Subaltern Social Movement (SSM)
Post-Mortems of Development
in India: Locating Trans-Local
Activism and Radicalism

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Abstract
This paper expounds on an Adivasi-Dalit subalternist critique of development and compulsory modernization
drawn from a participatory critical-interpretive case study developed from several episodic engagements
with these groups between 2006 and 2009 in Orissa, India. This critique is advanced by the Lok Adhikar
Manch (LAM), a trans-local movement network of 13 subaltern social movement groups in Orissa. These
disclosures are then deployed in a critical conversation with a specific strain of Marxist scholarship in peasant
studies that dismisses subaltern movements as conservative (status-quo politics in relation to capital) and
as scattered anti-Marxist postmodern populisms that fail to challenge the reproduction of capitalist control of
the rural hinterlands.

Keywords
Development, India, populism, subalter, subaltern social movements (SSMs), trans-local

Peasant movements like Chipko (northern India) and peasant protests reveal how policies of ‘economic
development’ or ‘modernization’ formulated at the top levels of states, corporations and international
financial institutions are often experienced by peasants, rural women, and laborers – as exploitation. In
the strategies of economic development, indigenous peoples, landless peasants, and women are expected
to bear the brunt of industrialization; disease, social unrest, food scarcity and land hunger testify to the
impact of this process.


Introduction
Subaltern social movements (SSMs)¹ and struggles in India today (Baviskar, 2005; Da Costa,
2007; Ghosh, 2006; Kapoor, 2009a, 2009b, 2010; McMichael, 2010; Menon and Nigam, 2007;
Mookerjea, 2010; Oliver-Smith, 2010; Rajagopal, 2003; Sheth, 2007) continue to proliferate in
conjunction with developments marking the post-1991 neoliberalization of the economy. The shift

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in the Indian political economy has begun to amplify the impacts of state/capital driven intrusions in the rural hinterlands marked by processes of primitive accumulation, proletarianization, dispossession (Harvey, 2003; Patnaik, 2007); displacement (Fernandes, 2006; Mehta, 2009); re/de-peasantization, de-tribalization and/or forced or benevolent inclusions in to national progress (development) (Baviskar, 2005; Prasad, 2004); market/economic violence accompanying global projects of imperialism, compulsory modernization (globalization/globalism or neoliberalism) (Appelbaum and Robinson, 2005; Rajagopal, 2003; Ray and Katzenstein, 2005); and what Walter Mignolo and Anibal Quijano reference as the historical project of the ‘coloniality of power’, replete with vectors of racism and ethno-cultural chauvinisms (Mignolo, 2000; Quijano and Ennis, 2000). Such rural *dislocations* encourage forced/voluntary migration to already dense urban centers, leading to the proliferation of a ‘planet of slums’ (Davis, 2006) where subalterns are again compelled to take on urban-based struggles for space (Gibson and Patel, 2010; Harvey, 2009; Pithouse, 2008). Modernizing state, market and civil society actors are variously implicated in advancing these trajectories, as overt champions of neoliberalism, as civil society actors wedded to humanizing capital (a politics of allegedly *benign inclusivity*) and social justice reformism or as state-socialist enterprises (socialist market economies) *re-negotiating* relations with a *recalcitrant* peasantry. As Nivedita Menon and Aditya Nigam (2007) observe:

> the policies pursued by the CPI(M)-led Left Front (LF) government in West Bengal (India) have become virtually indistinguishable from those of other parties committed to the neoliberal agenda. In recent times, the LF government has turned out to be more zealous than many others in dispossessing farmers of their land, and making it available for capital (2007:105).

According to one calculation, the acquisition of some 120,000 acres over the past five years of land reforms in the state has been accompanied by an increase of 2.5 million landless peasants (Banerjee, 2006: 4719).

Given these contexts of development dislocation, displacement, dispossession, and associated responses and resistances, this paper draws on a recent participatory critical-interpretive research initiative (Kapoor, 2009b) with an Adivasi (Kondhs) and Dalit (Panos) movement in South Orissa (an east coast state in India) that seeks knowledge for the first time (in this context) about Adivasi-Dalit social movements and struggles pertaining to these movements’ purposes and their learning and knowledge dimensions/politics, to expound upon SSM critiques of state-capitalist development and compulsory modernization (national and global trajectories).

