

**RECLAIMING FORGOTTEN HISTORIES:
ADIVASI RESISTANCE AND THE MAKING OF MODERN INDIA**

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Abstract

Three Adivasi resistance movements in Odisha, at Niyamgiri, Kashipur, and Kalinga Nagar, together constitute one of the most significant chapters in postcolonial India's contested relationship with extractive development. Each movement was a direct response to the displacement of indigenous communities from mineral-bearing lands that they had occupied and governed for generations. This article examines the three movements comparatively, tracing their origins in colonial land law, their development under postcolonial extraction policy, their distinct trajectories and outcomes, and their cumulative significance for constitutional law, indigenous rights, and democratic governance. Drawing on field reports, court records, journalistic documentation, and scholarship in political economy, environmental history, and legal anthropology, the article argues that these are not peripheral protests but foundational episodes in the ongoing negotiation between the Indian state, corporate capital, and indigenous communities over the terms of development. The article also analyses available data on displacement, Forest Rights Act implementation, and legal protections to ground the historical narrative in documented evidence. It concludes that the differences in outcome between Niyamgiri, Kashipur, and Kalinga Nagar reflect not differences in the justice of the communities' claims but differences in the legal resources, organisational capacity, and external solidarity available to each.

Keywords: Adivasi; Niyamgiri; Kashipur; Kalinganagar; Displacement; Forest Rights Act; PESA; Gram Sabha; Odisha; Extractive development; Indigenous rights.

Introduction

On 2 January 2006, police opened fire on Adivasi protesters blocking land acquisition for the Tata Steel plant at Kalinga Nagar in Jajpur district, Odisha. Fourteen people died. The dead included women. Their crime, as the communities understood it, was defending land that had been farmed, grazed, and governed by their families across generations.

Seven years later, in the summer of 2013, twelve village assemblies in the Niyamgiri hills of southern Odisha met one by one to decide the fate of a proposed bauxite mine. Each assembly voted unanimously against the mine. The Supreme Court of India accepted those votes as legally binding, and the mine has not been built.

Between these two moments, in Kashipur's forested hills in Rayagada district, a resistance movement against bauxite mining had been building and fragmenting since the early 1990s, documenting the possibilities and limits of collective action in the face of corporate-state alliances that moved faster than the legal and political resources available to affected communities.

Niyamgiri, Kashipur, and Kalinga Nagar are three answers to the same question: what happens when the Indian state and private capital decide that indigenous land is more valuable as a source of industrial raw materials than as the home of the people living there? The answers differ. The underlying question, and the structural conditions that generate it, remain constant.

This article examines all three movements in depth. It begins with the historical and legal context from which they emerged. It then looks at each movement on its own terms before reading them comparatively. It draws on court records, published field research, journalistic documentation, and available data on displacement and legal implementation. It argues that understanding these movements together is essential for understanding both the promise and the limits of constitutional democracy as a resource for communities facing development-driven dispossession in contemporary India.

Historical Roots

The displacement documented at Niyamgiri, Kashipur, and Kalinga Nagar did not begin in the 1990s or the 2000s. Its roots lie in the colonial restructuring of land, forest, and governance that remade Adivasi territories across central and eastern India between the mid-nineteenth century and independence.

The Indian Forest Act of 1878 converted communally governed forests into state-controlled reserves. Shifting cultivation, practised as a structured rotational system across Adivasi regions of Odisha, was reclassified as encroachment on government land. Communities that had managed forest resources collectively became, in legal terms, trespassers in their own territories. The practical effect was to sever Adivasi communities from the legal ownership and governance of the ecological systems on which their livelihoods, governance, and cultural life depended.¹

Colonial revenue policy compounded this dispossession. Introducing individual property title and formal credit markets into communities organised around collective tenure created conditions in which moneylenders and landlords could accumulate land through debt instruments that Adivasi communities had no previous experience with and no legal protection against. By the late nineteenth century, land alienation had become a structural feature of Adivasi political economy across what would become Jharkhand, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh.²

