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## RESEARCH PAPER

# “Our People Can’t Hold the Line!” – Extractive Capital, Fragile Ecologies and Politics of Dispossession and Accumulation in Eastern India

Minati Dash\*

**Abstract:** A protracted movement emerged in Kashipur in Southern Odisha in 1993 that stalled a bauxite mining project for over 18 years. It went through fragmentations and eventually petered out by the early 2010s. This paper aims to understand how and why the processes of capital accumulation through dispossession cause fragmentation of social movements and their eventual petering out. I analyse the collective strikes that the villagers engaged in during 2008–2010, paralyzing the company’s incipient construction work over a tumultuous nine months. Critically engaging with David Harvey’s concept of “accumulation by dispossession” (ABD) and Kalyan Sanyal’s concept of “jobless growth”, I argue that ABD processes entail protracted interaction of extractive capital, bureaucratic structures, ecology, and the movements of subaltern communities with existing divisions. Dispossession processes generate new fissures in which ownership of land or lack of it due to land acquisition becomes the central axis of cleavage, shaping the politics and outcomes of dispossession. I further reveal that ‘jobless growth’ is unachievable for a company that can push ahead only through the provision of precarious employment and such promises. It is based on eight months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2010–2012. Methodologically, it follows Burawoy’s (2000) call to “construct perspectives on globalisation from below” through “ethnographic grounding”.

**Keywords:** Strikes; Dispossession; Accumulation by Dispossession; Jobless growth; political society; Dalit-Adivasi; Bureaucracy; Commodity cycles

## 1. INTRODUCTION

On several occasions during 2008–2010, the villagers in Kashipur, Southern Odisha, differentially dispossessed by a bauxite mining project in the region, paralysed its incipient construction work through strikes. The strikes

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Published by Indian Society for Ecological Economics (INSEE), c/o Institute of Economic Growth, University Enclave, North Campus, Delhi 110007.

ISSN: 2581–6152 (print); 2581–6101 (web).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37773/eec.v6i2.1061>

challenged land acquisition and dispossession terms, making several demands on the company relating to compensation, employability, and employment. For a tumultuous nine months, these strikes pushed the project into a state of uncertainty. This period also coincided with the engendering of a dynamics that created intractable differences between villagers, fragmented the collective struggle against mining, and deepened the mining company's presence in the area. This paper explores how a closer reading of the engagements between the key actors in an extractive frontier can help in understanding the processes of accumulation, dispossession, and transformation underway in India. More specifically, it seeks to analyse how and why processes of capital accumulation through dispossession cause fragmentation and, eventually, the petering out of social movements.

This paper is primarily an ethnographic contribution concerning an area of acute extractive conflict. A protracted movement emerged against mining in Kashipur in the villages around the proposed bauxite refinery of Utkal Alumina Private Limited (UAIL) in 1993. UAIL is a 100 per cent subsidiary of Hindalco Industries Limited, a metals flagship brand of Aditya Birla Group. It is one of the world's cheapest and biggest greenfield mining projects. The villagers organized under the banner of Prakrutika Sampada Suraksha Parishad (PSSP or Council for Protection of Natural Resources). PSSP was led by local Adivasi and Dalit leaders with mass participation from the villagers. For over 18 years, it stalled the project. During this period, the movement underwent a series of fragmentations and shifts and eventually died down by the early 2010s.

This study shows that processes of accumulation through dispossession are essentially political, protracted, and contentious and lead to the fragmentation of collective action. To demonstrate this, I analyse the specific forms of engagements that occurred among the villagers, between the villagers and the mining company, and between the villagers and the state during the period of strikes, and the outcomes for stakeholders.

Firstly, I show that the dynamics of the strikes engendered tensions between different groups, which the mining company exploited to deepen its presence in the area. During the strikes, deep fissures emerged between those displaced and those who had retained their farmlands, indicating a kind of structural disarticulation between a still-existing peasantry and a proletarianized workforce that discouraged villagers from participating in collective action and fractured the movement. Secondly, I connect the localized struggles to the bureaucratic structures that drive land-intensive capital investment in contemporary India. High-ranking bureaucrats intervened in the strikes by engaging with the villagers directly and promising to address their grievances.

However, such promises and the opportunities for precarious employment created by UAIL, in turn, generated wedges between the strikers. Thirdly, I show that these projects of dispossession in unexplored resource frontiers are spurred by commodity supercycles in metals. A commodity supercycle refers to a general global upward trend in prices in particular sectors. Subsequent sections discuss it in detail. Fourthly, the impact of a severe drought in the region in 2008–2009 also accelerated the project of dispossession in unexpected ways. An ecological crisis motivated this project of dispossession.

This paper presents David Harvey's framework of "accumulation by dispossession" (ABD) (2003) and Kalyan Sanyal's "jobless growth" (2007) as two primary referents for understanding the conceptual relevance of the case. It reworks Harvey's concept of ABD and compares the same with Sanyal's findings. As it stands today, ABD largely obscures the political processes and dynamics that accumulation and dispossession unleash on the ground as they interact with heterogeneous communities. It also does not fully explain the global context in which ABD processes have accelerated at an unprecedented rate since the late 1990s.

Similarly, Sanyal's findings are primarily a description of an economic process. Ethnographic findings in Kashipur reveal that "jobless growth" is not a passive economic description but a political field. Rather, it is not jobless at all. It produces precarious employment and promises more of such employment. Therefore, the question of precarious employment becomes the terrain on which the politics of dispossession unfolds as livelihoods are lost and villagers stare at uncertain futures.