This exposition is developed from perspectives shared at a gathering of 13 LAM partners (see Table 1) by 30 leaders/participants in April 2009. LAM is a state/provincially-based network of SSMs and social movement organizations engaged in a ‘trans-local alliance’ (Da Costa, 2007: 315) and politics that first emerged among lead groups in the late 1990s to early 2000s. The insights from this data set are augmented on occasion with perspectives shared in a similar gathering of 23 leaders/village representatives from the Adivasi-Dalit Ekta Abhijan (ADEA) movement (a leading LAM movement participant) in February and March of 2008 and in village meetings in 2007. The research employs a combination of what Linda Tuhiiwai-Smith in *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999: 177) refers to as a ‘strategy of consultation where efforts are made to seek support and consent’ from the Adivasis and Dalits and a ‘strategy of making space’, whereby more Adivasis and Dalits become a part of the research process, and power sharing (including sharing of research objectives, process, design, analysis and decisions around the determination and sharing of findings) becomes an explicit and conscious process in the developing research/relationship; a process that is described in some detail elsewhere (see Kapoor, 2009c).
Table 1. Lok Adhikar Manch (LAM)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement participant (year established)</th>
<th>Location/operational area</th>
<th>Social groups engaged</th>
<th>Key issues being addressed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Kalinga Matrijiva Sangathan (early 1980s)</td>
<td>Gopalpur-on-sea (center) including coastal Orissa, from Gopalpur in Ganjam district to Chandrabhaga and Astaranga coast in Puri district</td>
<td>Fisher people (mainly Dalits) originally from the state of Andhra Pradesh called Nolias and Orissa state fisher people or Keuta/ Kaivartas</td>
<td>• Trawler fishing, fish stock depletion and enforcement of coastal regulations/zones (Trans/national corporate (TNC) investment) • Occupation of coastal land by defense installations (e.g. missile bases) • Hotel/tourism industry developments along coast (TNC investment) • Special economic zones (SEZ) and major port projects for mining exports (TNC investment) • Pollution of beaches and oceans • Displacement of fisher communities related to such developments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Prakritik Sampad Suraksha Parishad (PSSP) (late 1980s)</td>
<td>Kashipur, Lakhimpur, Dasmantpur and adjacent blocks in Rayagada district of Orissa, approximately 200 movement villages</td>
<td>Adivasis including Jhodias, Kondhs and Parajas and Pano/ Domb Dalits</td>
<td>• Bauxite mining (alumina) (TNC investment) • Industrialization, deforestation and land alienation/displacement • People’s rights over ‘their own ways and systems’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Jana Suraksha Manch (2007)</td>
<td>Adava region of Mohana block, Gajapati district including 60 or more villages</td>
<td>Saura and Kondh Adivasis and Panos (Dalits)</td>
<td>• Government/local corruption • Police brutality/atrocities • Deforestation and plantation agriculture (National corporate investment (NC)) • Dalit and Adivasi land rights and land alienation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Adivasi Dalit Adhikar Sangathan (2000)</td>
<td>Jaleswar, Bhograi and Bosta blocks in Balasore district and Boisinga and Rasagovindpur blocks in Mayurbhanj, including over 100 villages</td>
<td>Dalits, Adivasis, fisher people and Other Backward Castes (OBCs)</td>
<td>• Industrialization, port development and displacement of traditional fisher people (TNC investment)</td>
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</table>
| 5. Adivasi-Dalit Ekta Abhiyan (2000)    | Twenty panchayats in Gajapati and Kandhmal districts including 200 plus villages (population of about 50,000) | Kondh and Saura Adivasis, Panos (Dalits) and OBCs | - Land and forest rights  