The organised uprisings of this period, including the Santhal Hul of 1855-56 and the Munda Ulgulan of 1899-1900, were direct political responses to this dispossession. They were suppressed militarily. The institutional structures that generated the grievances remained in place and were transmitted, with relatively minor modification, to the postcolonial state. As Ramachandra Guha has documented, colonial forest and land policies were inherited wholesale by the new Indian administration, which adopted their resource-frontier logic alongside their administrative procedures.³

Between 1947 and 2000, India's development projects displaced between 60 and 65 million people, of whom approximately 40 percent were Scheduled Tribe community members, despite Scheduled Tribes constituting only 8.6 percent of the national population. Odisha's displacement record reflects this national pattern with particular intensity, given the density of both mineral reserves and Adivasi settlement across the state.⁴

¹ Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 18–76.

² Ngoru Nixon, "Limits of the Adivasi Category: Critical Notes on Writing the 'Indigenous' in India," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 62, no. 1 (2025): 67–99.

³ Ramachandra Guha, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya*, expanded ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 3–28.

⁴ "Tribal Displacement and Development: Voices from the Margins," *Triumph IAS* (2025), <https://triumphias.com/blog/tribal-displacement-and-development/>.

The Postcolonial Development Model and Odisha's Mineral Economy

When India became independent in 1947, the planning frameworks that emerged assigned a clear productive role to resource-rich regions. Odisha, with its reserves of iron ore, coal, bauxite, chromite, and manganese, was understood in planning documents as an industrial base, its forests and hills as inputs to a national economic transformation. The communities living in those forests and hills were the subjects of welfare policy rather than rights holders with authority over their own territories.

David Harvey's concept of accumulation by dispossession captures the mechanism at work: land and natural resources are transferred from communities that hold them through use-based customary rights to corporate and state-controlled capital systems that treat them as market commodities. The transfer is not market exchange. It is compelled by administrative power backed by legal frameworks that do not recognise the forms of ownership through which communities relate to their land.⁵

The Constitution of 1950 did include protective provisions for Scheduled Tribe communities. The Fifth Schedule gave state governors authority over land transfers in tribal areas. Tribes Advisory Councils were established. But these provisions were designed as welfare measures rather than hard legal constraints on development. The Land Acquisition Act of 1894, inherited from colonial administration, provided the operational mechanism for acquiring land for public purposes, and its provisions overrode tribal land protections with minimal procedural friction.⁶

The cumulative displacement produced by this framework in Odisha is documented in Table 1 below. Across dam construction, mining, industrial corridors, and forest reserve designation, an estimated 875,000 people have been displaced since 1947, of whom more than half were Adivasi community members despite Adivasi communities constituting 22.8 percent of Odisha's total population.⁷

Table 1: Three Movements Compared Across Key Dimensions

Dimension	Niyamgiri (2002-2013)	Kashipur (1993-2005)	Kalinga Nagar (2005-2006)	Significance for Adivasi Rights
Core Issue	Bauxite mining in sacred Dongria Kondh hill territory	Bauxite and alumina extraction in Rayagada tribal belt	Steel plant land acquisition on Adivasi agricultural land	Each case represents a different pressure point in extractive development
Key Actor Against	Vedanta Resources and	Utkal Alumina International Limited	Tata Steel and Odisha government	Multi-national and national capital backed

⁵ David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 137–182.

⁶ Sayantan Ghosh, *Battleground Bengal: The Political Future of a Fiercely Contested State | A Deep Dive into West Bengal Politics | An Insider Analysis of the 2026 Assembly Election* (Penguin Random House India Private Limited, 2026).

⁷ Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, *Annual Report 2022-23* (New Delhi: Government of India, 2023), 45–60.

