

# **Behind Dispossession: State, Land Grabbing and Agrarian Change in Rural Orissa**

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# Land Grabbing as 'Foreignisation of Space'

- Global dimensions of land grabbing- cross-border transfer of property rights, a significant phenomenon - not the only way land grabbing is carried out
- Land Grabbing as 'primitive accumulation'- multiple forms of land grabbing and dispossession
- linkages between catastrophic land grabbing and the classic processes of land alienation

# Poverty, Hunger and Underdevelopment in Orissa: The Context

- Orissa -the poorest state in India; it is at the bottom in terms of many indicators of social and economic development.
- Slower decline in poverty.
- Poverty is spatially and socially concentrated in Orissa- Districts of Northern and Southern Orissa have higher incidence of poverty; SCs and STs have remarkably higher levels of poverty
- Historical roots of poverty



# History: Colonial Period

- Interior Orissa under princely states: predominantly tribal
- Efforts to raise revenue by inviting upper caste cultivators and traders; land alienation from tribals to upper castes
- Curtailment of community rights over forests, grazing lands and water bodies
- new taxes over forest products; tribal uprisings

# Post-independence developments

- Feudal lords as new leaders of the people, landed elites maintained their hold over the agrarian economy
- Development projects (Dams, steel plants); large scale involuntary displacement; poor compensation
- Low agricultural investment, low productivity
- Slower growth of rural non-farm economy
- Massive deforestation by state agencies and corporate houses
- By 1980s: Kalahandi-Balangir-Koraput region came to be known as the 'hunger belt'

# Dispossession-in-slow-motion: Agrarian Change in Orissa

- pre-dominantly small-holder's agriculture: (85% were marginal less than a hectare of land in 2003)
- tenancy is higher than the national average (13.15%, 2003)

*Field Survey: 1999-2000*

- a neat correspondence between land-ownership status and caste-status
- land-lease market was found to be dominated by small and marginal farmers

## *Agrarian Change*

- Labour relations: permanent labour contracts present but declining; segmented casual labour market- by gender, tasks; piece rate contracts with migrant labour in irrigated villages
- various forms of 'unfreedom' in labour market
- Exploitative informal credit; interlocked transactions:
- Sources of credit: shopkeepers, moneylenders, grain traders and input-dealers
- Caste (Dalit or ST), low land ownership, low education and less access to non-farm income significantly related to participation in exploitative interlinked transactions

## *Field Survey: 2010*

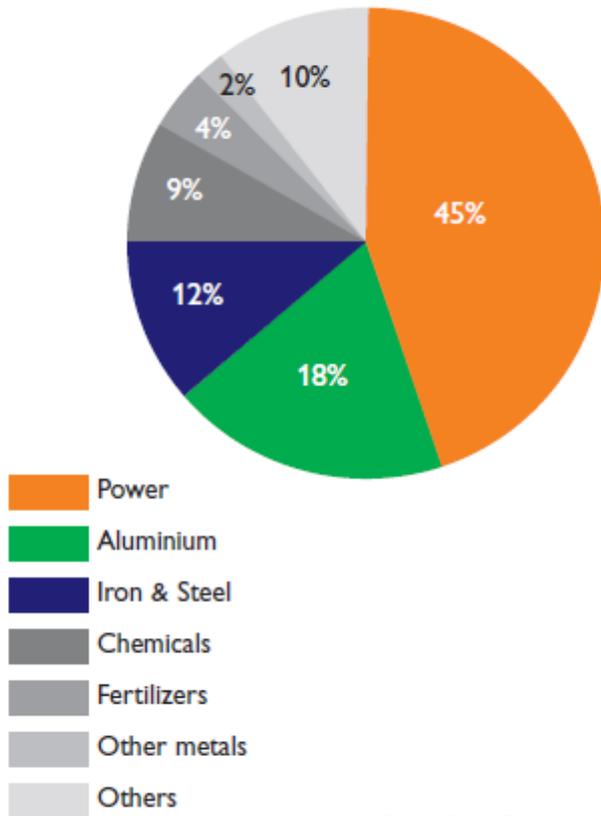
- **Declining profitability of paddy cultivation.** (water shortages, less reliable and timely supply of water through the canal system, increase in prices of inputs such as fertilizer and pesticides, underpricing of paddy in the post harvest period, and finally a rising cost of labour).
- **Labour out-migration, both seasonal and long-term increased-** a large number of small and marginal cultivator families are simply unable to survive without short-term migration or remittances from members who have already migrated.
- **Inadequate state support: Employment Guarantee not enough**
- **Elements of coercion (implicit and explicit)**

