaining land. Technically they were not displaced as their dwelling house was intact though all their agricultural land was acquired.

⁴⁷ Adhapada camp village in Lakhanpur block of Jharsuguda district which was set up in 1960s for the displaced persons due to Hirakud dam.

⁴⁸ Forum of the Hirakud oustees to claim the compensation in the Hirakud displacement case

⁴⁹ Forum to fight against the acquisition for the Ib Thermal

⁵⁰ Bexelius, Maria. 'Protesting violence- an empowering force- a case study of tribal women's protests against CRPF violence in Banpur' SWS. Utkal University. Bhubaneswar. 2000

⁵¹ Nayak, Birendra in Pradyumna Bal, Birendra Nayak, Bikalpa Sandhani Mancha. Debiprasad Dash eds 'Prak Kathana, Swadhinottara Odisare Jana Andolana' ('People's Movement in Post-Independence Orissa') Sameeksha. 1996

⁵² Mallik, R.M., T.P. Singh and V. Varalakshmi. *Study of domestic and commercial use including marketing of non-timber forest products*. Capacity Building for Participatory Management of Degraded Forests in Orissa, India. Study Report Orissa: Scandiaconsult Natura AB/Asia Forest Network. 1998

⁵⁴ Personal interview by the author of Pramila Swain. NAWO - Orissa President

Gulamiya Ab Hum Nahi Bajeibo: Peoples' Expressions for Justice in Jehanabad

Manish K. Jha

Gulamiya ab hum nahi bajeibo, azadia hamra ke bhawela...
Jheeni-jheeni beeni chadariya, lahrela tohre kaandhe
Jab hum tan ke kapda maangin, aawe sipahiya baandhe
Sipahiye se ab hum nahi bandheebo, chadaria hamra ke bhawela
Kankar chuni-chuni mahal banaulin hum bhaini pardeshi
Tohre kanooniya maaral gayeni katahu bhaeil na peshi
Kanooniya se ab hum nahi bandhaibo, azadia hamra ke bhawela
Hamre Jangarwa se dharti phulale, phulwa main khushbu bhara
Humke banukiya se kayela bedhakhli, tohre malikai chalele
Dharatiya ab hum nahi gamwaibo, banookiya hamra ke bhawela...

- Gorakh Pandey

--A very popular folk song, which people of Noanwa sing as their understanding of Justice.

(Life in Slavery is not fitting with us anymore, for free will has caught our fancy
You have the luxury of putting on rich and precious drapery on your shoulder
When we ask for a mere piece of cloth to cover ourselves, police come to apprehend us

However, we are no more apprehensive of the police for we have developed likeness for the drapery hanging on you

While you have adding on to your palace, we have only been distressed

Making a mockery of the proceedings, your legal mechanism made us suffer so far

But we shall not follow your law for free will has caught our fancy

It is people like us who make the land rich and abundant; it is we who fill in smell in the flowers all around

It is the might of our weaponry indeed, which made you master of the land around us
We shall loose no more land, for weaponry has caught our fancy.)

This is one among the numerous folk songs, which informs the audience how societies perceive and articulates justice despite a long history of remaining under the brutal forms of violence and injustice. These songs indeed also convey multiple layers and levels of the consciousness of the people, which they have acquired with great deal of struggle through a topography that was rather unrelenting. The undocumented idioms, folklores and folksongs like the one presented above are the most authentic sources of information with regard to experiences of injustice and indignity encountered by the subjugated dalits and extremely backward caste and class people of southern Bihar in general and in the district of Jehanabad in particular. However, it also beautifully communicates changes over years and a deeply held belief for better alternative appearing out of struggle and movement. Folk songs like this also help one to connect with Freire when he says "Without a

minimum hope, we can not so much as start the struggle. But without the struggle, as an ontological need, dissipates, loses its bearings, and turns into hopelessness. And hopelessness becomes tragic despair.⁵³

Introduction

The district of Jehanabad is an apt example of almost unshakable nexus between feudal peasantry, political leaders, criminal gangs and police forces. Infamous for recurring massacre and other forms of violence, Jehanabad has also been witness of protracted and sustained struggle for justice against age-old injustices and violence. Till 1986, Jehanabad was a part of Gaya district. In fact it was carved out from Gaya and made a separate district for tackling, what the state described as, 'growing extremist and Naxalite activities' in the then central Bihar. After bifurcation of Arwal district, Jehanabad consists of five development blocks, namely Jehanabad, Makhdumpur, Kako, Hulasganj and Ghosi.⁵⁴ It comprises one parliamentary constituency with five assembly segments and in this predominantly agrarian district, the owner-cultivators are mainly from upper caste Rajput and Bhumihar caste. *The rapacity of Jehanabad Zamindars was legendry. In addition to the exaction of revenue and ever increasing rent from the peasants, the landlords subjected them to various types of forced labour, begar, and levied arbitrary cesses, abwabs. Social oppression of tenants was practised not only through economic means but also through sheer brutality.*⁵⁵

Over the decades the productivity in the area declined which augmented exploitation of landless labourers through lowered wages and fewer share of produce for sharecroppers. Besides poorer section of the rural Jehanabad were also denied rights over *gairmazarua* (government or public commons) land and all other common village resources. Needless to mention about continued sexual exploitation of women from weaker sections. *The modus operandi of powerful political leaders of the area in terms of their extension of protection to agrarian vested interest has taken a particularly ominous form. They have backed the formation of caste based private armies or senas. A number of such senas have come up in the region: The landed kurmis formed the Bhoomi Sena, The yadava landlords and rich peasants set up the Lorik Sena, the Bhumihars have their Brahmarshi sena (and Ranvir sena as most influential one)⁵⁶ and the Rajputs nurture the Kuer sena.*⁵⁷ In the absence of strong and effective state machinery, the *senas* could get all the reasons to go berserk and indulged in looting, raping women and organising massacre in the hamlets of landless labourers.

The Influence of Naxalites

Gradually the victimised labourers felt the need of organising themselves and they rallied around left organisations like Indian Peoples' front, an erstwhile political outfit of CPI (ML) Liberation. Needless to say later on more radical Naxalite groups such as MCC, PWG and Party Unity⁵⁸ also made inroads in the area and were successful in bringing some of the villages under their influence. In certain power corridors of Bihar, it is not uncommon to come across the explanation that the caste militias had to come into existence as a response to Dalit/ Naxalite violence. On the very face of it, such accounts are erroneous as there were no militia in Bihar during late 1970s when Naxalite groups were probably at the peak of their influence. Surprisingly, when the organisations like CPI (ML) formed their political front, IPF, and decided to enter the arena of legislative and electoral process, numerous *senas* proliferated at various sites of this region. *Even if a revolutionary organisation is determined to avoid killing innocents and make restrained use of violence, there is no guarantee that the other side will do the same. Massacres of the labouring poor (including women and children) by caste senas in rural Bihar illustrate the problem.*⁵⁹ Situation of this nature forced left organisations to oscillate between armed struggle and political mobilisation; and some amount of ambiguity vis-à-vis their strategies found place in the prevailing discourse among left groups in 1980s.