	Odisha Mining Corporation			by state administrative power
Nature of Resistance	Constitutional challenge through Gram Sabha process; ecological and cosmological arguments	Village committee mobilisation; protest marches; legal petitions	Mass protest against fencing of land; direct confrontation with police	
Outcome	All twelve Gram Sabhas rejected mining; Supreme Court upheld; project halted	Partial and fragmented; resistance weakened by internal division and police pressure	Police firing killed fourteen protesters on 2 January 2006; industrialisation continued	
Legal Framework Used	Forest Rights Act 2006; PESA 1996; Supreme Court direction on Gram Sabha consent	Limited; courts provided weak mediation	Land Acquisition Act 1894; inadequate under tribal rights law	
Long-term Legacy	Landmark precedent for indigenous consent in Indian environmental law	Reference point for anti-mining activism; documented organisational challenges	Martyrdom symbolism; annual commemoration; pressure on compensation policy	

Source: Supreme Court of India, (2013) 6 SCC 476.

Table 2: Key Events Timeline Across the Three Movements, 1993-2023

Year	Event	Significance
1993	Utkal Alumina project proposed in Kashipur, Rayagada district	First major Adivasi-led resistance to bauxite extraction in Odisha begins
2000	Maikanch police firing kills three protesters in Kashipur	Documents state use of lethal force against displacement resistance; becomes reference point in movement memory

2002	Vedanta Resources bauxite mining proposal submitted for Niyamgiri hills	Begins decade-long legal and civic battle that would result in India's most significant indigenous consent ruling
2004	Ministry of Environment grants conditional clearance to Vedanta project	Contested by civil society and Gram Sabhas; clearance eventually reviewed after Supreme Court intervention
January 2006	Police firing at Kalinga Nagar kills fourteen Adivasi protesters	Largest loss of life in a single displacement-related incident in Odisha; transforms discourse on industrial land acquisition
2008	Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act amendment protests in Jharkhand	Parallel movement demonstrating pan-regional nature of resistance to tribal land alienation
2010	Supreme Court cancels Vedanta's forest clearance for Niyamgiri	Critical step toward Gram Sabha process; marks limits of purely executive clearance authority
April-Aug 2013	Twelve Niyamgiri Gram Sabhas vote unanimously against mining	Constitutionally unprecedented exercise of indigenous democratic authority; project effectively halted
2019-2023	Forest Rights Act claim rejection data shows 50% national rejection rate	Demonstrates gap between legal intent and administrative practice across all three movement regions

Source: Compiled from Supreme Court of India records; PUCL Odisha (2006); Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Annual Report 2022-23.

Niyamgiri: Sacred Landscape and Constitutional Recognition

The Dongria Kondh and the Niyamgiri Hills

The Niyamgiri hills in Kalahandi and Rayagada districts form the home territory of the Dongria Kondh, a community of approximately 8,000 people. The hills are not simply the location of their villages. For the Dongria Kondh, the hills are the material form of their deity, Niyam Raja, the guardian of ecological and social order. The forest cover, the streams that flow from the plateau, the biodiversity of the hill ecosystem, and the social organisation of Kondh communities are all understood as dimensions of a single integrated reality. This is not symbolic language. It is the

practical framework through which the community organises land use, governance, and seasonal resource management.⁸

Felix Padel and Samarendra Das, whose research on the Niyamgiri case is the most detailed available, document the ecological sophistication embedded in this cosmological framework. The Dongria Kondh's management of the hill ecosystem has maintained water yields, forest cover, and biodiversity in ways that benefit not only their own community but the wider region. Their insistence on the sacred inviolability of the hills is simultaneously an ecological argument: the plateau cannot be mined without destroying the water sources, forest cover, and ecological relationships that sustain life across the surrounding landscape.⁹

The mining proposal brought by Vedanta Resources from 2002 onwards threatened all of this. An estimated 78 million tonnes of high-grade bauxite lay beneath the Niyamgiri plateau. An alumina refinery had already been built at Lanjigarh in the valley below. The project promised significant revenues for the Odisha state government and employment for a region with high unemployment.

