ABSTRACT

Land as a factor of production has acquired unprecedented significance in post-liberalisation India and is perceived as a major cause of face-off between the state and local communities. Irrespective of the steps taken under LARR, 2013 to assure “just” compensation as well as rehabilitation and resettlement contestations around land acquisition are not relenting. Change in the ideological apparatus of the state is regarded as the reason behind protest movements by some scholars, whereas others have identified the owners’ pre-occupation with high prices due to increased information symmetry as the main reason. Scholars have also conducted extensive studies on Singur, Nandigram, Niyamgiri etc. exploring the multiple facets of anti-dispossession struggles. This has led to various policy interventions addressing the price related issues as well as that of defining broadly the category of ‘affected people’. However, few studies consider the outright rejection of acquisition to be driven by certain “cultural” values mainly attributed to adivasi community. This claim needs to be examined against the fact that land in scheduled areas is usually governed by protective laws restricting the competitive appropriation of its price. Moreover, there are instances where adivasis have sold their land without any visible protest. So, what then are the actual factors which shape the adivasis’ perception towards land?

Based on fieldwork conducted in the West Singhbhum district of Jharkhand – a scheduled area – this study aims at fulfilling three objectives viz. to study the influence of state intervention on the socio-political discourse of a tribal dominated society; to study the local mechanisms through which land acquisition is pursued; and to understand the shifting modalities of anti-dispossession resistance movements. An attempt has been made to understand land dispossession through a theoretical-empirical engaged research. The study analyses five cases of sponge iron industries (SIIs) and offers the construct of “disguised dispossession” to capture the nature of dispossession. Arguing that apart from the “negative externalities” which are a natural corollary of “dirty industries”, the SIIs also violates individual property rights by affecting the land adjacent to the plants. This nature of dispossession has still not entered the official lexicon on compensation and R&R as the LARR, 2013 is silent on this. Moreover, the “not-so-popular” movements organised against land acquisition under the tutelage of Jameen Bachao Samanway Samiti (JBSS) lacks the capacity to politically engage with this problem largely due to the divided social fabric of the adivasi community.