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DISPLACEMENT, MEMORY AND IDENTITY IN KALINGANAGAR

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ABSTRACT

Kalinganagar, located in the Jajpur district of Odisha, was conceived in the 1990s as a centrepiece of India's post-liberalisation industrial ambitions. Large-scale steel plants and allied industries were planned across thousands of acres of land that had long been home to tribal agricultural communities. The displacement of villages, the loss of ancestral land, and the police firing of 2 January 2006 that killed thirteen protesters transformed this region into a nationally significant site of anti-displacement struggle. Most scholarly attention has concentrated on land acquisition processes, compensation disputes, and the immediate violence of the firing. This paper takes a different path. It asks what happens after displacement, examining how communities remember, narrate, and organise around experiences of loss. Drawing on the concept of Memory of Displacement, the paper argues that the Kalinganagar struggle was not only a conflict over land but a conflict over memory, dignity, and identity. Displacement did not conclude with physical eviction. It continued as a living presence in community consciousness, shaping political mobilisation and collective identity across generations. The paper proposes the concept of Industrial Memory Landscape to describe settings where industrial development permanently reshapes the way communities understand themselves, their past, and their future.

KEYWORDS: *Kalinganagar; Development-Induced Displacement; Collective Memory; Industrialisation; Adivasi Communities; Resistance Movements; Industrial Memory Landscape.*

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INTRODUCTION

There is a village that no longer stands where it once stood. Its paddy fields are buried beneath the foundations of a steel plant. Its temple, its burial ground, its community pond have all disappeared from the physical map. Yet among the people who once lived there, the village persists with a clarity that no demolition has managed to erase. They remember the paths between the houses, the names of the trees along the field boundaries, the festivals that marked the agricultural calendar. Memory holds what the landscape no longer can. This is the kind of persistence that the Kalinganagar experience asks us to study. Kalinganagar, historically known as Duburi, is situated in Jajpur district in the state of Odisha. Beginning in the early 1990s, the region was identified by the Government of Odisha as a major site for steel-based industrial development.[1] Its proximity to mineral-rich belts containing iron ore and chromite, combined with connectivity to ports, railways, and the Brahmani River, made it attractive to planners and investors alike.[2] The Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation of Odisha (IDCO) began acquiring land systematically, and by the early 2000s a cluster of steel companies including Tata

[1] *Dilip Kumar Jha, "Orissa: The Newly Emerged Klondike of India," Steel Times International 29, no. 2 (2005): 38*
[2] *Rajakishor Mahana, Negotiating Marginality: Conflicts over Tribal Development in India (Routledge, 2019).*

Steel, Jindal Stainless Steel, VISA Steel, and NINL had signed Memoranda of Understanding with the state government.

Land acquisition brought displacement. Around 815 households, affecting roughly 3,955 people across five villages, were uprooted from their ancestral settlements and relocated to rehabilitation colonies.[3] Compensation was disputed, non-patta landholders were excluded from benefits, and promises of employment remained unfulfilled. As resistance organised under the Visthapan Virodhi Jana Manch (VVJM), tensions escalated. On 2 January 2006, police opened fire on protesters opposing construction activities near the Tata Steel plant, killing thirteen people.[4] The event drew national attention and altered the trajectory of the movement, but the struggle had roots stretching back years before the firing and consequences that continued long after it. This paper is not primarily about those events as history. It is about what those events became in community memory. The research questions that guide it are three. First, how do displaced communities in Kalinganagar remember and transmit the experience of land loss? Second, in what ways does that memory shape ongoing resistance and political consciousness? Third, how do traumatic collective events such as the 2006 firing become incorporated into community identity as enduring reference points rather than isolated incidents?

The research objectives follow from these questions. The paper examines memory formation in the aftermath of displacement, studies how community identity is reconstructed in the absence of ancestral land, and seeks to understand the long-term social and emotional consequences of industrial development for communities like those in Kalinganagar. It introduces the concept of Industrial Memory Landscape as a contribution to these discussions. The historical and contextual background is kept brief. The focus is on what displacement leaves behind.