The simmering tension in Jehanabad often gets manifested through recurring incidences of violence between upper caste private militias and different ultra-left outfits known popularly as Naxalites. Since late 1970s there has been a phenomenal growth in the instances of conflict leading to death and destruction of people mostly from lower socio-economic strata. A considerable change in the perception of the poorer section with regards to their ability to pin down instances of injustices was also clearly observable. The issue of dignity and rights have become central in their acuity. The protest movement of lower caste landless labourers under the leadership of Naxalite groups have ensured that the poor and downtrodden do not accept the repressive treatment any more. They started objecting to anything that hurts their honour. Such mobilisation and protests of lower caste were not accepted and tolerated by caste Hindus and consequent expressions were seen in the formation of caste *senas* (private caste militia) to 'set things right'. The upper caste groups have been subjugating the rights of poor people and their private militias have been used to keep them in continuous threat. Mutual distrust and conspicuous tension in the area has become the norm of the day. The trajectory of instances of unjust social structure and cases of persistent violence explicates the failure of the state in implementing land reform legislations, providing minimum wages to the agricultural labourers along with a range of practices of socio-economic exploitation of lower caste landless labourers at the hands of upper caste peasantry.

Mobilising the Low Caste Peasantry as A Conception of Social Justice

Referring to social arrangements, Rawls emphasises that *political, social and economic arrangements define men's rights and duties and influence their life prospect, what they can expect to be and how well they can hope to do...the intuitive notion here is that this structure contains various social positions and that men born into different positions have different expectations of life determined, in part, by the political system as well as by economic and social circumstances...In this way the institutions of society favour certain starting places over others. These are especially deep inequalities.*⁶⁰ Inequalities in the form of skewed ownership of land and other resources along with caste dominance in various forms, in a way, provided a foothold to ultra-left groups to organise landless labourers and marginal peasantry against all kinds of exploitations. Such mobilisations resulted in regular confrontation between low caste small peasants and labourers on the one side and the upper caste big peasants on the other and as a consequence widespread violence and massacre was witnessed frequently. Retribution is the prime understanding of social justice. All means are justified in the process of ensuring justice and more often than not, violence is justified as the only viable mechanism to ensure justice-here and now. In the face of persistent structural violence, people highlight the inevitability of violent means. "Violence is thrust upon us", "Either you take recourse to violence or perish", etc. are the frequent logic and justification one keeps hearing. *What is interesting about this argument is that it is professed not just by the protagonists of Ultra Left, but also by the propertied and powerful upper castes: 'we are forced to pick up arms to save our land and dignity from the onslaught of the Naxals', has been a common refrain of Ranveer Sena supporters, for instance and their likes in the past.*⁶¹ *Questioning the efficacy of such notion of justice, Rawls claims that 'physical conflict and resort to arms result in an ordering; certain claims do win out over others. The main objection to this ordering is not that it may be intransitive. Rather, it is to avoid the appeal to force and ...that the principle of rights and justice are accepted. Thus I assume that to each according to his threat advantage is not a conception of justice.*⁶²

As the locale of Jehnabad shows such expressions of violence ironically in the name of securing justice and fight for dignity exposed the shallowness of state's institutional justice system. Wilful erosion of state's institutional structures does not naturally mean wearing away the cravings for a just life amongst people and thus organising *Jan-adalat* (people's court) around the issues of sexual oppression, low wages and land issues has been a regular strategy of Liberation and other groups where judgments such as seizure of land and to practice *aarthik nakebandi* (economic blockage) are often delivered. Large numbers of people are approaching such *jan-adalat* (public hearing) for seeking redressal of everyday injustices, which reflects their lack of faith and confidence in institutionalised justice delivery mechanism.

The Ranveer Sena, on the other hand, questions the practice of social justice and highlights “*Maale ne daliton ka man badha diya hai*” (Maale has spoiled the dalits beyond the tolerable limits) and therefore the need to keep them in check through whatever means possible. Traversing through the predicament of logic and justification of violence vis-à-vis justice delivery, one comes across a range of experiences of oppression, humiliation and injustices juxtaposed with the failure of state and CJS to prove its credentials as custodian of justice. *By challenging the state’s monopoly of violence, and asserting the right of its opponents to resort to the same violence, the Naxalite movement set the tone for political discourse between the Indian state and the discontented segments of its population.*⁶³ Inevitability of violence is repeatedly eulogised as the social wisdom and only effective recourse of settling scores. It is also observed that dalits and EBCs have been able to assert for their dignity and rights in villages where the movement has greater influence.

As stated in the preceding lines, one needs to take into account that apart from land and wages, *izzat* (dignity) was one of the most important rallying points for the poor peasants and labourers in the area. It also remains one of the critical defining factors behind justifying violence as a primary means of retributive justice. In the backdrop of the semi-agrarian society of Bihar, violence is often directed against honour and status to defame and demoralise the adversary. Here it is contextual to relate with Palshikar’s understanding of humiliation, where he says “Revenge, retribution and forgiveness are the main historically evolved responses to humiliation”. He believes that humiliation is essentially a communicative interaction, that in protesting as well as in insulting one conveys something. Palshikar continues “Since violence is literally speaking destruction, or attempted destruction of something regarded by somebody as inviolate (Scruton: 1983), in the context of what we are discussing here, it may be permissible to run the ideas of violence and retaliatory humiliation together.”⁶⁴ Innumerable instances of everyday humiliation, indignity and exploitation ultimately forced the labouring poor to break their ‘culture of silence’. The tone and tenor of subaltern conversation now clearly demonstrates their ability to critically understand the hegemonic socio-economic and political structure of the society. And it has certainly evolved through their encounter with language of protest and revolution over several years; and credit certainly goes to several left and ultra-left groups active in the area.⁶⁵

The present study intends to locate the fundamental premises around the issue of *izzat* and everyday humiliation vis-à-vis sense of injustice and consequent social unrest in the locale of Jehanabad. In order to reach out and capture the meanings of justice entrapped in the everyday discourse, it appeared prudent to confine the field study to ideal-typical settings. Consequently, an ethnographic account of two villages, **Damuha** and **Noanwa** helped us understand long drawn mobilisation, struggle and recourse to violence as means to call for dignity meaning thereby ensuring social justice for hitherto unjust groups and communities on the

social-political ladder of southern Bihar. The present endeavour was also prompted by a desire to get an insight about people's understanding and interpretation of justice, which is an outcome of two decades of sustained struggle for seeking justice and rights. Conscious effort was made to relate with people not as a respondents but to build up a holistic understanding of them as social actors, in their relationship with others. While analysing the saga of humiliation, indignity and subsequent protest and struggle to seek justice, the study avoids any generalisation, whatsoever.

Village: Damuha

The village of Damuha has made a niche for itself on account of large-scale mobilisation and sustained struggled against social injustice and oppressive practices by the upper caste populace. Damuha, a part of Damuha panchayat of Kako revenue block, is situated only four Kilometers away from the district headquarter of Jehanabad. The village comprises mainly of Dalit and backward caste people. Most Dalit houses in the village are *pucca* (concrete) as it is constructed under Indira Aawas Yojana, a housing scheme of Government of India for poorer and marginalised sections of the society.