This paper, thus, depicts the interactions and relationships between extractive capital, global markets, bureaucratic structures, ecology, the politics of dispossession, and dynamics of collective action through the complexities of the case study at hand. It highlights the fundamental difficulties in sustaining collective action in contexts wherein dispossession processes create new fissures in communities and mining and state actors carefully manoeuvre their strategies to deepen accumulation processes.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The ethnographic fieldwork for this paper was conducted over eight months between 2010 and 2012 in villages around the bauxite refinery of UAIL in Kashipur. Detailed interviews and participant observations were conducted with mining company officials, district administrators, PSSP leaders, strike leaders, and villagers from Ramibeda, Kendukhunti, Dwimundi, Kucheipadar, and D Karol. Documents and archival resources were obtained from UAIL, the district administration, and PSSP. My familiarity with the

highly inflected dialects that are spoken locally was useful in obtaining insightful information from the village participants. By the time the fieldwork began in November 2010, the strikes were over (see Table 1). Yet, it was an important milestone and participants were able to describe their experiences vividly and provide rich details. Methodologically, the paper seeks to “construct perspectives on globalisation from below, i.e., grounded globalisations... through ethnographic grounding” (Burawoy 2000, 339–341). Such a construction demands robust ethnographic insights into the interaction of the forces of accumulation and local actors, who continuously act upon each other and shape one another’s politics.

### 3. ACCUMULATION, DISPOSSESSION, AND POLITICS

David Harvey’s concept of accumulation by dispossession is a theoretical advancement of Marx’s concept of “primitive accumulation” or “original accumulation”, which is part of his theory of neoliberalism (2003, see Marx 1867 [1977]). Accumulation by dispossession is framed as an outcome of the over-accumulation of capital in the core Western countries, which is resolved by finding new territories to be opened up. While Marx considered the concept as the starting point of capitalism or as a one-time phenomenon, Harvey articulates ABD as “the continuation and proliferation of accumulation practices” (2003, 159). By doing so, Harvey centres the role of dispossession in the context of neoliberal accumulation. It entails diverse processes, including the commodification and privatization of land and forceful expulsion of farmers; privatization of common property resources; intellectual property rights; commodification of labour; and usury. Including discrete processes under the same umbrella helps us fathom the breadth of arenas in which capitalist accumulation occurs. However, as Levien correctly observes, “Harvey is vague about the mechanisms of land dispossession. ...a high level of abstraction prevents him from capturing the diverse and unequal consequences of dispossession for rural people and the conditions under which they organize to prevent it. ... (it) prevents him from the sociological specificity of land dispossession” (2018, 15–16).

As it were, the concept does not illuminate our understanding of the opposition that accumulation practices face and how dispossession is accomplished on the ground in terms of the interactions between unequal actors in terms of power, class, identity, and politics. These entanglements are particularly complex as communities are not monoliths. Subaltern communities are not “bounded entities” (Crehan 2002). Studies show that there is heterogeneity among the local actors and a diversity of economic and political interests in the social field of resistance (Nielsen 2009; Nilsen 2010; Wolford 2010). However, we know very little regarding the shifting of

positions of subaltern groups in the context of land dispossession dynamics, something that this paper discusses. Peluso and Lund (2011) argue that the politics of land constitutes a key aspect in the dynamics of accumulation by dispossession in the context of land grabs. The findings of this paper also support this. It shows that the forces of accumulation and dispossession exploit existing rifts between communities and create new fissures between groups, in which ownership of land or lack of it due to land acquisition emerges as the primary axis of fissure that undermines collective action to the point of collapse.

Besides, Harvey's analysis, which subsumes ABD under the notion of over-accumulation, does not explain the role of commodity supercycles<sup>1</sup> at the global level, vis-à-vis the acceleration and intensification of extraction and dispossession in the Global South between the late 1990s and 2000s. This period was considered particularly "transformative" for metal prices—particularly aluminium, iron, and copper—which experienced a tectonic demand boost from industrialization and urbanization in emerging nations, including India, China, and Brazil (Goldman Sachs 2020; Sawyer and Gomez 2012; Nappi 2013; PwC 2011; World Bank 2008). The upward trend in prices was interrupted briefly in 2007 and 2008 due to the global financial crisis; however, it continued immediately thereafter. This reinforced the dominant industry narrative and the expectations of investors, corporates, and governments that the supercycle will continue for decades (Bowman *et al* 2021; Humphreys 2015). For an industry defined by successive cycles of boom and bust, these expectations encouraged the expansion of mining into resource frontiers primarily inhabited by indigenous communities in Africa and Asia (Ballard and Banks 2003; Humphreys 2015; Nappi 2013; Singh and Bourgoïn 2013). This implies that the supply gap in emerging countries spurred this zeal for extraction rather than over-accumulation. The concept of ABD also does not tell us how crises of livelihoods in marginal communities living in fragile ecologies might steer these processes.

This paper expands the concept of ABD by showing that the state, through its senior bureaucrats and mining capital, worked in tandem with the commodity supercycle and engaged variously with communities to animate the politics of dispossession on the ground.

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<sup>1</sup> There have been four broad-based commodity price supercycles since the early 1900s. One of the potential drivers of these supercycles is the interaction of unexpectedly large demand shocks and slow-moving supply responses (Büyükhahin, Mo, and Zmitrowicz 2016).