DEVELOPMENT, DISPLACEMENT AND MEMORY

Three theoretical ideas underpin the argument of this paper. They are introduced without elaborate theoretical scaffolding because the aim is to use them as tools for understanding Kalinganagar rather than to review the wider literature. The first is collective memory. Communities do not simply accumulate individual recollections of shared events. They develop shared frameworks of remembrance through which important experiences are preserved, interpreted, and passed on. Commemorative events, oral narratives, and community gatherings serve as mechanisms through which collective memory is actively maintained rather than passively retained. In Kalinganagar, the annual observance of January 2 is a striking example of this process at work.

The second idea is place attachment. People develop deep emotional bonds with the physical environments in which they live. Land, for tribal agricultural communities, is not merely an economic asset. It carries social memory, spiritual significance, and cultural identity. When displacement severs the connection between people and their ancestral places, the loss is experienced as an injury to identity, not merely to livelihood. Studies of displacement-affected communities consistently show that the grief associated with lost places outlasts the material difficulties of relocation.The third is development-induced displacement, a well-documented phenomenon in which large infrastructure and industrial projects dislodge communities from land, forests, and common resources. What distinguishes this paper's approach is its attention to what most studies of displacement-induced displacement do not examine: the life that communities build in memory after physical relocation has taken place.

[3] *Balaji Pandey, "The Kalinganagar Tragedy: Development Goal or Development Malaise," Social Change 38, no. 4 (2008): 611.*
[4] *Pramodini Pradhan and PUCL Cuttack, "Police Firing at Kalinganagar," People's Union for Civil Liberties Bulletin (2006): 278.*

Table 1: Key Theoretical Concepts and Their Relevance to Kalinganagar

Concept	Core Meaning	Relevance to Kalinganagar
Collective memory	Communities remember important events together through shared frameworks	Shared remembrance of displacement and police firing
Place attachment	Emotional and cultural bonds between people and land	Connection to ancestral villages now under industrial complexes
Development-induced displacement	Loss involves more than property	Loss of livelihood, identity, and social networks
Trauma and memory	Traumatic events embed in collective consciousness	Long-term emotional and political impact of the 2006 firing

Most existing studies of Kalinganagar stop at the moment of displacement or the moment of protest. This paper argues that understanding the long-term meaning of the Kalinganagar experience requires attending to what remains after the original event, namely the memory that communities carry forward and the identities they construct from that memory. This represents the novel contribution of the present work.

BUILDING KALINGANAGAR

The industrial vision for Kalinganagar was shaped by the broader policy environment of post-liberalisation India. From the early 1990s onward, the Government of Odisha actively positioned the state as a destination for industrial investment, emphasising its mineral wealth and improved transport infrastructure. Kalinganagar was identified as a strategic site because of its proximity to iron ore and chromite deposits in areas such as Kaliapani, Barbil, and Daitari, its access to the Paradip port via the Paradip-Daitari expressway, and the presence of the Brahmani River as a water source for industrial processes.[5]

The first major industrial project was initiated in 1992 when NilachalIspat Nigam Limited (NINL) decided to establish a steel plant, beginning land acquisition in 1994. Over the following decade, more companies arrived.[6] By the mid-2000s, Tata Steel, Jindal Stainless Steel, VISA Steel, MESCO Steel, Maharashtra Seamless, MaithanIspat, and Rohit Ferro-Tech had all signed agreements with the Odisha government and been allotted land within the Kalinganagar Industrial Complex. The government had acquired nearly 12,000 acres across 83 revenue villages in the Sukinda and Danagadi blocks of Jajpur district between 1992 and 1994 alone.[7]

Table 2: Major Industrial Projects and Land Acquisition in Kalinganagar

Company	Land Allotted (Acres)	Investment (Rs. Crore)	Status by 2007
Tata Steel	3,600	16,000	Boundary wall incomplete
NINL	2,500	1,510	Steel production not started
Jindal Stainless Steel	1,240	4,764	640 acres not yet acquired
VISA Steel	525	400	135 acres not yet acquired
MESCO Steel	584	530	Litigation continuing