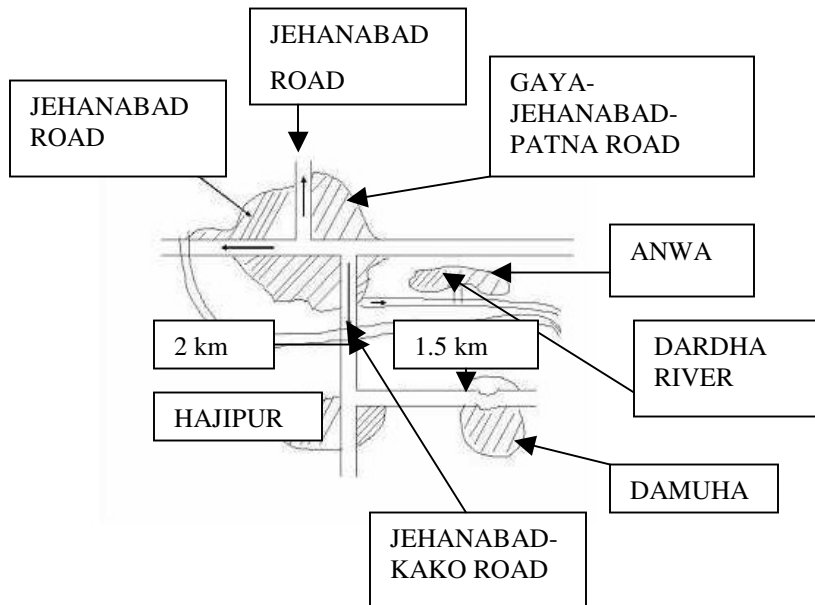
Table 1: Caste Composition of the Village

Name of the Caste	Households	Traditional Occupation
Yadav	60	Cattle rearing, agricultural labour
Koiri	40	Marginal landholding, agricultural labour
Mallah	40	Boat man, Fishing, agricultural labour
Ravidas(chamar)	25	Leather worker, agricultural labour
Paswan(Dusaadh)	20	agricultural labour
Bania	20	Extraction of oil, agricultural labour, retail vendor
Badhai-Iohaar	32	Carpenter, agricultural labour
Thakur(Nai)	06	Barber, agricultural labour
Ramaani	07	agricultural labour
Sonaar	01	Goldsmith, agricultural labour
Manjhi	15	agricultural labour
Chaudhri(Paasi)	10	Toddy extraction, agricultural labour
Kumhaar	02	Potter, agricultural labour
Total Household	278	

The village is surrounded by several small hamlets namely Laxman bighaa, Mundichak, Jogihaat and Gulzarbagh. Damuha panchayat's economy and polity has been dominated by two upper castes majority villages namely Anwa and Hajipur. Whereas Rajput caste group is in majority in Anwa, Bhumihars have a predominant presence in Hajipur. Damuha panchayat is infamous for Damuha-khagri massacre in

which 11 dalit-mushhars were killed by Hareram Yadav gang⁶⁶ in the year 1988; similarly the adjoining Anwa village is ill-famed for the feudal outbursts of Rajputs. Cases of injustice and violence against dalits and backward castes, misbehaviour with Dalit women and range of other brutal forms of oppressions and exploitations had been everyday phenomenon in and around the village chosen for the present study.

Sketch Map of Damuha Village



Understanding the Process of Action and Reaction, Exploitation and Revenge through People's Narratives

Our first meeting was with Mitthu Vishwakarma, who appeared disposed to talk to a stranger like the present researcher about something that indeed generates a chain of painful images emanating out of the iniquitous social topography of south Bihar. The researcher would like to share and convey the sense of agitation written on his face during the course of his narration of events woven around the plight and injustice that have been experienced by the villagers over the years. Talking about the landlessness, he says, "*hamare gaon ke 'mori' tak* (where the rain water drops from

tiled roof) *Anwa aur Hajipur ke bade logon ki jamin hai*” (Upper caste people of Anwa and Hajipur have landholdings till our huts). The expression ‘mori tak’ reveals complete landlessness of the dalits and their dependence on daily wage labour in the fields of upper caste people of adjoining villages. Except for very few, most of us are entirely dependent upon the agricultural labourers’ work in Anwa and Hajipur, says Mitthu. Talking about two neighbouring upper caste dominated villages, he mentioned that Hajipur is little far away (1.5 Kms) and the Zamindari system was never prevalent there. He added it as a reason for not so harsh behaviour vis-à-vis Damuha villagers. In contrast, Anwa was a small zamindari village and they interfered in the everyday social-cultural and political life of Damuha. Mitthu builds his narrative through down memory lane when he shares “my grandfather told us that Anwa people used to forcibly take away vegetables and milk from our houses as a matter of *right*. Besides, for feasts they would demand and take away goats by sending their henchmen. The system was assiduously built that for any of these commodities; there was no mechanism for payment etc. On the service side, cobblers had to make shoes for them free of cost, ironsmiths had to make *hal ka faal, khurpi, hansua, gandasi, kudaal* (implements used in agriculture), carpenters had to prepare *hal* (wooden frame for the plough), and potters to provide earthen pot, Barber had to cut hairs and nails. Unlike the conventional *zazmani* system prevalent in different parts where zaminadars used to provide support in cash and kind to the occupational caste groups, it was complete callousness built on unjust and exploitative demands from the Rajputs of Anwa. Besides, upper caste Rajputs was also practising *dola pratha*⁶⁷. It was one of such heinous and undignified practice that made multiple penetrations in the psyche of the people and communities who were on the receiving end. Tormented Mitthu recounted that it was 30 years since his grandfather died; however, the behaviour of Anwa Rajputs did not undergo any soothing and desirable change and experiences of injustices and exploitation are part of the growing up of our next generation too.

Our next engagement was with 70 years old Indradeo Mistri, who went ahead to add that they were forced to accept such injustice as their destiny; making it painfully linked to their cognitive structure. For ‘*bade log*’ (upper caste) the daughter of a poor is like personal property on whose body their ownership is *divinely* ordained. He continues, once Bhusan Singh, son of Ashok Singh of Anwa established sexual relation with the daughter of Rabidas (shaadi ka jhansa de ke-on false pretext and promise of getting married to her). However, once she was pregnant, he refused to marry and was forced to go for abortion. In another incident, after 2006 panchayat election Gandhi Singh’s son Ballu Singh raped the daughter of Mittu Manjhi. Manjhi, the anguished victim’s father was subsequently forcibly stopped from lodging complaint. He was given Rs 500/-and few Kilograms of grain as compensation and matter was *fixed and resolved*-what a price for the dignity and honour of women from subjugated communities. The most ironical part of such narratives is that they happen to be recurring episodes and not isolated aberrations. Here it is also important to understand that defiance of diktat during electoral process often results in revenge

from the hegemonic upper caste and the consequences are predictable in the shape of rape, murder and/or burning the fields or orchestrating massacre. The history of the flaming fields of Jehanabad is testimony of such correlations between electoral process and scaling up of injustice and violence.