In post-colonial economies, including India, it is argued that processes of ABD have led to “jobless growth” and the creation of surplus labour, as capital is unable to subsume the dispossessed within its ambit (Sanyal 2007; see also Bardhan 2015; Chatterjee 2008; D’Costa and Chakraborty 2017). Sanyal (2007) discusses this transition in the context of the trajectory of post-colonial capitalist development. Based on the dispossession of marginal communities, this transition does not absorb the population as capitalist wage workers as classical Marxist theory would have it (see Marx 1867 [1977]). Rather, it creates a redundant, uncommodified, and surplus labour power that is extraneous to capital and the processes of capital accumulation (Sanyal 2007, 58–59). In the process, the post-colonial economies exhibit a process of “jobless growth... the phenomenon of exclusion of a significant part of the population from the growth process” (245). The result of primitive accumulation is a wasteland where the surplus population is economically rehabilitated as the need economy. The need economy, Sanyal notes, emerges due to the compelling discourses of development and human rights that states must adhere to and is based on non-capitalist economic activities that enable subsistence (60). Sanyal thus articulates “jobless growth” as a description of an economic process and leaves some of the political specifications to Partha Chatterjee (2008) under the “political society” framework.

Bracketing this surplus population under the political society, Chatterjee notes

the bulk of the population in India lives outside the orderly zones of proper civil society. It is in political society that they have to be fed and clothed and given work, if only to ensure the long-term and relatively peaceful well-being of civil society. That is the difficult and innovative process of politics on which the future of passive revolution under conditions of democracy depends. (2008, 62)

This conceptualization also marks out “marginal groups” who are so powerless that they cannot even mobilize electorally to make demands on the state. These groups are the Adivasi and Dalit communities, “who are unable to gain access to the mechanisms of political society” (61) or make “effective claims on governmentality” (ibid). According to Chatterjee, they comprise “an outside beyond the boundaries of political society” (ibid, 61). However, rejecting the dichotomies set by Chatterjee, Baviskar and Sundar (2008) observe that, far from being a benign actor, states have mostly come down militarily on subaltern groups—whom Chatterjee refers to as “political society or even non-society/marginal groups” (ibid, 87)—struggling against dispossession. These groups, rather than being passive subjects of neoliberal welfarist governmentality to whom rights are automatically granted by the state, have engaged in sustained and powerful campaigns against the state to

make rightful claims on the state (*ibid*, 87–88). Adivasis, as well as Dalits, have led some of the longest and strongest political movements against dispossession and for the assertion of rights against corporate take-over of land (Baviskar 1997 EQUATIONS 2007; Karlsson 2013; see Padhi and Sadangi 2020; Dash 2017; see also, Rajan and Baral 2020 for contemporary histories of Dalit assertions against extraction and dispossession in the post-colonial period in Odisha).

#### **4. ACCELERATED EXTRACTION, MINING-LED DEVELOPMENT, AND DISPOSSESSION IN ODISHA**

In 1993, India announced its first National Mineral Policy (NMP), thus opening the mining sector to private investors from across the world. NMP mandated the acceleration of the process of extraction through corporate mining. UAIL was the first private-sector bauxite mining project to be set up in India following this announcement. This period coincides with the global commodities supercycle in metals that began in the late 1990s. Buoyed by the optimism generated by this supercycle, India witnessed an accelerated mineral boom in the 2000s (Padel and Das 2010; Sawyer and Gomez 2012). During this period, states undertook an inordinately large role in governing mineral extraction (Ballard and Banks 2003; Humphreys 2015). It is likely that a fresh national mineral policy was implemented in 2008 to facilitate large-scale corporate mining and reap the benefits of the supercycle, as it was believed that “the needs of economic development (make) the extraction of the nation’s mineral resources an important priority” (GoI 2008).

Odisha contains nearly a quarter of India’s mineral wealth, including over 55% of its bauxite.<sup>2</sup> Economic growth in Orissa has been led by expansion in the mining sector with private investment, particularly after 2002–2003 (World Bank 2008, 17). Investments in mining picked up in 2005–2006, leading to “mega-mining” (Mishra 2010), which is evident in the increased production of minerals that rose five-fold between 1993 and 2010. From one bauxite mining lease in 1993—that was operational since the 1960s—Odisha advanced to 11 major bauxite mining leases in 2010 (GOO 2010) and, overall, 128 working mining leases covering an area of 98,438 thousand hectares in 2011–2012 (GOO 2013). There is no exact data to convey the quantum of displacement in Odisha due to mining projects during this period.<sup>3</sup> However,

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<sup>2</sup> Odisha contains 95% chromite, 92% nickel ore, 55% bauxite, 33% iron ore (hematite), etc. (It is) the leading producer of chromite with a share of 99.8%, iron ore 47% and bauxite 36% in the total production of respective mineral in the country (GoI 2015).

<sup>3</sup> One estimate suggests that over 0.3 million persons have been displaced in Odisha between 1960 and 1995 due to mining (Fernandes and Asif 2007).



if the scale of investment roughly provides a sense of its extent, it must be mentioned that between August 1991 and March 2014, Odisha topped all other states as the most attractive investment destination—a leader in mining and mining-related industries (GoI 2014).

This extractive industry is so central to the state's economic growth that Naveen Patnaik, the chief minister of Odisha, thundered in the Odisha State Assembly in 2004 that “no one, I repeat, no one would be allowed to come between mining and development”—he was responding to concerns about human rights violations in the mining areas in South Odisha (PSSP 2005). This also informs the larger context in which the Kashipur movement emerged, as well as the shape of community-state-miner engagements on the ground.