- Food  
- Sovereignty/plantation agriculture (NC investment)  
- Industrialization, modernization and protection of indigenous ways and systems  
- Communal harmony  
- Development of people’s coalitions/forums (no state, NGO, corporate, ‘outsider’, upper/middle castes participants) |
| 6. Indravati Vistapita Lokmanch (late 1990s) | Thirty villages in the district of Nabarangapur | Several Adivasi, Dalit and OBC communities | - Dam displacement (Indravati irrigation and hydro-electric project) (NC investment)  
- Land and forest rights  
- Resettlement, rehabilitation and compensation for Development Displaced Peoples (DDPs)  
- Industrialization and modern development and protection of people’s ways |
| 7. Orissa Adivasi Manch (1993 to 1994)  | State level forum with an all-Orissa presence (all districts) with regional units in Keonjhar and Rayagada districts and district level units in each district | Well over 40 different Adivasi communities | - Adivasi rights in the state  
- Tribal self rule, forest and land rights and industrialization (SEZs) (TNC investment) |
| 8. Anchalik Janasuraksha Sangathan (2008) | Kidting, Mohana block of Gajapati district including some 20 villages | Kondh and Saura Adivasis and Panos (Dalits) | - Land and forest rights  
- Conflict resolution and communal harmony between Adivasis and Dalits over land and forest issues |
| 9. Dalit Adivasi Bahujana Initiatives (DABI) (2000) | Five blocks in the Kandhmal district with 10 participating local movements (networks) | Kondh Adivasis, Panos (Dalits) and OBCs | - Land and forest rights  
- Food sovereignty and livelihood issues  
- Communal harmony |
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| 10. Uppara Kolab Basachyuta Mahasangh (late 1990s) | Umerkote block, Koraput district (includes a 30-village population base displaced by the upper Kolab hydroelectric and irrigation reservoir) | Paraja Adivasis, Panos and Malis Dalits and OBCs | • Displacement due to the upper Kolab hydro-electricity and irrigation reservoir (NC investment)  
• Compensation, rehabilitation and basic amenities for DDPs  
• Land and forest rights |
| 11. Jeevan Jivika Suraksha Sangathan (2006) | Three panchayats in the border areas of Kandhmal and Gajapati districts including 50 or more villages with a population of 12,000 people | Kondhs and Saura Adivasis and Panos (Dalits) and OBCs | • Land and forest rights/issues  
• Communal harmony  
• Food sovereignty and livelihood issues |
| 12. Adivasi Pachua Dalit Adhikar Manch (APDAM) (2000) | Kalinga Nagar industrial belt in Jajpur district (25 or more villages, along with several participants in the Kalinganagar township area) | Adivasis, Dalits and OBCs | • Industrialization and displacement (TNC investment)  
• Land and forest rights  
• Compensation and rehabilitation  
• Police atrocities/brutality  
• Protection of Adivasi-Dalit ways and forest-based cultures and community |
| 13. Janajati Yuva Sangathan (2008) | Baliapal and Chandanesar block in Balasore district including 32 coastal villages being affected by mega port development (part of SEZ scheme) | Dalit fisher communities and OBCs | • SEZs (TNC investment)  
• Industrialization and displacement  
• Land alienation and marine rights of traditional fisher communities |
The primary objective of this paper is to amplify the politics of these movements in relation to the ‘development project’ (McMichael, 2007) as voiced by SSM participants. Secondly, debates pertaining to the radical potential of rural/subaltern struggles and certain Marxist dismissals (e.g. see Brass, 2007a, 2007b; Das, 2007) pertaining to subalterity, subaltern politics and social movement activism are taken up in relation to what we can learn (with respect to radical political praxis/potential and social movement teleology) from these critical SSM articulations concerning ‘development’.