However, with change of time and certain desirable developments in our vicinity, we the underprivileged also started talking about *Izzat aur adhikaar* (dignity and rights), says Ram Prakash Mahato. The 40 years old passionate Mahto emphasises about the growing consciousness regarding the misdeeds of upper caste people. He says, “Earlier we could never dare to question or oppose it. There were few *dallals*⁶⁸ of Rajputs amongst us and whenever we raised any issue, they would lose no time in conveying it to their *bosses* bringing more of atrocity and punishment on to us. Mahto goes on highlighting that after independence; these upper caste people joined congress and other mainstream political parties and became MLAs, Chairman of municipalities, Mukhiya and Sarpanch of villages-the new institutional structures of power and privileges. Bureaucrats and police personnel from top to bottom were hand in gloves with the upper caste goons and we were totally confused about our future course of action. Leave aside political parties like congress and Socialists, even CPI politicians were approaching upper caste for votes as also for donation.” Chipping in the discussion 45 year old Rajkumari Devi gets furious while sharing about the contemptuous and derogatory proverbs and expressions used by Anwa Rajputs for Dalits. “Proverbs such as *Rar ki jaane bara ke swad* (the lower caste people cannot appreciate precious things) and phrases such as *rar-raiyan*(a derogatory reference to the lower caste) etc. were quite demeaning for us but we had to swallow it with a strong pinch of humiliation since ages”, she concludes her succinct intervention in the discussion.

75 years old Lalmuni Devi feels strongly about the impact of Anwa peoples’ nuisance on the economy of Damuha. “Earlier our village (Damuha) was famous for a very big haat (in many respect it was bigger than Jehanabad and Masaudhi baazaar) – the spread was between Mangusao’s house to Thakurbaari (roughly 500 metres). People used to come to do marketing here from far away places (even as far away as 10 kms.) but due to continuous terror of upper caste goons from Anwa, it gradually lost its charm and finally the haat shifted to another village.” The congregation at this point was joined by Rajkumari Devi entered into the discussion and shared her experiences while working in the field. “Womenfolk, who were working at the fields of zamindars during sowing season, were not allowed to get water after their breakfast. Often they had problems in going for toilet in the open fields due to constant presence of stooges of zamindars.” She moved on to hum one of the popular folk songs capturing the plight of landless labourers

“Khet Mazdoor ke baa ajbe kahani, Khetba main khatat biti jaala jindgaani

Hokhate bihaan jaale maalik ke duari, late sait bhela pe sune pare gaari...

Khai ke na anna bhar pet, penhe ke na kapda; dhahal dhimilayal ghar lauke nahi khapda

Kaisan azadi milal hamra na bujhael, mehnat majooriye main zindagi seeraiyel

(Life of an agricultural labourer is indeed astounding, for the entire life passes on the same patch of land

As the morning dawns we are supposed to be at the landlord's patio and the delay invariably gets insults for us

The wages we get does not suffice for food or cloth and our homes look ruined

We fail to figure out what kind of freedom we have got, for we have spent life like the wretched on the fields)

When confronted with a query as why they are not opting for institutional-legal channels for redressal of their grievances, Rajkumari devi responded citing that "on several occasions we lodged complaint in Kako police station, Jehanabad and even approached Sub-Divisional officers and Superintendent of police but it did not improve the situation. Everyone had one and the same advice: stay in harmony; which in our situation meant nothing but to tolerate all indignities and exploitation without murmur."

Around 1984-85, son of a cobbler got married with the girl named Rani from Punpun in Patna district. That was the time when Naxalite movement was at its peak in Punpun. Rani is quite forthcoming in sharing the history of fight for justice and processes of mobilisation in the village "when I came to Damuha after my marriage I shared about the change which took place in my village and area with other womenfolk in the village. Earlier situation was no better even in my village but when poor people started organising themselves and protested vehemently, things started changing gradually. Kurmi zamindars of our area formed Bhumi sena⁶⁹ and through their caste militia they tried to repress the voices of protests of poor. Scores of killings and massacres followed, men folk of our area were put behind the bars on false charges. Despite the efforts to suppress our protest, we fought back aggressively. I feel that sharing of my experiences motivated the people of Damuha who were already getting restless for taking the upper case exploitation and injustices head-on. The process of gaining true consciousness and unflinching faith in the solidarity of people on the margins got momentum with the establishment contacts with Indian Peoples' Front. Meetings of the poor around *alaav*(around fire) became regular sight and the agenda was how to fight back for our rights and dignity against all odds.

While the researcher was trying to come to terms with the narratives of exploitation and struggle, a boy, Munna Chaudhry (of Pasi caste) was climbing up a toddy tree to take out toddy. In the mean time Babu⁷⁰ Rajnandan Singh of Anwa arrived with one of his *lathait* (henchman) who was a yadav by caste. Straightaway taking recourse to abusive language, Singh told Munna to give toddy to his *lathait* free of cost. Munna came down without taking out toddy and protested against the language used. When Rajnandan singh continued abusing, Munna attacked Singh with *pasuli* (a sharp edged weapon used in extracting toddy leaves). Singh escaped miraculously but the rajputs of Anwa got together and set the house of Munna on fire. Dalits also got together and extinguished the fire. The process of action and

reaction, exploitation and revenge taking has indeed become part of everyday life, which is in sharp contrast of the way sufferings were earlier taken as natural by the underprivileged. There were several occasions when organised lot of dalit and backward caste communities drove them away from village. We were informed by the villagers that even when the upper caste goons came prepared with *gohar*⁷¹, they found us equally equipped and ready to withstand and react, forcing them to retreat. “We made it obvious to them that time has changed; pay and take milk. We ensured that words of servitude and subordination, continuing since ages, are intolerable anymore”, says Munna.

Disposing of the Shackles of Deep-Rooted Injustice

Perpetual discrimination in temples and festivals was the norm of the time. Dalits were not allowed to enter inside the sanctum sanctorum of temples prior to 1986. We decided that either everyone would go to worship inside or no one shall; neither Rajput nor Paswan. It became one of the most serious issues of conflict. Rajputs of Anwa came with an interesting compromise saying that- “you can go inside but you should not touch the feet of the deity, however only we shall be privileged to do so”. We immediately replied back that ‘*yahan babadham wala hisaab chalega, sabhi jayenge aur sabhi jal chadhayenge, murti ko koi nahi chhuyega*’ (we will practice Deoghar⁷² system’ which means everyone will go inside, everyone would put water on deity but no one would touch it). Since then this is what is practiced in our village. It is however another matter that rarely does Anwa Rajput comes here now. They do call us in the Shiv mandir of their village, and we visit them for *bhajan and kirtan* (singing devotional songs)

Mitthu Vishwakarma, who led the movement, recollected “when the organisation and movement of IPF gained momentum and the Rajputs of Anwa fought and lost many times, they took the recourse of protecting a gang of thieves under the leadership of Hareram Yadav. Ranging from grains in the paddy field to our cowsheds to our goats, everywhere insecurity loomed large due to menace of stealing by the gang. It was difficult to travel between Jehanabad to Damuha after 6 o’clock in the evening. On several occasions we requested the local administration for our safety and security but they turned a deaf ear. Soon we discovered that the gang provides the share to police as well. A sense of disillusionment about the administration led to an impeccable desire to fight for justice. This precisely was the time when Hareram gang orchestrated another massacre in Golampur village which is only 8 Km away from Damuha. We identified some of the notorious members of the group namely Hareram yadav, Tunnu Paswan, Rajesh Yadav, Bihari Yadav, Anandi Yadav, Deena Yadav, Bhangi Yadav and Ramji Yadav. Under the guidance and leadership of Party (IPF), we organised ourselves to eliminate the gang. Within few months Tunnu Paswan, Ramji Yadav and Bhangi yadav were killed. Bhangi yadav was killed in the broad day light when he was coming from khalishpur where he stole

a paddy thrashing machine from the house of one of the comrades. We caught hold of him just in front of Jogiadih police camp and eliminated him. The gang got extremely petrified by the incident and cases of stealing were stopped altogether”. As the readers shall observe, the narratives of the incidences shared have strong elements of ravings about violence. From being perceived as instruments of exploitation and oppressions earlier, violence undergoes transformations for them, consequently appearing as *weapon of the weak*. The centrality of violence as an instrument to seek justice also underlines the confession that poor have hardly any reason to keep reposing faith in legal-institutional mechanism of justice delivery.