# Neoliberalism meets Chronic Poverty

- Mining and mineral based industries as the basis for market-led economic growth- infrastructure (linking industries with ports or railway networks)
- Privatisation of electricity and other utilities
- Development model under neo-liberalism: states competing against each other to attract foreign and domestic capital
- New concessions- land, raw materials, water, infrastructure; environmental concession

From A report by  
Brand Equity Foundation of India

Orissa - Distribution of investment

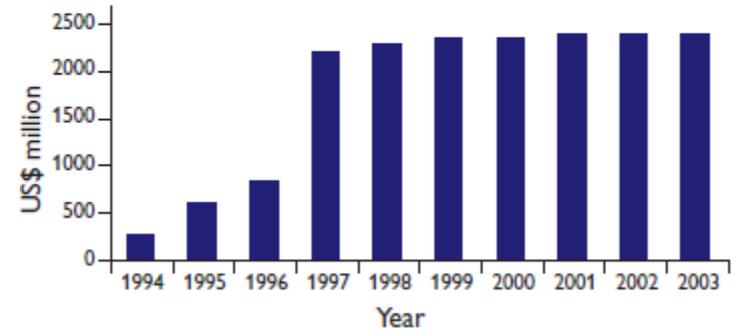


Source: Projects Today, data as on July 31, 2004

Foreign Direct Investment

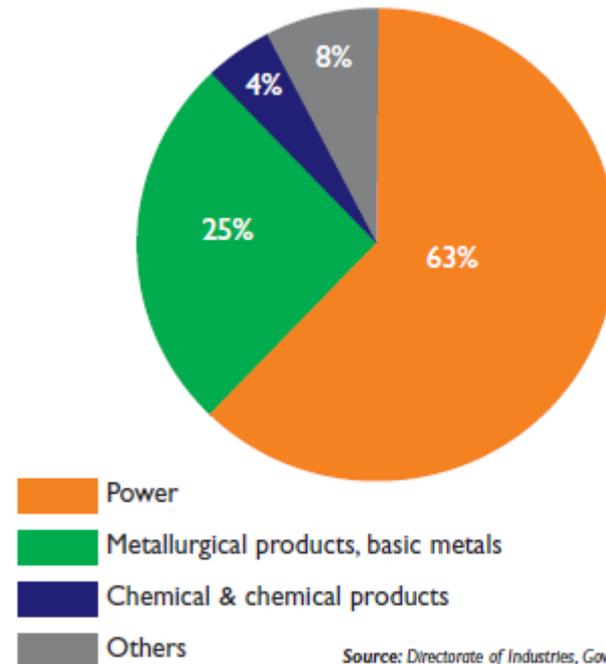
During 1991 to 2003, Orissa approved over

Orissa - Cumulative FDI



Source: Directorate of Industries, Government of Orissa

FDI - Sectoral Break-Up



Source: Directorate of Industries, Government of Orissa

# Development as Dispossession

Land grabbing in Orissa: different forms and for different purposes

- mining, industrial, and infrastructural projects (Kashipur, Niyamgiri, Kalinganagar, Jharsuguda), including SEZs (POSCO);
- military projects (Saintala)
- Construction of dams (Upper Kolab, Indravati, Lower Suktel and many others)
- Conversion of forest lands to agro-industrial plantations (Coffee plantations in Koraput);
- state-initiated enclosures for conservation projects
- illegal enclosures by non-state actors.

# Land Grabbing as Primitive Accumulation

- Role of state power crucial in the on-going process of primitive accumulation
- relaxation of environmental regulations, non-compliance with standard norms and statutory provisions, submission of misleading and false information
- Development as mining and industrialisation; dispossession as the price of development
- Violent suppression of dissent (routine police brutality)
- Role of local elites (a rentier class?): legitimizing primitive accumulation- non-state/ informal sources of coercive power

## Role of State and Non-State actors...

- Action against civil society groups, NGOs, individuals- deregistration, physical attacks
- Maoist insurgency and movements against displacement: increased attention but increased repression as well
- State and Central governments: Vedanta/ Niyamgiri case- environmental clearance as centre-state conflict
- Conflicts over water: farmers against industry

# Concluding Remarks....

- Global dimensions of cross-border land transfer a significant phenomena, but it is on-going primitive accumulation under globalisation
- accumulation-by-dispossession not limited to displacement of people from land through coercive state action.
- dispossession through gradual, but systematic undermining of resources upon which the poor depend also significant – these two forms are linked and often mutually reinforcing.