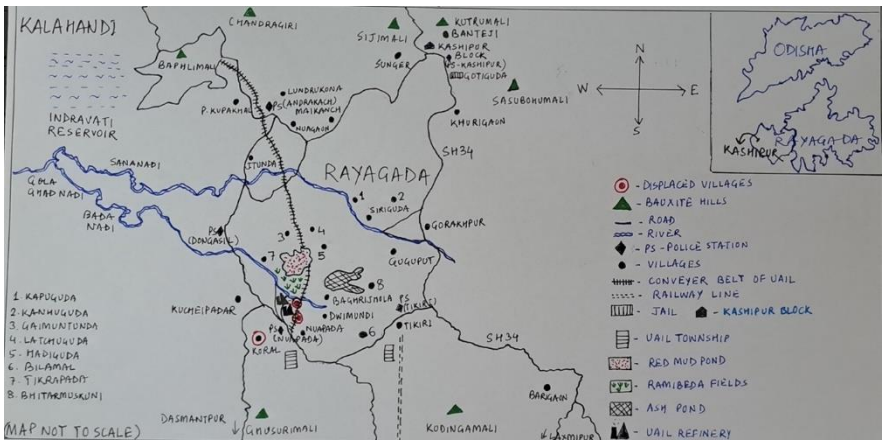
## **5. KASHIPUR AND THE ADIVASI AND DALIT MOVEMENT AGAINST MINING**

In the mid-1990s, the Adivasi and Dalit villagers of Kashipur organized themselves under PSSP to oppose the UAIL mining project. Initially a consortium of three multinational companies—Norsk Hydro (Norwegian mining company), Indal (Indian subsidiary of the Aluminium Company of Canada), and Tata Iron and Steel Company (TISCO)—UAIL became a wholly owned subsidiary of Aditya Birla's metals flagship company, Hindalco group, in 2007. The project proposed mining the Baphlimali hills in Kashipur and establishing its refinery in Ramibeda valley, which became the locus of the Kashipur struggle (Map 1). The region has a fragile resource base with mountainous terrain. Only a quarter of the total geographical area is available for farming (Senapati and Sahu 1966). Livelihoods are based on agriculture and wage labour. In the 1990s, less than 30% of the villagers were food-secure (TARU 1996). In 2010–2011, over 85% of farmers were small and marginal farmers, with an average landholding of 1.19 acres (Agricultural Census of Kashipur 2010/2011). Jhodia (also called Paraja or Jhodia Paraja) and Kondh Adivasis dominate the area—60% of the population—along with Dalits—21% of the population (Census Commissioner 2011).

Since the inception of the project, the villagers attacked UAIL-related works. On a few occasions, the people involved were taken hostage. Soon, social activists from the state got involved. The collective struggle faced severe repression—its leaders and participants were routinely beaten up by local policemen and company-hired goons. In the summer of 1996, landed Dalits from the Dwimundi village accepted a meagre compensation of ₹21,000 per acre against land acquisition following threats from the administration, even as the struggle continued. Facing local protests, TISCO withdrew from the

project in 1997. After three Adivasis were shot dead in an unprovoked police fire in the Maikanch village in 2000, the project was put on ice. Attempts were made to revive the project in 2004–2006. By this time, other UAIL partners had also withdrawn from the project after selling their stake to Hindalco. In December 2004, a large police outpost was set up amid huge opposition next to the proposed refinery site, and paramilitary forces swarmed the area for a year. Active police repression and low-intensity paramilitary repression paralyzed the movement’s attempts at mass mobilization. PSSP leaders were arrested, preventing local mobility, and the area was sealed off to outsiders. Between 2004 and 2006, two villages (Kendukhunti, a Dalit village, and Ramibeda, an Adivasi village) were displaced at gunpoint and relocated to a rehabilitation and resettlement colony to make way for the refinery. Residents of D. Karol (lower colony)—comprising landless Dalits—were also declared displaced.

**Figure 1:** Mobilization Area of PSSP



**Source:** Author

It is important to mention that participation of the Dalit and Adivasi groups together was not always explicit; their positions regarding the movement changed over time. As such, there were clear differences between Adivasi and Dalits along caste/tribe identity, and they were also internally divided.<sup>4</sup> This

<sup>4</sup> Structural markers of difference in terms of land ownership between Adivasis and Dalits also present a complex picture. Marginality among both groups increased during 2000–2011. It became far worse among the Dalits, when the proportion of marginal farmers in the population increased from 46% in 2000–2001 to 73% in 2010–2011. However, more than 50% of the overall Adivasi-Dalit population comprised marginal and small farmers and an equal number were still landless (Agricultural Census of Kashipur 2000/2001, 2010/2011).

made organising these disparate groups for collective action difficult. The mining project had also deepened the fissures between them. For instance, the landless Dalits joined the company as “communicators” (persons working at the behest of the company for a pittance) in the mid-1990s. Landed Dalits were the first to accept compensation in 1995. Groups of the more powerful Dalit farmers also sought special packages from the administration for their lands that were acquired by UAIL (RPDAC 2005). All of these instances caused resentment among the Adivasi villagers, as the Dalits were seen as working against the movement. In a few cases, the communicators were also physically targeted by PSSP members. In contrast, PSSP was largely seen as an Adivasi organization by the Dalits, even though a few PSSP leaders were Dalits. Some landed Adivasi men also worked as communicators, but they were never targeted. At the same time, a large section of landed and landless Dalits supported the PSSP vehemently during 1999–2007.

