

Women's Movement for Land and Livelihood: A Case Study of Odisha

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Introduction

The visibility of rural women, particularly those belonging to adivasi communities in India and Odisha, protesting against the state in the last decade and a half or so, is being widely reported in the media. There are some studies, though limited, available on the subject (Arnopoulos 2010, Shah 2010, Fontanella-Khan 2014). 'Rural woman' is a generic term and in the chapter at hand, it encompasses populations living in regions and using natural resources in a particular manner typical to that geographical area from time immemorial. However, among the groups dependent on indigenous land, forest and water, the majority are the adivasi communities. It is the voices of such indigenous rural women that have been addressed in this chapter. What is that voice? Does it have any relevance in the context of the current approach to development that we see in India and more specifically in Odisha? Why are the indigenous women resisting? What is the nature of their helplessness if any? Such questions and many more will be explored in the chapter.

It is well known that the problems faced by the indigenous peoples are by and large universal. They suffer from the consequences of historic injustice, including colonization, dispossession of lands, territories and resources, oppression and discrimination, as well as lack of control over their ways of life. Their right to development has been largely denied by colonial and modern states in the pursuit of economic growth. As a consequence, indigenous peoples often lose out to more powerful actors, becoming one of the most impoverished groups in the country (UN 2010). In India, despite the presence of several laws to protect the adivasis and their habitats such as Schedule V, PESA (Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas 1996), FRA (Forest Rights Act 2006) and Land Alienation Act (non-transfer of adivasi lands to non-adivasis), all of which have been systematically violated and encroached upon by mega national companies and multinationals for extraction of minerals and other natural resources available on their land. The state is responsible for allowing corporate encroachment on indigenous lands. The profits made by the corporate sector are siphoned out of the area leaving the indigenous population resourceless and pauperized. In the process, indigenous communities are also exposed to a whole range of development-induced changes in their habitats. Indigenous women are worse off as compared to their male counterparts among such communities, as they are largely responsible for providing of household resources (food, fodder, fuelwood and water) and raising their children.

The chapter focuses on grassroots women's resistance and struggles against corporate