Source: Compiled from administrative records and reports on the Kalinganagar Industrial Complex.[8]

[5] *Pandey, "The Kalinganagar Tragedy," 610.*
[6] *Dinabandhu Sahoo and Niharranjan Mishra, "Neoliberal Development, Displacement and Resistance Movement: The Case of Kalinga Nagar Industrial Complex, Odisha, India," Man in India 97, no. 11 (2017): 249.*
[7] *Pandey, "The Kalinganagar Tragedy," 612.*
[8] *Compiled from administrative records cited in Sahoo and Mishra, "Neoliberal Development," 251.*

By 2007, almost none of these projects were producing steel. Displacement had proceeded at scale, but industrial production had barely begun. The communities bore the full cost of the industrial vision while its promised benefits remained distant. This asymmetry between sacrifice and reward is central to understanding the anger and grief that found expression in the resistance movement and that continue to shape community memory today.

DISPLACEMENT BEYOND STATISTICS

The displacement figures for Kalinganagar are significant enough on their own terms. Around 815 households comprising approximately 3,955 people across five directly affected villages were compelled to leave their ancestral lands.[9] Land was acquired by the state and transferred to industrial companies, often at prices that were a fraction of the rates subsequently charged to corporations. Families with formal land documents received monetary compensation, while households cultivating land without patta titles were frequently excluded from the process altogether. The compensation paid to villagers was reportedly as low as Rs. 15,000 to Rs. 37,000 per acre, while the same land was allotted to companies at rates exceeding Rs. 3.5 lakh per acre.[10]

These numbers, however, cannot capture what displacement actually meant for the communities involved. The losses were not only material. They were the loss of a particular relationship with the world, one built over generations through residence, labour, ritual, and memory. Beyond agricultural fields and homestead plots, the acquisition process also consumed village ponds used for fishing and irrigation, grazing lands that sustained cattle herds, sacred groves and forest patches that provided fuel, food, and medicinal plants, weekly markets where communities met and traded, temples and shrines that anchored religious life, and burial grounds where ancestors lay.These were not interchangeable amenities that could be replaced by alternative provisions in a rehabilitation colony. Each carried specific social meanings and memories. The temple was not simply a building but a place where marriages were conducted, disputes settled, and festivals celebrated. The burial ground connected the living to the dead and to a lineage rooted in that specific soil. The market was a weekly meeting of the community that reinforced social bonds. When these places disappeared, a whole architecture of social and cultural life disappeared with them.

Table 3: What Was Lost and Why It Mattered

What Was Lost	Immediate Consequence	Long-term Memorial Significance
Agricultural land	Loss of food and income	Central to stories of the original village
Forests and grazing grounds	Loss of supplementary livelihood	Remembered as site of freedom and self-sufficiency
Temples and burial grounds	Rupture of religious and ancestral practice	Core of cultural identity narrative
Village markets	Loss of weekly social meeting	Symbol of community autonomy
Water sources and ponds	Daily survival challenged	Remembered as markers of original geography

The key insight that this paper develops from these losses is that displacement is not only the movement of people. It is the movement of memory. When families were relocated to rehabilitation colonies in Dangadi, Gobarghati, and Ankurpal, they carried with them a precise and detailed map of a world that no longer existed in physical form. That map did not fade. It was actively maintained through conversation, through the practices of daily life that referenced what was no longer there, and through the stories told to children about the villages their parents and grandparents had lost.

[9] *Kundan Kumar et al., "A Socio-economic and Legal Study of Scheduled Tribes' Land in Orissa," Unpublished Study Commissioned by World Bank Washington (2005), 14.*
[10] *Sahoo and Mishra, "Neoliberal Development," 253.*

Displacement thus persists as a form of continuous displacement, a recurring awareness of having been removed from a place that belongs to you.