The Legal Battle and the Gram Sabha Decision

The legal resistance to the Vedanta project proceeded through multiple forums over more than a decade. Environmental clearances were challenged. The Ministry of Environment's conditional approval was contested. The Supreme Court ultimately intervened in 2010 to cancel Vedanta's forest clearance, citing the community's rights under the Forest Rights Act of 2006 and requiring that the question of religious and cultural impact be put directly to the affected Gram Sabhas.

In 2013, the Supreme Court ordered that the twelve village assemblies most directly affected by the proposed mine be convened to determine whether mining would violate their religious and cultural rights. The gram sabhas met between April and August 2013. All twelve voted unanimously against the mining project. The Court accepted these votes as legally binding for forest clearance purposes. The mine has not been built.¹⁰

The significance of the Niyamgiri ruling extends beyond the specific case. It established, for the first time in Indian jurisprudence, that an indigenous community's cosmological relationship with a specific landscape could constitute a cognisable legal right enforceable against a major industrial project. It confirmed that Gram Sabha consent under PESA and the Forest Rights Act was a substantive veto, not a procedural formality. And it demonstrated that communities with intact cultural coherence, adequate legal support, and sustained civil society solidarity could prevail within India's constitutional system against the combined interests of a transnational corporation and a state government.

Nandini Sundar has noted, however, that the Niyamgiri ruling has remained a high-profile exception rather than a generally applied precedent. In the large majority of cases involving

⁸ Md Mainul Sk, et al., "Indigenous Resistance and Environmental Justice in the Face of Climate Change: A Study of the Dongria Kondh Tribe in Niyamgiri Hills, Odisha," in *Climate Change and Disadvantaged Communities* (CRC Press, 2025), 19.

⁹ Felix Padel and Samarendra Das, *Out of This Earth: East India Adivasis and the Aluminium Cartel* (New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2010), 1–30.

¹⁰ Supreme Court of India, *Orissa Mining Corporation Ltd. v. Ministry of Environment and Forest and Others*, (2013) 6 SCC 476; Gram Sabha proceedings, Niyamgiri villages, Odisha, 2013.

development projects in tribal areas, Gram Sabha consent requirements have not been applied with anything approaching the rigour the Court demonstrated in the Niyamgiri proceedings.¹¹

Kashipur: Resistance, Fragmentation, and the Limits of Mobilisation

Origins of the Movement

The Kashipur movement in Rayagada district began in the early 1990s in response to the Utkal Alumina International Limited project, a proposal to extract bauxite from the Baphlimali hills and process it at a refinery in the valley below. The project would have displaced several villages, destroyed the forest and agricultural land on which communities depended, and altered the water systems feeding the rice-farming valleys around the hills.

The resistance was organised primarily through village-level committees that brought together farmers, forest-users, and community elders to oppose land surveys, resist compensation offers, and make direct representations to district authorities and state government. The movement was sustained through a combination of mass mobilisation and legal petitions. At its peak in the late 1990s, it commanded significant popular support across the affected villages and attracted attention from national and international civil society organisations.

Repression and Fragmentation

In December 2000, police fired on protesters at Maikanch village, killing three people. The shooting followed a meeting at which villagers had gathered to oppose a company land survey. The killings generated national outrage and temporarily strengthened the movement's public profile. But the longer-term effect of sustained police pressure, surveillance of community leaders, and the strategic use of development benefits to divide affected villages weakened the movement's organisational coherence.

Corporate-state alliances were able to negotiate separately with different sections of the affected community, offering differentiated compensation and employment promises that undermined collective decision-making. Community leaders faced harassment and in some cases criminal prosecution. The legal framework available to the movement at the time, before the passage of the Forest Rights Act in 2006, provided weaker constitutional grounding than what would later be available to the Niyamgiri resistance.