The Adivasi-Dalit dynamics are important to understand these contexts [see Dash 2017, 2020, 2024 (forthcoming)]. However, it is not the central line of fracture in the context of strikes, as I show in subsequent sections. After displacement, new dynamics came into play. The displaced persons (DPs) had turned into wage labourers. Throughout 2005–2006, they clashed with the mining officials and occasionally stopped work at different construction sites, including the refinery, demanding wages and work (UAIL 2010). In 2007, the displaced villagers and PSSP came together to launch strikes. Strikes were considered “the only and last option” (“*aan upaaya kand*”) to put pressure on UAIL and make effective collective demands. Beginning in 2008, these strikes paralyzed the company’s construction work and threw the project into a fresh state of uncertainty. The strikes continued for over two years. However, by the end of 2010, the Kashipur struggle lay in a state of decline.

## 6. KASHIPUR STRIKES: DISPLACEMENT AND NEW SOLIDARITIES

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Landlessness was pervasive and the resource base was fragile. The Adivasis-Dalits inter-relations were also multifaceted. They had pronounced differences, for instance, in terms of linguistic abilities—Adivasi men’s inability to speak Odia and Dalit men’s proficiency in it—Dalits calling Adivasis “dumb”, and Adivasis referring to Dalits as “thieves”. Yet, they interacted in their daily lives—inter-marriages between Kondh Adivasi women and Dalit men were not rare and did not result in physical violation against the groom, they spoke of “collective destiny”. At the same time, their orientation to the movement shifted over time (see Dash 2017, 2020, 2024).

The project hit the ground by displacing two villages and a colony and turning them into wage labourers who worked on the construction sites. They did not receive wages regularly and, at times, had to beg for food from other villages. The house deeds of the resettled quarters were not given to them as well. In 2006, UAIL constituted a Displaced Persons Committee (DPC) by handpicking people from these villages. Every displaced person was economically vulnerable, as they had spent the compensation and the ex-gratia amount of ₹80,000 per acre given to them in 2005 (Fieldnotes 2011). The displaced villagers had frequent heated quarrels with mining officials as well as DPC members, as day-to-day survival had become difficult for them due to the absence of assured daily wages. However, no one articulated or addressed their grievances.

In 2007, leaders of the displaced villages reached out to PSSP for support, apologizing for “acting smart and consequently eating shit” (“*chalaki hai ki guba kbaili*”). Following a series of village-level meetings, PSSP extended its support to them for a long-drawn struggle to obtain substantial long-term benefits for their collective future. Towards the end of 2007, a new committee, Basachyuta, Khyatigrasta o Prabhavita Committee (Displaced persons, Land-losers, and Affected People’s Committee [DLAPC]; hereafter, committee), replaced the DPC. The committee had one member each from all the 26 villages that refinery operations would impact adversely. A charter of demands with 38 points was drawn up. The key demands included: raising compensation amount to ₹1 million per acre; withdrawing all the criminal cases filed against over 1,000 villagers for opposing the mining company; permanent employment to all those displaced and those who had lost land to the project; provision of technical training for young men; DP status to five more villages that lay close to the refinery and tailing pond sites, and development of education infrastructure in the area.

**Table 1:** Strikes During 2008–2010

<b>Year</b>	<b>Period of Strikes</b>	<b>Days</b>
2008	20 February–26 June (126 days)	150
	8 December–31 December (24 days)	
2009	22 February–7 March (16 days)	74
	3 June–30 July (58 days)	
2010	10 January–5 February (27 days)	27
	<b>Total number of strike days</b>	<b>251</b>

The strikes were launched by the villagers by locking the company gates and its offices. Company-related construction work was halted. Displaced persons left their jobs and sat on strikes. Over 10,000 people from over 26 villages participated in these strikes in front of the refinery gates. The demand charter was submitted to UAIL and state government departments, including the Tribal Development Department and the Department of Steel and Mines.

Section 6.1 discusses the villagers' longest strike, which began in February 2008 and lasted for over four months. The dynamics of the strikes—including existing differences between the villagers in terms of land ownership and identity, engagement of bureaucrats, and promises and opportunities of employment—engendered tensions between various groups. Most notably, an irreversible rift emerged between those who were displaced and those who had retained their homes and/or farms, indicating a kind of structural disarticulation between the proletarianized workforce and the still-existing peasantry. The severe drought conditions of 2009 in this region further caused widespread food insecurity and hunger. This crisis accelerated the project of dispossession causing fragmentation in the movement.

### **6.1 Committee Leaders, Bureaucrats, and the Deepening of Structural Disarticulation Between Villager Groups**

Strikes began by daybreak on 20 February 2008. Within hours, the local police and UAIL officials arrived and warned the leaders and protestors from the displaced villages of dire consequences. They were told that if they stopped company work, the company would not take responsibility for their welfare. DLAPC members came forward as the representatives of the 26 dispossessed villages. Two months went by without any formal dialogue with the company or state administration.