The broad impetus for the research germinated from the author’s long-standing practical engagements with Adivasis and Dalits in the region since the early 1990s and through discussions with the recently established Adivasi-Dalit Center for Research and Development Solidarity (CRDS) in 2003, before a grant was eventually secured to support this particular research project in 2006. Theoretical interests in relation to the same have been encouraged by Ranajit Guha’s concern with demonstrating a politics of the people (1982) or an autonomous domain of popular consciousness and an anti-colonial politics, once aimed at the British (a preoccupation of the original Subaltern Studies group) and now directed at contemporary (internal and external) agents of colonization, including an increasingly neoliberal and corporatized Indian state. Consistent with the earlier commitments of Subaltern Studies, this study magnifies the localized roots of such a politics, that is a subaltern politics that is not simply a derivative of an elite trans/nationalist, class, civil-societarian and/or neoliberal politics, but one that is rooted in a relatively autonomous domain. In keeping with critical/reflexive commentary on Subaltern Studies (Chaturvedi, 2000; Ludden, 2005), the research is an attempt to check the drift away from documenting the struggles of the poor and the dispossessed or what Sumit Sarkar (1997) has referred to as a Faustian bargain or the conventional postmodern turn in the project, away from an earlier structuralism.

**Accelerated Development and Subaltern Displacement, Dispossession and Assertions in India**

While subaltern struggles against dispossession date back to the colonial era of the British or the pre-1947 period and have been rationalized in an elite nationalist historiography as part of the anti-imperialist struggle for independence, or to use Menon and Nigam’s (2007: 68) metaphor, ‘tucked cosily away into a pleat of Mother India’s sari’, similar assertions in the post-independence era are instantly branded as anti-national, anti-developmental (modern) and regressive on the part of these more ‘traditional’ and ‘backward’ social segments that are retarding prospects for ‘India’s’ economic growth and status as a global economic power; that is, Adivasis and/or diffident subalterns are seen to be standing in the way of development (Baviskar, 2005; Blaser et al., 2004; Ghosh, 2006; Mehta, 2009; Oliver-Smith, 2010; Rajagopal, 2003).

The policy of development at the time of independence (1947) ushered in industrialization through large-scale power projects, dams, oil and gas and mineral/natural resource exploitation, urbanization and infrastructure development led by a state committed to democratic socialism through a process that was defined in successive five-year national plans – a process that has displaced about 500,000 people each year, primarily as a consequence of land acquisition by the state (Menon and Nigam, 2007; Patnaik, 2007; Ray and Katzenstein, 2005). While not going unchallenged during this period (conflicts pertaining to dams like Bhakra, Hirakud and Rihand are but a few examples), the post-1991 neoliberalization of the Indian political economy has accelerated this process of development in the interests of providing for a growing middle class and a global marketplace through an increasingly greater reliance on the corporate sector and transnational corporate investment in India, as the state (left and right versions inclusive) has lobotomized
itself and handed over key sectors of the economy to the private sector (the proliferation of Special Economic Zones or SEZs is a case in point) in a move that increasingly sees the corporatized state moving to protect private interests and profit in the face of unprecedented and increasingly organized resistance, as specific groups benefit at the expense of the majority (Guru and Chakravarty, 2005; Menon and Nigam, 2007).

Unsurprisingly, reports from the UN’s Working Group on Indigenous Populations and the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) include ‘plundering of resources’, ‘forced relocation’ and ‘forced integration of indigenous peoples in to market economies’ as but some of the political-economic problems being faced by the indigenous peoples of Asia (Eversole et al., 2005: 32). While Adivasis constitute 8 percent of the Indian population (or 80 million or more people belonging to some 612 Scheduled Tribes), they account for 40 percent of Development Displaced Peoples (DDPs) and in the state of Orissa (home to 62 groups numbering 8 million or more people) where they make up 22 percent of the population, they account for 42 percent of DDPs (Fernandes, 2006: 113). Promoting market access has become the key neoliberal response to eliminating poverty, which in turn entails disciplining the subaltern who are

presented as inhabiting a series of local spaces across the globe that, marked by the label ‘social exclusion’, lie outside the normal civil society … Their route back … is through the willing and active transformation of themselves to conform to the discipline of the market. (Cameron and Palan, 2004: 148)

This is nowhere more apparent than through the SEZ process that continues to consume the country, especially in the eastern region and in Orissa (given its huge mineral reserves – bauxite/alumina, coal and iron ore especially – and largely unexploited rural-forested hinterlands (see Padel and Das, 2010)) prompting several subaltern and other movement/struggles in multiple locations (Orissa’s Dalit and Adivasi populations account for some 45 percent of the state population and live mostly in the state’s 57,000 villages, given that 85 percent of the population live in the rural regions), many of whom are part of the LAM (see Table 1). Intended as duty-free and tax-free enclaves which are treated as ‘foreign territory’ when it comes to trade operations, tariffs and duties, SEZ policy was initiated by the right-wing National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and was subsequently pursued by the Left-supported United Progressive Alliance that came to power in 2004 and again in 2009, minus the Left which faced a decisive electoral set-back in Bengal and nationally post-Singur, Nandigram and Lalgarh (Menon and Nigam, 2007). The attempt to establish SEZs (as in Nandigram) involves the handover of Scheduled Area lands and forests (protected areas for Scheduled Tribes/Adivasis) to private industry through a process that has invited spontaneous and organized resistances from subalterns to such land grabs by capital, aided by the corporatized-state and in almost all instances, buttressed by the state’s monopoly over the use of force (see Kapoor 2009b, 2009d for subaltern perspectives on strategies employed in these instances, including the use of Corporate Organized NGOs or CONGOs to entice people into development projects and/or stifle activism; for the latter in Orissa, see Padel and Das 2010). These state-corporate land grabs (often justified in the name of ‘public/national interest’) are being opposed and met by different subaltern movements (and local, trans/national allied movements) in Orissa and West Bengal (the eastern regions) including, for example:

(i) In Singur (Bengal) (not an SEZ acquisition) where the Left Front government failed to acquire 997 acres of peasant land for the Tata group to manufacture cars;

(ii) In Nandigram (Bengal) where the same government is being opposed by peasants in its bid to acquire 14,500 acres for an SEZ and this is a small part of a wider SEZ plan where
as much as 144,000 acres of land in nine districts have been earmarked for private industry (Bidwai, 2007) encouraging similar responses elsewhere, as is currently evident in Lalgarh (Bengal);

(iii) In Kashipur (Orissa) where Kondh, Penga, Paraja, Jhodia tribes and Dalits (who have formed the Prakrutik Sampad Surakshya Parishad) are still engaged in a protracted opposition that has lasted over a decade in response to a billion dollar open-pit bauxite mine proposed by Utkal Alumina International Ltd (a consortium of trans-national companies which used to include ALCAN of Montreal and Indal, a subsidiary of Hindalco Industries which is an affiliate of the Aditya Birla Indian conglomerate);

(iv) In Lanjigarh (Orissa) where the Dongria Kondh Adivasis are up against British global mining giant, Vedanta’s (owned by London-based billionaire Anil Agarwal) open-cast bauxite mining venture in the Niyamgiri hills (of religious significance to the Dongrias), a company described by mining expert Roger Moody (cited in Chicaiza, 2009: 15) as ‘the world’s most damaging mining company’ given its use of ‘deception, lies, breaches of faith and violation of regulations over the past five years’;

(v) In Kalinganagar (Orissa) or the steel hub of Orissa, where Adivasis and Dalits (through the Visthapan Virodhi Jana Manch) have been protesting a proposed steel plant by Tata as part of a much wider process of acquisition by the Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation of Orissa (IDCO);

(vi) And similarly, at an Orissa state level, betel leaf farmers and the POSCO Pratirodha Manch (engaging Adivasis and Dalits) are holding up a US$12 billion project by South Korean steel giant, Pohang Steel Corporation (POSCO) that has signed Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with the state government to exploit the best coal and iron ore of the state for export markets for a period of 30 years.

**Lok Adhikar Manch (LAM), Orissa and SSM Post-Mortems of Development**

What are the perspectives of SSMs/struggles on development in India today, given that the context of development-displacement and dispossession is so real for subalterns as directly affected groups? Where and how do subalterns see themselves vis-à-vis this developmental scenario? What is the subaltern analysis and critique of what is transpiring? What are some of the possible responses and what does current subaltern politics entail? What do subalterns hope to achieve through SSM activism? LAM participants provide us with some insight in relation to these questions that are of political-practical and theoretical import when it comes to addressing development and movement politics today, and more specifically as these relate to the invasion of capital – locally, nationally and on a global scale.

We, the people’s movements present here representing people’s struggles from South and coastal Orissa have discussed and debated our issues and are hereby resolved to stand as a broad-based platform known as Lok Adhikar Manch (LAM) in support of the following manifesto [people’s statement]:

#1. We are communities dependent on natural resources like land, forest and water, which are more than resources for us – our life system depends on them. Our way of life, beliefs, knowledge and values have historically and as it is today revolve around our natural surroundings. More than at any other point of time in our lives as traditional communities, today we feel pressurized and pushed hard to give up our ways and systems and give way to unjust intrusions by commercial, political and religious interests for their development and domination [shemano koro prabhavo abom unathi]. We have been made to sacrifice, we
have been thrown out throughout history by these dominant groups and forces for their own comfort and for extending their way of life while we have been made slaves, servants and subordinates [tōhalōko]. Our natural systems have taught us that each of us is important, each of our communities are important and we are an integrated part of the natural order we live in. At this critical juncture, we resolve to work together to protect ourselves, our interests, our natural bases [prakrutik adhar] and fight against any unjust appropriation of our natural habitations by commercial and state developmental interests. The manner in which industrialization is taking place [especially mining and dam projects], displacing the sons and daughters of the soil, destroying our resource and life base, we collectively oppose it and resolve to stand together to oppose it in the future. We have nothing to gain from liberalization [mukto bojaro], privatization [ghoroi korono] and globalization [jagothi korono], which are talked about today. We want to live the way we know how to live among our forests, streams, hills and mountains and water bodies with our culture, traditions and whatever that is good in our society intact. We want to define change and development for ourselves [amo unathi abom parivarthanoro songhya ame nirupono koribako chaho]. We are nature’s friends [prakruthi bandhu], so our main concern is preserving nature and enhancing its influence in our lives. (LAM Statement, field notes, April 2009)