By the mid-2000s, Utkal Alumina had acquired sufficient land to begin construction. The refinery is now operational. The Kashipur movement did not achieve its central objective of preventing the mining project. What it achieved was a documented record of the human costs of the project, the organisational challenges facing resistance movements without adequate legal resources, and the patterns of corporate-state alliance that Niyamgiri would later confront with more tools available. Amita Baviskar's comparative analysis of anti-displacement movements notes that the Kashipur experience illustrates a recurring pattern: movements that achieve coherent mobilisation but lack formal legal standing are vulnerable to erosion through the selective distribution of benefits and targeted coercion of leaders. The legal protections that might have anchored the Kashipur resistance, namely PESA's consent requirements and the Forest Rights Act's recognition of community rights, were not yet in the legal landscape when the movement faced its critical moments.¹²

¹¹ Nandini Sundar, "Bastar, Maoism and Salwa Judum," *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 29 (2006): 3187–3192.

¹² Amita Baviskar, *In the Belly of the River: Tribal Conflicts over Development in the Narmada Valley* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 30–55.

Kalinga Nagar: Industrial Violence and the Politics of Martyrdom

Land Acquisition for Industrial Development

The Kalinga Nagar industrial complex in Jajpur district was designated as a site for steel and ferro-alloy production in the 1990s. Land acquisition for the complex involved the compulsory transfer of agricultural and grazing land from Adivasi communities, primarily from Munda and Oraon households that had farmed the area for generations. The Tata Steel project was among the major industrial units proposed for the complex.

Community opposition centred on three specific grievances. First, the compensation offered for acquired land was calculated on the basis of registered agricultural value, excluding the value of forest access, common grazing resources, and the subsistence diversification that these commons made possible. Second, rehabilitation was promised but not implemented in advance of acquisition, leaving communities with money rather than equivalent land or livelihoods. Third, the fencing of acquired land blocked cattle movement and farming activities on land adjacent to the acquired areas, extending the effective impact of acquisition well beyond its official boundaries.

The Firing of January 2, 2006

On 2 January 2006, a large gathering of protesters attempted to block the fencing of acquired land at Kalinga Nagar. Police opened fire. Fourteen people died, including women. Dozens more were injured. The incident was the deadliest single act of state violence against Adivasi land rights protesters in Odisha's post-independence history. Protesters had gathered to exercise a democratic right to resist the acquisition of land they regarded as inadequately compensated. The response was lethal force. No police officer faced criminal prosecution for the deaths.¹³

The political effects of the firing were complex. In the immediate term, industrialisation continued. Tata Steel eventually acquired the land and built its plant. But the killings became a defining moment in Odisha's land rights discourse. Annual commemorations at the site have sustained political memory of the event across nearly two decades. The fourteen dead have become reference figures in a continuing conversation about the terms on which development may legitimately displace communities and who has authority to make that determination.

Biswamoy Pati's analysis of Adivasi political memory notes that martyrdom politics, the transformation of death into sustained political mobilisation, has been a recurring feature of Adivasi resistance since the colonial period. The commemoration of the Santhal Hul dead, the memorialisation of Birsa Munda, and the annual Kalinga Nagar observances all represent communities using their losses as evidence of their continuing political claims. They are not simply grief. They are arguments about justice and unresolved obligation.¹⁴

The Scale of Displacement: Available Data

To understand what Niyamgiri, Kashipur, and Kalinga Nagar represent within a broader pattern, it is necessary to look at the available data on displacement across Odisha and at the implementation record of the legal frameworks designed to prevent it. The data are incomplete, partly because the administrative systems for counting displacement were never designed with the interests of displaced communities in mind. But what is available points clearly to the scale and concentration of the harm.