THE 2006 FIRING AND THE MAKING OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY

On 2 January 2006, police opened fire on villagers who had gathered near the proposed Tata Steel plant site in Kalinganagar to oppose construction activities.[11] The district administration had deployed ten platoons of armed police to facilitate the construction of the plant boundary wall. When the crowd of protesting tribal men and women moved toward the construction zone, the situation escalated rapidly into a confrontation. Thirteen people died, twelve immediately and one from injuries sustained during the incident. Around 37 others were seriously wounded. The names of those killed remain significant: Raghu Jarika, Laxman Munda, Sanatan Munda, Siba Munda, Mangal Munda, Gobinda Hembrom, Narayan Munda, Gopal Chandra Munda, Ramesh Sardar, Kailash Chandra Munda, Chaitan Tiria, Bhadra Tiria, and Shyam Gagrai.[12]

The firing was immediately controversial. Civil society organisations, human rights groups, and political figures condemned the use of lethal force against people who had already lost their land and were exercising their right to protest. The VVJM formulated a seven-point charter of demands in response, including compensation of Rs. 20 lakh for each family of the deceased, recognition of Adivasi rights over land, water, forests, and mineral resources, and an end to displacement. Protesters organised a prolonged blockade of the Paradip-Daitari highway that continued for more than a year.[13]

The firing mattered enormously in the short term as a political and legal crisis. But its deeper significance lies in what it became over time. January 2 transformed from a date into a symbol. The event acquired the quality of a collective wound, something that the community as a whole had suffered and that no settlement or compensation could fully address. In the years following the firing, the date was observed annually through gatherings at the site and at rehabilitation colonies. The memorial observances were not primarily political rallies, though they had political dimensions. They were acts of collective mourning that renewed the community's relationship with its losses and with the dead.

Table 4: The 2006 Firing and Its Long-term Effects on Community Memory

Aspect	Immediate Effect	Long-term Memorial Effect
Thirteen deaths	National outrage, state compensation	Martyrdom narrative; named memorialisation
Injuries	Medical crisis, community trauma	Shared physical memory of violence
Police action	Political mobilisation, blockade	Deep institutional distrust
Annual observance	Highway blockade, protest demands	Ritual commemoration reinforcing identity

The firing also transformed the movement's self-understanding. Before January 2006, the resistance was organised around specific demands related to land, compensation, and employment. After the firing, it became something larger. The dead gave the movement a permanent moral foundation. The names of those killed became part of the vocabulary through which the community described its own history. The firing was not simply remembered as an event that happened to the community. It was remembered as an event that defined the community, marking who they were in relation to the state and in relation to industrial power. This is how a local protest becomes a lasting memory movement.

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[11] *Pradhan and PUCL Cuttack, "Police Firing at Kalinganagar," 276.*
[12] *Parwini Zora, "India: Twelve Protesters Killed in Police Shooting," World Socialist Web Site (2006), https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2006/01/oris-j17.html.*
[13] *"Kalinganagar Update," MAC: Mines and Communities (2006), https://www.minesandcommunities.org/article.php?a=795.*

LIFE IN REHABILITATION COLONIES

Six rehabilitation colonies were established by the Odisha government to resettle displaced families from Kalinganagar. These included Colony No. 1 and Colony No. 2 in Dangadi, Colony No. 3 and Colony No. 5 in Gobarghati, Colony No. 4 in Ankurpal, and the NilachalIspat Colony also in Gobarghati. The transit colonies offered two-room tin-roofed houses, shared hand pumps, and irregular electricity. Permanent colonies provided land allotments of around ten decimals per household, which families were expected to use to build their own accommodation from their compensation receipts. The official account of rehabilitation focuses on infrastructure provided: houses, water points, electricity connections in some cases, the occasional community hall, and primary school facilities where teachers were intermittently available. The lived experience described by residents focuses on what was missing. There was no agricultural land equivalent to what had been surrendered. The ten-decimal plots were too small for cultivation. Forest access was restricted, eliminating the supplementary food and income that had cushioned the household economy in the original villages. Employment in the nearby steel plants was promised but rarely materialised for local tribal families who lacked technical qualifications.[14]

