

SEA, LAND AND RESISTANCE IN COASTAL ODISHA

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ABSTRACT

The proposed POSCO steel project in Jagatsinghpur district of Odisha became one of the most debated industrial projects in contemporary India. Announced in 2005 through an agreement between the Government of Odisha and the South Korean company POSCO, the project involved an estimated investment of approximately US\$12 billion and was presented as a major step toward industrial growth and foreign investment in the state. The project included a large steel plant, a captive port and associated infrastructure that required extensive land acquisition in the coastal region. While government authorities and corporate actors portrayed the project as a symbol of economic progress, local communities viewed it differently. Villagers in Dhinkia, Gobindpur and Nuagaon feared the loss of land, forests and livelihoods that had sustained them for generations.

This paper argues that the resistance against POSCO was not driven solely by concerns about displacement. The movement emerged from the defence of an existing coastal economy based on betel cultivation, fishing, forest resources and community management of natural assets. These activities provided income, food security and ecological stability to thousands of households. The conflict therefore reflected two competing visions of development. One prioritised industrial expansion and global investment, while the other emphasised livelihood security, environmental sustainability and local control over natural resources. By examining the ecological foundations of the movement, the paper highlights how coastal communities articulated an alternative understanding of development rooted in everyday economic and environmental realities.

KEYWORDS: POSCO Steel Project.

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