This incident turned out to be a rallying point and the poor and downtrodden people started mobilising themselves in a much more organised way. “Earlier we were always scared of ‘babu log’ (upper caste people) and felt petrified by the mere sight of ‘lal topi wala’ (police personnel). The situation has changed drastically as ‘babu log’ avoid moving out from their houses after dusk and police squads do not dare to enter our village after sun set”. This indeed is an expression of villagers’ sense of hard earned accomplishment in disposing of the shackles of deep-rooted injustice ingrained in the society for long.

“As always Upper caste and police administration were hand in glove and they made another plot to thwart our effort to seek justice and rights. On 11th August 1988, they organised another massacre through Hareram gang. In Damuha-Khagari massacre 11 dalit-mushhar were killed; however, this incident failed to instil fear amongst people. On the other hand, it culminated into palpable anger amongst poor in the entire region. The same gang had orchestrated a massacre in Nonhi-Nagwa village of same Kako revenue block only two months back” shares Arun Thakur, a former cadre of Peoples’ War. Here it is worth mentioning that in both of these villages landless labourers were getting organised under the influence of IPF. Earlier, when Bhagwat Jha Azad, the then Chief Minister of Bihar visited the massacre site in Nonhi-Nagwa, people informed him about the crimes perpetrated by Hareram Gang and he assured that there will not be any massacre afterwards. “Damuha-khagri massacre made people extremely angry and furious and when Azad came to the site, people in thousands *gheraoed* him and IPF activist Birendra Vidrohi blackened the visiting CM’s face thus using the occasion to convey the general sense of betrayal felt by the subjugated communities in the region. *Vidrohi ne jo kaalikh lagaya who Mushar ke ghar ke dirkha pe rakhe diye ki kaalikh thi* (the black powder used by Vidorhi was taken out of the lamp kept at a Mushar’s front-yard). For administration it was an act of *Rajdroh* (act of treason), for us it was one of the great symbolic manifestation of our liberation. Talking about the reason behind the Nonhi-Nagwa massacre, 50 years old Charmanti Devi shares why her husband Vriksh Manjhi became one of the victims of massacre. “A local country liquor shop owner, Ramashish was angry at my husband as he was mobilising people for the closure of the shop. Due to people’s opposition under IPF’s leadership, Ramashish was forced to close the shop. He had threatened us of dire consequences”, says Charmanti Devi.

After this massacre, government announced to build approach road from Hajipur to Damuha but it never started. “Forty youths of our village took the vow to construct the road through *shramdaan*. 1.5 km long road, by which you have come, is

not a government road; it is the road of our struggle, labour, blood and sweat”, Arun informs with a sense of pride.

Even today men and women from our village go to Anwa as agricultural labourers and a good number of them go to sell vegetables, clothes and others things. They were quick to add that now Anwa Rajputs use *sammanjanak shabd* (respectable expressions). In between once or twice they tried to revert back to their old behaviour but organised youth of our village went to Anwa and made them aware of the changed social-political situation. Since then things are nearly normal. However, the noticeable aspect is that in the absence of ML organisation in Anwa, dalits and backward caste are still not treated well in the village and repression and exploitation continues unabated there.

About us, ‘*babu log*’ says that ML spreads terror and the area lost its peace and tranquillity since the advent of ML in the region. They termed it as an absurd propaganda. Weaving the finer drapery of narration, they added that earlier when we worked as bonded labour, took exploitation and oppression as natural to us and the *izzat* (dignity) of our womenfolk depended merely on their will-the area indeed was peaceful. Amity also prevailed when we did not question the denial of our voting rights, entry in the temples, and dehumanised treatment accorded to us. Because we did not protest the sufferings we were undergoing, it was peace all around. “*Ham logon ne taya kiya ki bade logon ke anyaya be aadharit shanti ab nahi chaegi*” (we collectively decided that so called peace and tranquillity built on the edifice of injustices and exploitation of Upper caste cannot be accepted anymore). Raising the voice against injustice and holding the hands of the oppressor we became killers, extremists and naxalites in the eyes of the administration, which shamelessly acted as the protector of the upper caste marauders.

**“ Gaon- gaon ghumli auro hum saharwa ghumli aye Ram,
Bhaiya ho saara jahanwa lage suna janwaadi samvidhan bina hey Ram
Koi re anchalwa main badhwa to koi main sukharwa dekhli hey Ram
Bhaiya ho, munge chalali hum adhikaarwa te hamni ke jailwa milal hey Ram”**

(We have journeyed through the villages and the towns

My brother! The world appears barren without a genuinely people’s constitution

Our eyes have seen in this land flood at one place, while drought at another

My brother! Whenever we asked for our rights, we were shown the corridors of the jail)

The contextualisation tries to unravel the strong sense of injustice and infringement of fundamental rights of poor. “We neither wish to kill people nor the idea is to spread terror, however, we are clear and conscious that we should have a right to live with dignity.”

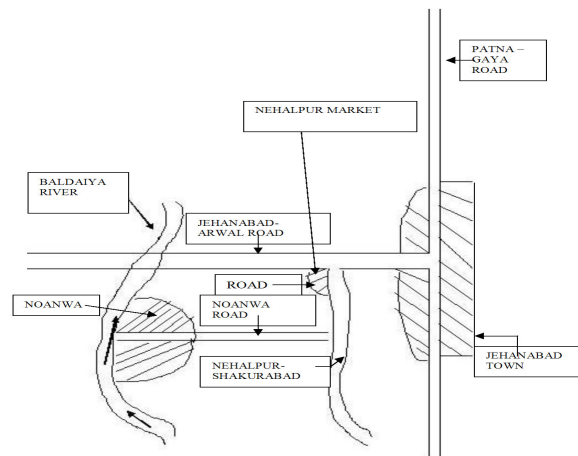
“During Congress regime till 1989 whatever happened, people used to say that it is a party of ‘bare log’ and therefore the poor are getting exploited. When Lalu Prasad came in power and assured that poor would get social justice, we saw a ray of hope for better days. However, during 15 years rule of his party, the administration responded in the same old fashion. The only change which was visible was the replacement of old feudal lords by few newer ones; earlier brokerage in the bank-police station-revenue block offices were the monopoly of Brahman-rajput-

bhumihars; in Lalu Prasad's regime yadavs took charge. The brokerage of bus depot, bazaar samiti, country liquors' shops, block offices, police stations and other such places came in control of people belonging to the social bases of Lalu Prasad. We haven't got anything from government whatsoever- "*na sarson na rai*". We have no qualms about our belief that whatever we are going to get, it is through our "*sangathan and sangharsh*" (organisation and struggle)" Mitthu concludes.