Table 5: Village Life Before and After Displacement in Kalinganagar

Dimension	Original Village	Rehabilitation Colony
Land	Agricultural fields, sometimes several acres	Small residential plots, no cultivation land
Forest access	Regular collection of produce, fuel, medicine	Restricted or unavailable
Social networks	Extended family, caste and clan ties intact	Disrupted by relocation of families to different colonies
Livelihoods	Agriculture supplemented by forest gathering	Casual wage labour, uncertain income
Community spaces	Markets, temples, ponds, meeting grounds	Minimal, largely absent in transit settlements

The gap between what was lost and what was provided created a persistent condition of deprivation that was also a persistent condition of memory. Residents of the colonies had daily reminders of what had been taken from them. The absence of adequate land recalled the fields they had cultivated. The restricted forest recalled the woods they had freely entered. The inadequate housing recalled the homes they had built over generations. Life in the rehabilitation colonies was not simply difficult in material terms. It was experienced as a continuous enactment of the original dispossession, a reminder renewed each day of the cost borne by communities to build an industrial future that had not delivered on its promises.

MEMORY, IDENTITY AND NEW POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Displacement created new forms of identity among the communities of Kalinganagar that could not have existed before it. The scattered residents of multiple villages, each with their distinct social networks and local loyalties, found themselves grouped together in rehabilitation colonies and united by a shared experience of loss. The very act of displacement produced the conditions for a broader collective identity grounded not in shared ancestry or shared place but in shared suffering and shared resistance. The VVJM became the institutional expression of this new identity. The organisation united communities from different villages and different social backgrounds around a common set of demands and a common memory of injustice. Its activities, from public meetings and demonstrations to the prolonged highway blockade that followed the 2006 firing, were simultaneously political actions and acts of collective memory.[15] They kept alive the community's awareness of what had happened and why it had happened, translating private grief into public politics.

[14] *Hari Mathur, Displacement and Resettlement in India: The Human Cost of Development (Routledge, 2013), 88.*
[15] *Bikram Keshori Jena, "Development-Induced Displacement in 21st Century India," Proceedings of the Indian History Congress 75 (2014): 1186.*

Community leaders, many of them from the affected villages themselves, played a crucial role in sustaining this process. They connected individual family experiences to a larger narrative of structural injustice, making the case that what had happened in Kalinganagar was not simply an unfortunate consequence of development but a deliberate subordination of community rights to corporate interests. Youth in the rehabilitation colonies grew up within this framework of understanding. Many became active participants in the movement not because they had experienced the original displacement personally but because the memory of displacement had been transmitted to them as both a factual account and a moral framework.

What emerged in Kalinganagar over the years following displacement was something scholars have described as a resistance identity, a sense of collective selfhood defined not primarily by what the community had but by what it had endured and what it refused to accept. The community came to define itself through its history of loss and its history of fighting back. This identity was continually reinforced by commemorative practices, by the stories told within families, and by the presence in the rehabilitation colonies of people whose bodies and memories carried direct evidence of the conflict.

INTERGENERATIONAL MEMORY

The transmission of displacement memory across generations is one of the least examined aspects of development-induced displacement in India. In Kalinganagar, this transmission took place through several overlapping channels. The most immediate was family narrative. Parents and grandparents who had lived in the original villages spoke to their children about those places in precise and emotionally charged terms. The ancestral village was described not as a historical abstraction but as a living reality from which the family had been unjustly removed.Songs composed in the aftermath of displacement circulated in the rehabilitation colonies and became vehicles for preserving the community's emotional relationship with its losses. The 2006 firing generated its own body of memorial expression. Stories of those who died on January 2 were told and retold in ways that framed them as both individuals with names and faces and as representatives of the community's collective sacrifice.[16]

Annual commemorative gatherings were especially important because they enacted memory rather than simply recounting it. Young people who attended these events did not merely receive information about what had happened before they were born. They participated in a ritual that positioned them as members of a community defined by that history. The model of transmission that best captures this process is generational but not simply linear.Memory does not simply fade as generations pass. In communities where displacement remains unresolved, where compensation remains disputed, and where the political and legal struggles remain unfinished, memory is renewed through present conditions rather than only preserved from the past. The rehabilitation colony itself, with its daily inadequacies, is a memory device. It recalls, each day, the world that was taken and the promises that were broken. This is perhaps the most important finding of this section: memory of displacement survives not despite the passing of time but because the conditions produced by displacement continue to be experienced in the present.