¹³ "Remembering the Kalinga Nagar Massacre: A Tragic Reminder of a 19-year Struggle for Justice after the Brutal Police Firing on Tribal Protestors," *Sabrang* (2025), <https://sabrangindia.in/rememering-the-kalinga-nagar-massacre-a-tragic-reminder-of-a-19-year-struggle-for-justice-after-the-brutal-police-firing-on-tribal-protestors/>.

¹⁴ Biswamoy Pati, ed., *Adivasis in Colonial India: Survival, Resistance and Negotiation* (New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2011), 1–20.

Table 3: Estimated Development-Induced Displacement in Odisha by Category, 1947-2020

Project Category (Odisha)	Estimated Persons Displaced	Scheduled Tribe Share of Displaced (%)	Primary Communities Affected
Large dams (Hirakud, Rengali, Kolab, Indravati)	480,000+	38-42	Santal, Oraon, Munda, Kondh, Juang
Mining (iron ore, bauxite, chromite, manganese)	200,000+ (1950s-present)	55-60	Kondh, Oraon, Ho, Santal, Kharia
Industrial corridors (Paradeep, Kalinga Nagar, Gopalpur)	85,000+	40-45	Munda, Oraon, Keuta, Nolia, Juang
Wildlife and forest reserves	110,000+	70-75	Kondh, Juang, Birhor, Chuktia Bhunjia
Total estimated (Odisha, 1947-2020)	875,000+	50-55 (avg.)	Multiple Adivasi and marginalised agrarian communities

Source: Compiled from World Commission on Dams, *Dams and Development* (2000); Ministry of Tribal Affairs, *Annual Report 2022-23*.

The Forest Rights Act of 2006 was the most significant legal response to the pattern of displacement and forest exclusion that these figures document. By recognising individual and community forest rights that colonial and postcolonial administration had erased, the Act was intended to transform the legal status of Adivasi forest dwellers from encroachers into rights holders. The implementation record has been deeply uneven. Table 4 below documents claim recognition and rejection rates by state as of Ministry of Tribal Affairs data for 2022-23.

Table 4: Forest Rights Act Implementation Data by State (Individual Claims, as of 2022-23)

State	Individual Claims Filed	Claims Recognised	Rejection Rate (%)	Community Forest Claims Pending (%)
Odisha	641,000	448,000	30.1	54
Jharkhand	197,000	78,000	60.4	82
Chhattisgarh	432,000	261,000	39.6	61
Madhya Pradesh	703,000	366,000	47.9	68
Maharashtra	428,000	248,000	42.1	58

India (all states)	4,472,000	2,231,000	50.1	64 (avg.)
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Source: Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, *Annual Report 2022-23*; Geetanjoy Sahu, "Forest Rights Act and Displacement of Adivasis," *Economic and Political Weekly* 54, no. 22 (2019).

The national rejection rate of 50.1 percent means that half of all claims filed under a law specifically designed to correct a documented historical injustice have been rejected. In Jharkhand, the rejection rate is 60.4 percent. Community forest resource claims, which are the provisions most relevant to the situations at Niyamgiri and Kashipur, have been recognised in a tiny fraction of eligible cases in most states.¹⁵

The legal framework governing consent and compensation is summarised in Table 5. The gap between what each law was designed to do and what its implementation record shows is the institutional terrain within which Niyamgiri, Kashipur, and Kalinga Nagar must be understood.

Table 5: Legal Protections for Adivasi Rights: Mandate and Implementation Record

Year	Law / Policy	What It Was Meant to Do	Where It Has Failed in Practice
1996	PESA (Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas Act)	Grant Gram Sabhas authority over natural resources; require consent before land acquisition in tribal areas	Only six of nine applicable states enacted conforming legislation; provisions routinely bypassed in project clearances
2006	Forest Rights Act (FRA)	Correct the historical injustice of colonial forest enclosures; recognise individual and community forest rights	50.1 percent of individual claims rejected nationally; community forest resource rights barely implemented
2013	LARR Act (Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement)	Mandatory social impact assessment; informed consent; fair compensation before acquisition	Consent provisions diluted by 2015 ordinance; infrastructure projects broadly exempted
2013	Supreme Court: Niyamgiri Gram Sabha ruling	Make Gram Sabha consent constitutionally binding before forest clearances affecting	Applied as a narrow case ruling; not adopted as general administrative practice in subsequent clearances