Village: Noanwa

Noanwa is the biggest village in the Noanwa panchayat of the newly constituted revenue block, Ratni- Faridpur of Jehanabad district. It is situated 14 kms west and south from Jehanabd district headquarter. For reaching the village one needs to go to Nehalpur market on Jehanabad-Arwal main road, which is situated 9 km east-west from Jehanabad district headquarter. From there one must travel southward through a dilapidated road going towards Shakurabad market. Five Kilometers from Nehalpur, Noanwa is situated at the western side of the road.

Sketch Map of Noanwa



The general belief is that it is the biggest village in Magadh range (Gaya- Nawada-Aurangabad, Jehanabad and Arwal district). It is situated at the bank of Baldaiya river which is a tributary of Punpun River. The population is around 6000 with 3400 hundred electorates in this village who are part of Makhdumpur assembly constituency. Politically, Noanwa is considered quite an influential village. The mukhiya of Noanwa panchayat is Smt Kiran Singh a Bhumihar by caste whose husband Mr. Ranganth Sharma is associated with Janta Dal (United). It is general belief that despite belonging to Bhumihar caste, the family was opposed to Ranvir Sena even during its peak phase of success.

Table 2: Caste/ Community Composition of the Village

Name of Caste/ Community	No. of Families	Traditional Occupation
Bhumihar	250	Landowners
Chamar	50	Leather worker, agricultural labour
Mushahar	30	Agricultural labour, cattle rearing
Paswan	10	Some land, agricultural labour
Doom	08	Landless labourer
Kayasth	10	Government and Non-government employment
Brahmins	25	Priestly function, some land, employed
Kushwaha	67	Some land, agricultural labour
Nai	20	Barber, agricultural labour
Kahar	20	Water and luggage bearer, agricultural labour
Dhobi	04	Washer man, agricultural labour
Kumhaar	15	Potter, agricultural labour
Kandu	15	Agricultural labour
Yadav	04	Some land, cattle rearing, agricultural labour
Teli	10	Oil extraction, retail vendor, some land
Bania	10	Small business, some land
Sonar	05	Goldsmith, some land
Lohaar	10	Ironsmith, agricultural labour
Badhai	20	Carpenter, agricultural labour
Mallah	10	Boatman, Fishing, agricultural labour
Sinduria	10	Agricultural labour
Maali	03	Gardener, agricultural labour
Paasi	04	Toddy extraction, agricultural labour
Tamoli	02	Makes Paan (betel), agricultural labour
Muslims	30	Agricultural labour
Total Household	632	

Noanwa seems to be fitting well within the traditional independent village community system. The location of the village, large *deeh bhumai* (residential area) and existence of tall mud houses even in 21st century indicate that the history of this village goes back to centuries. Generally, during British Zamindari system Jehanabad district was under Tekaari raj but surprisingly such a big village like Noanwa, which has an area of 45 hundred Bighha, was not under any estate. Farmers used to deposit taxes directly in the collectorate. The settlement pattern in the village is largely compact and a concrete road divides the houses of Bhumihars and other caste groups. Primarily, Bhumihars own up most of the agricultural land in the village. Few

Kushwahs and Yadavs also have some landholdings. Among dalits, only Paswans have small patches of land in their name. Rest of the populace are either agricultural labourers or depend on traditional occupation for their life and livelihood. Off late Bhuminars have started giving land under *bataidari*⁷³ system and these lands are being cultivated by extremely backward caste or dalits. Nowadays even some Bhumihar households have also started taking land on batai for cultivation, which was unheard of earlier. In the absence of appropriate arrangement for irrigation, *nagdi patta per jamin lene-dene ki wyavastha nahi hai* (sale-deed where immediate payment is made). Even now the market forces have not penetrated much in this village. Due to *jarjar* (dilapidated) road, there is no public transport system to and from district headquarters. There is a government middle school in the village from the pre-independence phase. Besides, a six-bed hospital was constructed in 1982-83, which is now standing as decrepit building reminding people that it was meant to be a hospital. The political influence of Noanwa in yesteryears is easily understood by the fact that it is the only village where a water tank was constructed and pipeline was fixed in every household. Staffs for the purpose are still posted and they are drawing their salary. However, the pipes and the tank have never seen the water.

The researcher shall like to share one of the interesting facts about the system of “*bataia suwar*”; under this arrangement, dalits keep pigs as pet and the money for purchasing the same comes from the women members of Bhumihar caste. The arrangement is akin to ‘batai’ system, wherein when the pigs are sold off; the money gets divided between both the parties. So far keeping in view the *polluting* nature of the pigs, it appeared implausible that caste Hindu women shall be at the one end of this important deal. However, such important revelation surfaced when an agitated Kailash Ram started divulging the covert layers and aspects of relationships between communities.

It was also observed that all new concrete construction in the village is in the locality of dalit and EBC-OBC houses. None of the Bhumihar family constructed new houses and many have not been even painting their homes for several years. The reason stated being the fact that farming has become unviable for Bhumihars due to higher wages demanded by the labourers and decreasing productivity of the land. On the other hand, the combine of push and pull factor of the economy made several dalit and backward caste youths to move out of the area to other states to earn. The relative and recent prosperity in their households here is on account of the *money-orders* they have been sending back to their village back home.

As mentioned in the preceding lines, the Bhumihars are the prime landholders of land and that made them hegemonise socio-political domain. A very long regime of hegemony has further nurtured a mindset, which is feudal to the core. Enduring mechanism and episodes of exploitation and oppression makes them carry and execute a disapproving disposition towards all progressive movements, ideologies and individuals. One of the worst ironies of history informs us that the area was known as epicentre of anti-zamindari movement under the leadership of Swami Shahjanand Saraswati and Pandit Yadunandan Sharma. As a consequence to

these movements, the area was able to nurse different shades of communist and other progressive struggles.

Oral Narratives of Some Members of the Lower Caste of Noanwa Village

While traversing through landscape of the origin and evolution of people's movement for the assertion of justice, Kailash Ram shares "in the post independence phase, the leadership of ruling congress party went in the hands of ex-zamindars belonging to Bhumihar caste and this leadership was averse to all kinds of progressive movements and Noanwa thus became a representative village. As the exploitation and repression over poor crossed threshold level of tolerance, mobilisation process against socio-economic, cultural and political exploitation gained momentum in the 1980s and the struggle became fierce. Bhumihars were notoriously known for their ill temperament and feudal and abusive languages (*hey, ho, aare, tora* – derogatory expressions used for communication against the lower caste). "Earlier we were given food in the aluminium plate. We protested and held meetings. We refused to eat in aluminium plate. Thereafter, they started giving food in steel plate", say Kailash Ram. He adds "During sowing season, it was customary to sing songs in praise of Zamindars. Our women folk refused to sing such songs and we started singing 'janwaadi' (revolutionary) songs and the practice continues till now.

Similar to the narratives of Anwa, people here too shared that they tolerated misbehaviour and misdemeanour of the Bhumihars with their womenfolk and all other forms of torture as part of their destiny. However, the fierce struggle of 1970s in Bhojpur and in the beginning of 1980s in Dhanrua, Punpun and Vikram of Patna district encouraged us to mobilise ourselves and fight against the tyranny of Noanwa."