However, unbeknownst to the villagers, frantic negotiations were taking place in Rayagada between the district administration and select committee members. Ram Naik, an ex-president of the committee, spoke to me about these meetings,

When we closed the gates, we—just some of us, the “main people”—were called to Rayagada for discussions. The collector and other officials repeatedly urged us to end the protests. We remained firm on not opening the gates until our demands were met. The collector said that they could not agree to all our demands as the resettlement and rehabilitation plan was finalized long back, but we did not budge from our position. (Personal Interview, March 30, 2011)

In contrast to his assertion in his statements, I learned that the villagers had forced him to step down from the committee in 2008 following allegations of

corruption. Chitta Naik, committee coordinator (2009–2010), bemoaned such betrayal in these words,

On the ground, people were suffering, sitting in the sun and starving themselves for a future in famine conditions, and in Rayagada, persons like Ram Naik were negotiating with the company and administration to open the gates. Ram got a construction contract of ₹0.6 million from the company and an assurance from the collector that criminal cases against him would be dropped. Hundreds of our brothers have police cases against them, but all he thought about was himself. (Personal Interview, April 4, 2011)

Despite such negotiations in Rayagada, the strike continued, effectively paralyzing the company's work. Alongside these negotiations, senior bureaucrats were mobilized to engage and negotiate with the villagers, which created new dynamics. In May 2008, in response to the strike pressure, one of the most senior state officials, the revenue divisional commissioner (RDC) [Berhampur division], met the committee members in Rayagada. He assured them that "their demands would be fulfilled". Soon after, another senior-most state bureaucrat—the secretary of the Board of Revenue, Odisha—visited the site of the strikes in June 2008. He spoke to the protesters for over two hours, agreeing that "they were wronged". He promised that their demands of employment would be considered at the "highest level" and their grievances would be addressed at the earliest. He urged the villagers to open the gates so that the company could resume work.

Biju Majhi, a PSSP leader, spoke sarcastically about the practical challenges of working with disparate groups:

He (the revenue secretary) came and, after hearing us, urged the villagers to "open the gates", and, immediately, some persons began to push open the gates. But there was no discussion among the villagers regarding ending strikes or opening the gates. Some villagers, mostly the displaced villagers, supported the decision to open the gates. Suddenly, out of nowhere, a bunch of people brought garlands, some got musical instruments, the revenue secretary was garlanded—as if all our demands had been accepted—and before we could make sense of anything, the gates were opened! Raji and Ram were leading the group. Loud chants in the name of the secretary accompanied the drumbeats as if we had won a war. Months of the suffering of the strikers came to nought...what did we get? The deadline passed, and not a single demand was met. (Personal Interview, December 13, 2010)

The engagement of some of these bureaucrats with the protestors implied that the Odisha government considered resolving the Kashipur impasse critical. The state had deep stakes in mining, given the commodity supercycle in aluminium. This partly explains the continual presence of senior

bureaucrats on the ground in attempts to address the deadlock. However, it cannot be said that these officials had any alliance with the miners, as several studies on mining projects have shown (Adduci 2013; Bharadwaj 2009; Sawyer and Gomez 2012; Lahiri-Dutt 2014). Many villagers that I spoke to during my fieldwork asserted that when a “big official came down from the capital to meet and speak to us patiently, how could we not believe him?” (Fieldnotes, 2011). Such a popular perception is more likely to draw from an understanding of “higher officials seen as providing redressals for grievances” (Gupta 1995, 390).

Throughout strikes during these years, there were rumours that committee leaders had taken money from UAIL to break strikes. Charged by the villagers of “eating money”, more than five presidents of the committee—including both Dalits and Adivasis—had to step down between 2008 and 2009. The accusations had a ring of truth. UAIL documents reveal that construction contracts of up to ₹77.6 million and monetary offers worth ₹0.5 million were given to several committee leaders by mid-2008. Raji Naik, for example, received contracts worth ₹7.7 million, while Gajendra Majhi, an Adivasi committee representative, received contracts worth ₹4.3 million (UAIL 2011). The total quantum of contracts given to these leaders rose to ₹150 million by the end of 2008. It further increased to ₹181 million in 2009 and was at ₹201 million in 2010 (*ibid.*).

UAIL, as well as the district administration, cultivated some of the leaders as “strike-breakers”. The strike-breakers were most likely persuaded to do the deed through material incentives and/or guarantees on withdrawal of criminal cases that had been filed against them for participating in the movement or squabbling with the company officials. Interestingly, these leaders had been either active supporters or antagonists of the company in the past. Of the six key strike-breakers, four were displaced Dalits and two were landed Adivasis who had lost parts of their lands for the project. This group was similar to the figure of an intermediary or brokers who are crucial actors in land deals and in sinking the interests of the corporations into the local community (Levien 2018; Sud 2014; Welker 2014). These shock troopers for the company were very effective. They were members of the local communities, so they could engage more closely with the villages without drawing much attention to themselves. The villagers knew most of these strike-breakers as “*kompany dalals*” who worked to further company interests in the area. Of these strike-breakers, the Dalit ones were also on the committee. On the other hand, the Adivasi strike-breakers were landed persons who were disgruntled with PSSP leadership. Dalit strike-breakers were on the committee because they were also DPs, and the committee drew from leaders from all 26 villages. In the

context of displacement, PSSP and villagers erroneously believed that these dalals would work towards obtaining long-term benefits rather than serving company interests. Instead, they took money from the company and worked towards breaking the strikes. During the fieldwork, villagers often regretted trusting the strike-breakers and said, “*cbhoro ku jagial kolu, bhool helu*” (“it was a mistake to trust the thieves as watchmen”).