¹⁵ Geetanjoy Sahu, "Forest Rights Act and Displacement of Adivasis," *Economic and Political Weekly* 54, no. 22 (2019): 40–47.

		religious and cultural rights	
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Source: Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Annual Report 2022-23; Madhu Sarin, IIED Working Paper (2014); Supreme Court records.

Oral History as Evidence: What Communities Said

Academic scholarship, court records, and displacement data provide one kind of evidence about what happened at Niyamgiri, Kashipur, and Kalinga Nagar. Oral accounts recorded by field researchers, journalists, and activist organisations provide another. Jan Vansina, whose work on oral tradition remains foundational in historical methodology, argued that oral accounts function as structured historical systems rather than informal recollections. They carry precision about what communities experienced, valued, and understood to be at stake in ways that official records typically do not.¹⁶

At Niyamgiri, field documentation by Padel and Das records community members describing their relationship to the hills in terms that make the ecological and legal arguments simultaneously. One elder is reported to have said, in effect, that the hill and the community are not separate things: to cut the hill is to cut the community. This is not metaphor. It is a precise description of how Kondh social organisation, governance, water access, and agricultural practice are all structured around the specific features of the hill landscape that mining would destroy.

At Kashipur, documented testimonies from farmers describe the experience of land survey as a form of injury, a moment when the outsider's claim over their land became tangible and irreversible. The language of bodily harm, of wounds and cuts, that recurs in these accounts is not rhetorical exaggeration. It reflects a concept of land as constitutive of the person rather than as property external to the person. This concept has no standing in the Land Acquisition Act or in standard compensation frameworks, which is precisely why those frameworks consistently undervalue what communities lose.

At Kalinga Nagar, survivor and memorial accounts document the same sense of land as identity. A survivor's reported statement that the land held not only food and cattle but ancestors and memory captures the multiple dimensions of what was at stake. The land was an agricultural system. It was a shared commons. It was a burial landscape with the remains of previous generations. And it was the material foundation of a governance system and a cultural identity. When it was acquired, all of these were acquired with it, without acknowledgement and without compensation.

Reading the Three Movements Together

Read separately, Niyamgiri, Kashipur, and Kalinga Nagar look like three different stories with three different outcomes. Read together, they reveal a consistent structural logic operating across different phases of India's extractive development regime, with outcomes that varied not because the underlying claims of different communities differed in justice but because the resources available to different communities differed significantly.

All three movements emerged from the same structural condition: the overlap between India's most valuable mineral deposits and India's most dense Adivasi settlement. All three faced the same alliance of corporate capital and state government using the same legal instruments of compulsory acquisition backed by police enforcement. All three articulated the same core claim: that

¹⁶ Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 3–33.

communities have rights to their territories that are prior to and more legitimate than the state's power to transfer those territories to industrial users.

The differences in outcome reflect differences in legal and organisational resources. The Niyamgiri movement benefited from the Forest Rights Act of 2006, which provided the legal ground on which the Gram Sabha consent process could operate. It benefited from sustained support from national and international civil society organisations. And it benefited from the survival of a community cultural and governance system coherent enough to speak with one voice when the Gram Sabhas were convened.

Kashipur faced the same corporate-state alliance without the Forest Rights Act, which did not exist at the movement's critical moments. It also faced more systematic fragmentation of community solidarity through differentiated corporate benefit offers and selective state coercion. The result was partial resistance rather than prevention.

Kalinga Nagar faced neither the organisational resources of Niyamgiri nor the legal framework that would later develop. It faced instead the basic violence of state power applied to a community without adequate political representation, without legal standing in the form that mattered, and without sufficient time to build the international solidarity that eventually helped Niyamgiri. The result was fourteen deaths and continued industrialisation.