The simmering discontent among the dalits and EBCs of Noanwa found a *trigger* during Holi festival in 1983. Normally, during *holika dahan* the ill-tempered youths of Bhumihar caste used to enter the by-lanes and hamlets of poor people for singing holi songs. Invariably these songs shall always use vulgar and abusive expressions naming specific females from dalit and EBC families. This practice was extremely humiliating and unnerving for the underprivileged section for several years but they were not able to muster organisational strength and courage to resist the same. *To be humiliated is to be rendered inferior or deficient in some respect by others in a deliberate and destructive way. It is therefore a deeply distressing experience. It is something one can not get over easily, and those who have to face it everyday sense a constant threat to their sense of self-worth.*⁷⁴ In 1983, when the practice was repeated as always, I, Kailash Ram, a young boy from extremely backward caste (EBC)⁷⁵ caste opposed it openly. I managed to gather all my strength to declare in public that this is offensive to our being, as we must be treated with dignity. Such vociferous opposition was felt, as future threat by the feudal Bhumihars for this kind of public outrage was unbelievable to them. In front of Lalaji's

frontyard⁷⁶(where we were sitting), I was beaten black and blue, presuming my unconscious state as dead, they left me then and there. This one incident later culminated into a major symbol of unity for the underprivileged people in our village. We made contacts with CPI (ML) group and regular meetings started taking place in our hamlets. Frequent visit of party leaders and organisation of strong cadre in the village posed a very serious threat for the upper caste bhumihars and they realised the possible danger in case they dare to repeat such undignified behaviour and acts of oppression. As one can see that the genesis of the struggle here was around the issue of prestige. Our demand always had been *umra ke hisaab se hum logon ke liye bhi aise hi shabdon ka istemaal ho jaisa hum unke liye karte hain* (Taking age as the criterion and determinants of address and expression, they should also use the same idioms as we use for them). The struggle started on the issue of dignity and other issues gradually got attached to it.

Surti Devi, belonging to mushahar caste emphasises that poor women are feeling really liberated now and they are participating actively in the meetings of ML. It was felt that culture of protest and struggle has replaced hitherto dominant culture of silence in this Bhumihar dominated village.

Taking Recourse to Weapons and Violence to Settle Scores of Age Old Injustices

When ML organisation was not there in our village we had to run from pillar to post in order to seek justice. "*Sabke saamne dason noh aur battishon daant nipore*" (we begged for justice with folded hands) but did not get any justice. On the visits by the DIGs and SPs in this conflict-ridden village, we were suggested by them to stay in harmony and you must see what they meant by peace and unity. Rather than addressing the root cause of tension they used to preach us about peace and harmony, surati Devi continues. Such responses find its echo in the writing of Rawls, when he says "*Some have held that in fact substantive and formal justice tend to go together and therefore that at least grossly unjust institutions are never, or at any rate rarely, impartially and consistently administered.*"⁷⁷

The villagers, we spoke to were near unanimous in putting forth the view that their concern and demands were addressed only due to strong protest and struggle under ML leadership. We realised that if we wanted to live with dignity we will have to fight for it and secure the same and we must also be prepared to sacrifice our lives. The story line here too bore similar script as we were informed that hundreds of youths were put behind the bars under false charges and baseless accusations. However the spirited struggle continued unabated despite feudal and administrative repression in tandem. Administration had the tendency to catch hold of any black skinned youth *aur ghosna kar dete the ki male ka area commander arrest ho gaya* (any blackskinned youth-a reference to lower caste and announce that ML area

commander has been arrested). The people around us had pains to share that even the judiciary was biased in favour of upper caste and that made them doubly despondent of the legal-political structures. We could never get bail from trial courts and we did not have money to fight our cases in the high courts; as a result we had to languish in jails for several years together. Till late 1980s we had not seen ballot papers as upper caste people captured booths and denied us the right. Whenever we mustered courage to demand our right to vote, we got a threat to life-and the choice remained between the adult franchise and the life of near and dear ones.

In the light of such blatant denial of rights and exploitation of all kind and that too for decades altogether, we felt that we needed to take recourse to weapons and violence to settle scores of age old injustices. We also strongly felt that we ought to counteract against the violence perpetrated by several private caste militias-the most recent and most organised one has indeed been the Ranveer sena. With the fervour of saying a bold no to the organised onslaught of the *sena* and the administration, around a dozen people from amongst us became full time activists of ML in our village and they started organising people in the nearby villages as well. We never believed in violence and armed struggle and we agreed to resort to the same only as a desperate bid when nothing else was coming to our rescue. Elaborating further, they added that when there is nothing to cook for lunch and no grains for dinner, when children do not have cloth to cover their body, when children cannot get books to go to school with, how we can think of getting and holding guns.

There indeed is a qualitative change in the interaction with and everyday behaviour of bhumihars vis-à-vis dalits and backward castes. They sit together and discuss issues; credit to some extent goes to ML effort, which brought different caste people under its influence. However, Kariman Das put it upfront that they are sharing the cot with Bhumihars as a result of long drawn struggle. Bhumihars of Noanwa seems tamed and visibly anxious to avoid any statement, which might be taken otherwise by a conscious, and conscientised landless labourers. It appears that political equation of the village has changed substantially and under pressure Bhumihars have accepted that even poor people have right to life with dignity. Behind the façade of an apparent amity, they loose no opportunity to mention that on account of long drawn struggle, the development of the village has indeed got adversely affected and as a result everyone is suffering. As indicated in the case of the earlier village, the instances of Bhumihars ploughing their land themselves and also of taking land on 'batai' are narrated as the change visible in the village. This is because marginal farmers are not able to pay the prevailing wages and coercing labourers to accept low wages cannot be thought of anymore.

Contesting some of the views expressed by dalits, Rangnath Sharma puts blame on faulty investigation by police. "Police often proceed on the basis of FIR in which many innocent people also get implicated. I was always against Ranvir sena kind of organisation but even I was named as accused in Mianpur massacre. My name got cleared after some time." Despite his political clout in the panchayat and district, he was opposed by an aged dalit, Kariman Das who emphasised that justice was possible through struggle only. "It is a fact that few innocent get implicated in false cases but the upper caste landlords and their goons have started negotiating and

entering into dialogue with us only after a long phase of struggle. Previously no one was even bothered to discuss any thing with us. Tell us, why we were not allowed to enter thakurbaari (temple) earlier. Even school was shut down due to tension. And you know the reason of tension; our children were always forced to sit in the back. Derogatory language and humiliating behaviour is the bottom line behind tension.” One gets surprised to hear frequent uses of chaste hindi words like *sangathan*(organisation), *sangharsh* (struggle), *shatru varg* (class enemy), *vichardhara* (ideology), etc from an illiterate person like Das but soon one realises that such expressions are part of everyday lexicon of struggle for justice. One really relates with Lucas here, when he writes “*If I talk only about justice, I am in danger of relapsing into platitudes: it is when I get hot under the collar about some specific piece of unfairness, that my eloquence has an edge to it, and I really know what is getting my goat.*”⁷⁸ Eloquence in language and precision in strategies gets further clearer when one hears Ramprit Vishwakarma “*Urebi boli fassad ki jar hai* (foul language is the root of all problem. Citing her interview with Party unity cadre, Bhatia quotes “*Feudalism will have to be rooted out steadily, otherwise it will uproot you. Samantvaad Har aadmi pe chhaya hua hai* (feudalism lies like a shadow on every person). *Until feudalism is rooted out kranti* (revolution) *can not be achieved.*”⁷⁹