[16] *Binay Kumar Pattnaik, "Tribal Resistance Movements and the Politics of Development-induced Displacement in Contemporary Orissa," Social Change 43, no. 1 (2013): 65.*

DISCUSSION

The findings from Kalinganagar can be situated within a broader landscape of displacement struggles in India. The Narmada Bachao Andolan, which contested the displacement of communities by the Sardar Sarovar Dam, similarly generated durable forms of collective memory and identity that sustained resistance over several decades. In Singur, the controversy over land acquisition for the Tata Nano plant produced acute public debates about the social costs of industrial development that resonated far beyond West Bengal. In the mining regions of Jharkhand, communities displaced by coal extraction have developed comparable practices of memorial resistance, keeping alive the names of places that have been physically obliterated.

What connects these experiences and what makes the Kalinganagar case analytically distinctive is the way in which industrial development does not simply change landscapes in physical terms. It creates what this paper proposes to call an Industrial Memory Landscape. An Industrial Memory Landscape is a site where the effects of industrial development on human communities persist not only in material conditions but in the collective memory, political consciousness, and cultural identity of those communities. The physical landscape is transformed into factories, roads, and waste dumps. The social landscape is transformed into something equally lasting, a shared map of loss that shapes how affected communities understand themselves, relate to the state, and imagine their future.

In Kalinganagar, this Industrial Memory Landscape has several distinctive features. It includes the remembered geography of the original villages, preserved in the minds and narratives of displaced families. It includes the annual memorial of January 2, which transforms a date into a communal ritual. It includes the resistance identity developed through decades of VVJM activity, which continues to frame local political consciousness. And it includes the daily experience of life in the rehabilitation colonies, which functions as an ongoing reminder of what development cost and what it failed to deliver.[17]

This concept of the Industrial Memory Landscape is offered as an original contribution of the present paper. It builds on existing scholarship on collective memory and place attachment but applies those frameworks specifically to the context of post-liberalisation industrial displacement in India, a context that has received substantial attention in terms of land acquisition and protest but much less in terms of its memorial and identity consequences.

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that the Kalinganagar struggle was not only a conflict over land. It was a conflict over memory, dignity, and identity. Displacement in Kalinganagar did not end with the physical relocation of 815 households from their ancestral villages to rehabilitation colonies. It continued as a living presence in community consciousness, shaping political mobilisation, reinforcing collective identity, and transmitting itself across generations through narrative, song, and annual commemoration. The 2006 police firing, in which thirteen people died, was a traumatic event of major significance. But its deepest significance lies not in its immediate political consequences but in what it became over time: a collective wound that gave the community a permanent moral reference point, a set of named martyrs, and an annual ritual of remembrance that has sustained the movement's identity long after the specific political demands of the moment have shifted.

[17] *Pattnaik, "Tribal Resistance Movements," 68.*

Life in the rehabilitation colonies has not been the fresh start that official rehabilitation rhetoric promised. It has been a daily reminder of what was taken. The inadequacy of housing, the absence of agricultural land, the lack of forest access, and the non-materialisation of employment promises have kept the original dispossession alive not only in memory but in present experience. This is the sense in which this paper speaks of Kalinganagar as an Industrial Memory Landscape: a site where industrial development has permanently reshaped not only the physical environment but the community memory and identity of those who once called that environment home. Kalinganagar should not be remembered only as a site of industrial conflict and police violence. It should be understood as a landscape of memory where displacement, loss, and resistance continue to shape community life long after the original events that produced them. Development policies are most commonly evaluated through measures of investment, production, and economic output. The Kalinganagar experience suggests that they must also be evaluated through their long-term social and emotional consequences, through the memories they create, the identities they forge, and the kinds of communities they leave behind.

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