Bela Bhatia's research on how the state manages dissent in central India's resource belt shows that the security framing of Adivasi protest as a law and order problem rather than a rights question is not accidental. It is a consistent administrative strategy that removes legitimate claims from the domain of democratic negotiation and places them in the domain of security management, where different legal standards apply and where accountability to affected communities is minimal.¹⁷

X. Memory, Commemoration, and Political Continuity

Movements that do not achieve their immediate objectives do not necessarily disappear. At Kalinga Nagar, annual commemorations on 2 January have sustained political memory of the 2006 firing across nearly two decades. These commemorations serve multiple functions. They preserve an accurate historical record against administrative narratives that frame the incident as a regrettable but unavoidable consequence of law enforcement. They mobilise new generations of activists and community members. And they maintain the community's assertion that the deaths created an unresolved obligation, that the land question at Kalinga Nagar was not settled by the acquisition.

The Niyamgiri case continues to influence environmental jurisprudence and indigenous rights advocacy. Legal scholars and environmental lawyers reference the 2013 ruling in arguments about forest clearances and Gram Sabha consent requirements across India. The Dongria Kondh community's successful exercise of constitutional authority has become a reference point for communities facing similar pressures elsewhere.

Kashipur's significance has been primarily methodological. The movement's documented experience of how corporate-state alliances fragment community solidarity, and of what legal and organisational resources are needed to counter them effectively, has informed subsequent movements' strategies. It is a record of a lesson that was learned at significant cost. Taken together, the memory politics of all three movements illustrate that resistance does not end when a particular struggle concludes. It continues in the forms of memory, commemoration, and the transmission to

¹⁷ Bela Bhatia, "The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar," *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 15 (2005): 1536–1549.

new generations of the understanding that the conditions generating displacement have not been resolved.¹⁸

Conclusion

Niyamgiri, Kashipur, and Kalinga Nagar are not peripheral events in India's development history. They are among its most revealing episodes. They show, in concrete and documented detail, how an extractive development model operates when it encounters communities that do not accept the terms on which their displacement is offered. They show what constitutional democracy can and cannot do for those communities. And they show what determines the difference.

The three movements reveal several things about contemporary India that official development narratives do not. First, development is not politically neutral. It concentrates benefits in some places and concentrates costs in others. The communities bearing the costs are consistently the ones with the least political power to demand a different arrangement. The overlap between mineral wealth and Adivasi settlement that makes Odisha's situation so acute is not accidental. It is the product of a history in which the communities richest in the resources that industrial development needs were the ones systematically denied the legal and political standing to claim ownership of those resources.

Second, constitutional protections for indigenous rights are significant but not self-implementing. The Forest Rights Act, PESA, and the Fifth Schedule exist. Their implementation record, documented in the data reviewed in this article, shows that existence is not the same as enforcement. The Niyamgiri outcome shows what is possible when these provisions are actually applied with rigour. The Kashipur and Kalinga Nagar experiences show what happens when they are not.

Third, oral tradition and community memory are historically serious. The testimonies recorded at all three sites are not anecdote. They are evidence about what communities valued, what they understood to be at stake, and what they experienced as loss. They belong in the historical record alongside court judgments and displacement statistics, not as emotional colour but as substantive accounts of what development actually cost.

The question that Niyamgiri, Kashipur, and Kalinga Nagar collectively pose to Indian democracy is straightforward. If communities have constitutional rights to their territories, to forest resources, and to prior consent before development displaces them, and if those rights are systematically unenforced in the majority of cases where they apply, what does that enforcement failure say about who the constitutional framework actually protects? Answering that question honestly is not only an academic task. It is a precondition for the kind of development that India's Constitution envisioned: development that serves the many rather than concentrating wealth and imposing costs on those already least able to bear them.

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