Yet, the opening of the gates on 26 June after the revenue secretary had promised to fulfil their demands implies that a far more complex set of forces and factors were at work—the involvement of persons such as Ram Naik and Raji Naik in exhorting others and opening the gates was for their gain. However, which forces swayed the villagers to agree to open the gates? We now turn to understand this.

## 6.2 Deepening Sense of Structural Disarticulation

The visit and promises made by the revenue secretary brought existing contradictions between the two major groups to the surface. The role of strike-breakers in fanning these contradictions was critical too. They frequently did so by emphasizing the DPs were a precarious labour force that was dependent on the company for everyday survival, in sharp contrast to other villagers who still owned homes/lands and had “no imminent fear of dispossession”. Usa, a displaced Dalit woman from the erstwhile Kendukhunti village, spoke about the role of strike-breakers in creating a charged environment on the site of strikes:

In the evening, dalals like Raji and Ghana would come and sit down with our menfolk. They would talk about our misery and tell us that PSSP did not care for us. Sometimes, upon hearing all this, our menfolk would get agitated. (Personal Interview, September 24, 2011)

As it is, the displaced persons framed each day spent at the strikes without any tangible outcome as a “loss of wages for the day”. The movement leaders had to deal with the economic contradictions between different groups constantly. Each time after the strikes, the displaced villagers, both Adivasi and Dalits, entered into arguments with other villagers over their suffering due to the strikes. They accused the other protestors of “enjoying their troubles” and PSSP of pursuing its agenda of “no plant, no mining” and being more interested in stalling the project rather than solving their problems. It is difficult to say how much of this was merely instigation by the strike-breakers. Those displaced and the rest of the villagers were united in their understanding that short-term gains would have to be sacrificed to achieve substantial long-term benefits from the company. Yet, “surviving without wages or hope for any solution” (“*bhutti bi milu nai, samadhan bi heu nai?*”) and



living like squatters without land deeds was becoming an inescapable grim reality for them.

Here, one can see parallels with the industrial strikes. Chandavarkar, in his compelling work on striking millworkers in Bombay cloth mills, suggests that “complex calculations occurred everyday” as workers decided if they would take part in the strike. He notes,

Workers would appear at the mill gates on the morning of the strike to check whether the general tendency favoured a stoppage... At every stage of a strike, the commitment to industrial action imposed complex calculations upon the workforce. They had to consider not only their immediate chances of success but also the extent to which their ... resources would enable them to bear the costs of industrial action. At the same time, to obtain concessions from the employers... it was imperative for the workers that the strike be complete. (2009, 137)

It is likely that this contradiction around land—that those who still had land could afford to be more patient as compared to the DPs who depended on the company for everyday survival—caused an increasing rift between these groups. They vacillated between hope and despair in the context of their everyday vulnerabilities and associated anxieties. Ordinary DPs clashed with other striking villagers and PSSP leaders on several occasions, telling them to “either pay us wages or else open the gates” (Fieldnotes 2010). Their tone became increasingly bitter as they blamed the PSSP leaders and other villagers for a continued deadlock in the strikes. This also vitiated the already tense environment, further widening the rift between DPs and the rest and generating a sense of betrayal among groups of the existing peasantry for trusting the DPs to lead a long-term fight.

Linking how the strike-breakers provoked the villagers by exploiting their economic vulnerabilities and interests, an upset Chitta Naik continued,

On what basis could the displaced persons ask us to give them jobs or money? The dalals would take a group of displaced people to a corner and say, “Look, PSSP is making you fools; they want UAIL to leave the area. Otherwise, why are they not ending the strikes now?” Do villagers not know how the struggle is done? One must sacrifice to get something valuable. What to do? Our people are not good; they can’t hold the line. (Personal Interview, April 4, 2011)

Throughout this period, displaced villagers frequently clashed with mining officials and corporate contractors over wages, and committee members and dalals quarrelled with officials to obtain petty construction contracts. Criminal cases of dacoity and attempt to murder were registered against them (Police Files 2009). Following a squabble over wages in early 2009, their discontent

erupted in a riotous incident in which the company sites of refinery and other construction were vandalized. Eighteen corporate construction contractors of UAIL, including Gannon Dunkerley & Co. Ltd and Larsen & Toubro, withdrew, leaving the company in a fresh state of uncertainty. Such an incident heightened the DPs' sense of immediate economic insecurity. At the same time, it put the government on edge. Throughout 2009, a series of high-level meetings were held at the district to discuss the situation in Kashipur, including compensation, a special package for select land losers, and rehabilitation plans (RPDAC 2009). These meetings were attended by at least one state under-secretary, RDC (Berhampur division), and district administrators, implying the urgency of resolving the deadlock that had marred the project.

### **6.3 Fragile Ecologies: Accelerating the Mining Project in Unexpected Ways**

In 2007, over 350 cases of deaths due to cholera and a lack of food and potable water were reported in Kashipur (Das 2007). Entire cattle had perished. As the region was still reeling from the drought conditions of 2008 and 2009, there was a lot of anger among the villagers against the administration for its inaction. PSSP galvanized the striking villagers to picket the local administration at Kashipur block over issues of malnutrition deaths, crop failure, and hunger. Over 2,000 villagers moved from the site of the strike to picket the block in mid-2009. They locked the sub-district offices, petitioned for compensation against cattle heads lost, crop failure, and compensation for the families of the deceased, and urged the administration to take measures towards food security.