Conclusion

The study of both the villages highlights the issue of indignity, misbehaviour, ill temperament, etc by the upper echelon of the society as prime locus around which struggle for justice and assertion of rights has ensued and sustained. *Izzat* and issues associated with it dominate the inter-community relations in Jehanabad. This is not to underline that economic exploitation and class antagonism due to ownership and control over economic means has insignificant relevance for the poorer section. What is problematic is the fact that in the process of analysing the social unrest in Jehanabad, scholars and journalists often over emphasise the payment of minimum wages and distribution of land; unfortunately as the cost of careful scrutiny of unease around *izzat* (dignity or honour) which more often than not proved to be triggers for mobilisation and struggle. The culture and language of politics in Jehanabad is deeply embedded around processes of mobilisation of landless labourers for securing right to dignity and justice against everyday oppression in some or the other form. Once organised under the aegis of ML kind of group, issue of minimum wage, land to the tiller and control over *gairmazarua* land and other resources were obviously taken up and the struggle could thus be sustained for long. These groups moved beyond the classical Marxist position, which analyse inter-community relations only from class inequality standpoint. When ethical issues around violent means were raised, one could sense the justification around the logic and notion of **retributive** justice. In most of the cases ultra left group took recourse of blatant violence only around the

cases of rapes; in other situations principle of *annihilation of class enemy* was generally avoided. The struggle has been effective in its assertion of landless labourers as human beings and cases of rape of lower caste women have decreased substantially. Mostly the strategies of protest and for demanding justice is non-violent one and the tactics used ranges from dharna, gherao, pradershan to aarthik nakebandi and jan-adaalat. Violence is generally avoided in both the villages but they keep themselves prepared for any eventuality and also to convey the message loud and clear that they are ready to fight by all means-all for the end of a dignified living.

Although, the concept of social justice has been explicated through a range of philosophical standpoint, the study helps us in analysing how people relate with the notion of justice while encountering injustice and humiliation day in and day out. *The extensive variety and internal complexity of the ideas which are associated with the notion of justice make many different analyses of justice seem plausible. Thus there is some basis for the belief that it is the senses of injustice or grievance that is at the core of our ideas about justice and explains its powerful emotive force. Justice is normally the language of complaint, and sometimes of revenge. It is in resented deprivation and consciousness of having been wronged that much justice talk is rooted.*⁸⁰ While mapping violent terrains of Bihar through ethnographic methodology, cravings of social justice unfold itself in a very unique way- where so called stake holders of the society justifies their violence and counter violence as delivering social justice for their respective constituencies. Here it is crucial to emphasize that social justice is not a monologue; the conception of the concept might be universal but practice of it is certainly not uniform. When one looks into people's assertion for justice, the study quite starkly reveals that social actors are oscillating between the strategies of non-violent mobilisation to violent means.

The conjunctures around delivery of social justice in the region demonstrate that the different forms of revenge have become primary lens to look into justification of claim making and more often than not, violent strategies are opted to secure such claims. It also brings into light as how sense of power, claim for social justice and use of violent means are intertwined in the everyday life of people in this rather nondescript locale of the country, known only for the infamous and recurring outbursts of violence as primary means to claim justice. However, an ethnographic account reveals that claims making for ensuring justice gets displayed either in organised way (around ultra left ideologies and strategies) or on an everyday individual behaviour which can be seen in close proximity to James Scott's *weapons of the weak*⁸¹. The present inquiry has also comprehensibly exposed state's weakness in delivering justice for the poor and marginalised in particular. Furthermore, peoples' narratives about scores of caste/ class based violence and the tales of ghastly massacre bears testimony that the institutional mechanism of justice is in total jeopardy and contours of institutional justice is virtually shrunken for the victims of injustice. While capturing people's impression of social justice, manifested and articulated through their individual and collective response to issues surrounding

dignity, economic resources, as well as political and social status, it was felt that people are not necessarily prisoners of 'a particular' conception of justice only, which justifies violence unabashedly. Although people might be affiliates to one or the other ultra-left ideologies and organisations; they are at the same time relating with the mainstream political processes of social justice as has been articulated by political leaders like Lalu Prasad Yadav or Nitish Kumar. The consciousness of social reality and assertion of social justice undoubtedly helped people in enhancing their social status, even when their economic status remained by and large unchanged. Despite the fact that the image of Bihar is generally under siege, one can not refute that the language of politics as also the power discourse has changed significantly in the last two decades. And that language gets articulated when one comes across with expressions such as '*Gulamiya ab hum nahi bajeibo, azadia hamra ke bhawela*' (Life in Slavery is not fitting with us anymore, for free will has caught our fancy).

(I would like to put on record my strong sense of gratitude to the people of Damuha and Noanwa – for their candid sharing and sharp articulation of struggle and justice. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Kamlesh Sharma and Mr. Kumar Anil for their enormous support in the process of this study. Thanks to Prof. Pushpendra and Dr. Ritambhara Hebber for their comments. The usual disclaimer holds.)

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13. Paulo Freire's faith and confidence in the effectiveness of dialogical encounter proves so very real in this context.
14. One of the very notorious gangs of 1980s, which committed several crimes in Jehanabad.

15. Under Dola Pratha, the brides of the lower caste had to spend their first night after marriage with the landlord of the area. This system was considered as one of the most outrageous arrangements.
 16. A close negative connotation akin to broker.
 17. In early 1980s, Bhumi Sena was launched by some Kurmi caste landlords in collaboration with some criminal gang. It operated in Patna, Nalanda, Nawada and Jehanabad areas. The *sena* unleashed maximum terror in Punpun-Naubatpur and Masaurhi Blocks.
 18. The upper castes people often use prefix 'Babu' in their name and expect others to call them Babu.
 19. *Gohar* is an act of the dominant caste landed gentry in which friends; relatives and armed attendants come together to avenge a real or perceived threat.
 20. Babadham (Deoghar) is one of the most revered places of worship by Hindus of Bihar and Jharkhand. Inside the sanctum sanctorum of Babadham, devotees are supposed to put water on the idol rather than touching it.
 21. Bataidari is a system of sharecropping.
 22. Palshikar, Sanjay. 'Understanding Humiliation'. *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol XL, No51. December 17, 2005. pp 5431.
 23. This place has special importance in the village. No one stays in this house of Lalaji as everyone works outside the village. The front yard of the house witnessed first open defiance of upper caste oppression and over the years this has developed as a neutral place where confronting parties are ready to come together for negotiation and dialogues.
 24. Extremely Backward caste is being devised one of the vulnerable and socio-economically poor section in Bihar. Their plight and problems are to a great extent similar to dalit categories.
 25. Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts. 1971. Page 59.
 26. Lucas. J.R. *On Justice*. Clarendon Press, Oxford: New York. 1980. pp5.
 27. Bhatia, Bela. 'The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar'. *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol XL No 15. April 9, 2005. PP. 1540.
 28. Campbell, Tom. *Justice: Issues in Political Theory*. Macmillan Education: London. 1988. Pp 1.
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