Since the 1980s, this ecologically sensitive region has been in the spotlight for malnutrition deaths. In 1987, 400 deaths were reported due to malnutrition and there have been instances of sale of children due to distress (Ahmed 1987; Currie 2000). In Dasmantpur and Kashipur, 21, 350, and 14 deaths were reported in 2002, 2007, and 2009, respectively, due to starvation and cholera (Das 2007; see Dash 2017, 86–87 for details).

After a week of picketing, the administration responded by providing food rations in all the drought-affected villages with promises of strengthening food security schemes and provision of ₹5,000 per acre per family. Around the same time, UAIL and the state administration responded to the strikes by increasing compensation to ₹0.344 million by 2010.

Speaking of a possible link between the summer months and the company's disbursement of the compensation and arrears, Paban Misra, a PSSP activist, told me,

As monsoons approach (in the villages), the food is exhausted, and soup becomes watery with less and less *ragi*. Is it a mere coincidence that the compensation amount, the arrears, and employment offers...are all made during a period when hunger stalks? (Personal Interview, November 8, 2010)

UAIL began to issue housing deeds and employment letters to DPs towards the end of 2008. It also started giving a monthly allowance of ₹2,000 to each displaced family. The outstanding wages to the villagers were also cleared. According to Chitta Naik, by the end of 2008, each time the gates were locked, the DPs got into fights with the other villagers over the opening of gates, accusing them of “envying that UAIL had given them jobs”. Although, these were either precarious jobs as gardeners and security guards or jobs in which they needed to show up once a month to collect their salary without doing any work whatsoever.

By the end of 2009, many of the villagers from the 26 villages stopped participating in the strikes. Near the end of 2010, no collective action had taken place. PSSP formally withdrew from the strikes in early 2010. The hope that they could work together to achieve long-term benefits for everyone in the area died.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This paper shows that the Kashipur strikes successfully mobilized and organized disparate groups envisioning a collective destiny around livelihoods. The strikes became a formidable force and achieved many successes. Yet, collective action also became a site of explosive interactions and collapsed by mid-2010.

This paper is illustrative of how local struggles were shaped by larger bureaucratic structures at play in the context of commodity supercycles in metals and minerals. It depicts globalization grounded in and generated by complex interactions and entanglements of local struggles, bureaucratic structures, mining capital, and global markets. The movement eventually became disarticulated due to the fracture that emerged between the displaced persons who had become precarious wage labourers and the existing peasantry, who still owned small parcels of land. These differences were exacerbated due to false promises made by the bureaucrats and localized strategies of the miners involving strike-breakers. The efforts of the leaders of the collective struggle to sustain collective action were severely undermined, as many DPC leaders were charged with corruption, and a large section of protestors grew tired of the frequent breaking of the strikes without any substantial gains.

The role of the commodity supercycle in animating these dynamics is crucial. The optimism demonstrated by the dominant industry narratives fuelled the expansion of mining into new territories such as Kashipur. An enormous opportunity was envisaged by state actors in leveraging the windfall from mining to fuel the state's economic development. However, the mining supercycle did not automatically lead to the engagement of state and mining actors with the communities. It was realized through localized accumulation strategies of mining capital in which the state actors (bureaucrats) played an important role. These were strategies of divide and rule, accomplished through false promises and amplification of existing contradictions between groups through strike-breakers. Contrary to Chatterjee's slotting of Adivasi-Dalit groups in the category of marginal groups, who cannot make "effective claims on governmentality" (2008, 61), one finds that the Kashipur struggle started in the 1990s as a movement against corporate penetration and governmentality through its anti-mining stance. It changed orientation following the displacement of the villages towards obtaining better compensation and rehabilitation packages as well as pressing claims of governmentality through a language of rights and assertions by demanding access to education, health, and nutritional security; technical training for the young men and allowances for the elderly persons; agricultural development, and comprehensive area development. These processes of claim-making, however, led to the fragmentation of the movement. This fragmentation was accompanied by a parallel process of displaced persons increasingly engaging with the processes of a narrow version of development as survival through precarious employment opportunities. This ultimately led to the collapse of the movement. This also brings into terrain the concept of Sanyal's "jobless growth". If the company is, per the final analysis, dependent upon the generation of consent from local communities for dispossession to ensure the smooth functioning of everyday refinery operations, "jobless growth" is ultimately unachievable for the company.

As land and mining-based accumulation processes gather pace across eastern India, these dynamics provide important lessons. Local politics after dispossession is shaped significantly by precarious jobs and promises, exacerbating existing contradictions and fracturing the tenuous solidarity achieved between different groups. Accumulation processes advance by carefully undermining and fragmenting collective action both from inside and outside, implying that there is nothing really "contingent or haphazard about its (*ABD*'s) modus operandi" (Harvey 2003, 149; author's emphasis). So, how do social movements deal with such an onslaught both from inside and outside? It is an open-ended question that I leave all of us with.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to the anonymous reviewers and editors at EES for their detailed feedback helped to improve this paper greatly for conceptual clarity. Thanks are due to Chitrlekha and her team at The Clean Copy for painstakingly editing the paper. I would also like to express my thanks to Nandini Sundar for her support.

**Ethics Statement:** I hereby confirm that this study complies with requirements of ethical approvals from the institutional ethics committee for the conduct of this research.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data used in this paper is not provided in a repository as the data is obtained from the mining company's officials and is part of the company's internal records. Other reports from the district administration are also not available for public scrutiny.

**Conflict of Interest Statement:** No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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