The above statement, adopted as part of LAM’s People’s Manifesto suggests that development is understood as a process of exploitation (of nature), dispossession of subalterns who are the friends of/close to nature (prakruthi bandhu) and assimilation of subalterns (being pressured to give up their ways). Or, it implies that subalterns are simply seen as being in the way of development and therefore deemed expendable (burnable communities) – development as a process of extermination (physical and cultural). As one Dalit leader at the gathering put it:

We are gathered today as Adivasi, Dalit and peasant and fisher folk, as people of nature and as natural resource-dependent communities. We are also burnable [expendable] communities and by this we mean, we, the Dalit, the Adivasi, the farmer and the fisherman are always forced to give up whatever we have, suffer and sacrifice for the sake of what they call development. Why should the government develop this country at the cost of our way of life? The government and the industrialists accuse us of being obstacles in the process of development and as enemies of modernization, enemies of progress and enemies of Indian society – what they mean by this is that we are in the way of their process of exploitation of natural resources for this development. With the help of the big companies and industrialists and multinationals, the state and central governments want to continue to exploit our natural resources to the maximum and we know what this means for us. (Field notes, April 2009)

Subalterity is embraced to the extent that there is an attempt to define a ‘common identity’ across the included social groupings that is defined/linking by a sense of ‘ecological ethnicity’ (prakruthi bandhu), the ‘difference’ from moderns (as the enemies of progress and the ‘burnable’), a common experience with relations of subordination (development-displacement, dispossession, cultural assimilation and/or extermination – being turned to dust – talitalanth) and the claim to being ‘root peoples’ (mulo nivasi). Antithetically speaking, the state, corporates (trans/national), upper classes and castes (ucho-barga) and urbanites (often referred to as ‘developer-outsiders and Oriyas’) are assessed as social groups and specific actors that are perpetrating development against the subaltern through, for instance, a strategy of encroachment, stampeding and deliberate creation of inequality and disunity. However, LAM aims to resist, protect and persist in their relations with nature and decide on what development and change mean from their point of view, as opposed to having it imposed on them from without in this manner.

We are the mulo nivasi [root people and the people who dominate us, as history has taught us, came here 5000 years ago … Today the sarkar [government] is doing a great injustice [anyayo durniti]… and the
way they have framed laws around land-holding and distribution, we the poor are being squashed and stamped into each other’s space and are getting suffocated [dalachatta hoi santholito ho chonti]. This creation of inequality [tara tomyo] is so widespread and so true … we see it in our lives. They tell us they want to make machines and industries for themselves. To do this they are doing forcible encroachment of our land – they are all over our hills and stones … we have become silent spectators [niravre dekhuchu] to a repeated snatching away of our resources … whenever we have asserted our land rights, we have been warned by the upper castes, their politician friends and the wealthy and have faced innumerable threats and retaliations. The ucho-barga [dominant castes and classes] will work to divide and have us fight each other till we are reduced to dust [talitalanth]. (Kondh Adivasi leader, interview notes, January 2007)

In addition to the above references to physical and cultural extermination of burnable/expendable communities who are in the way of development and being reduced to dust, development (and specific agents of development) is being described as a colonizing and racist project built upon a foundation of ethno-cultural chauvinism (of the developers = outsiders = Oriyas), caste-class superiority and urban colonial prejudices aimed at subalterity and the subaltern meaning/ways of life; a coloniality of power (development as exploitation, assimilation and extermination of subalterns) that is not just a personal expression (from developer to subaltern) but one that is systematic and deliberate (several quotes shared above illustrate this possibility, as do the following quotes) in terms of its political-economic and socio-cultural trajectories as experienced by the subaltern (see Das and Poole, 2004).

We fought the British thinking that we will be equal in the independent India. (Kondh elder, interview notes, January 2007)

The sarkar [government] and their workers think that we Adivasis do not know anything and we are good for nothing, that we are weak and powerless and will not question them if they treat us unjustly. That is why they think that they do not need to ask us anything before going ahead. That is why they think they can put their pressure on us [shakti a bong prayogo karanti]. To the government we are of no significance [sarkar amar prathi heyogyano karuchi]. They are selling our forests, our water and land and maybe they will sell us also. (Adivasi woman leader, interview notes, February 2007)

They have the power of dhana [wealth] and astro-shastro [armaments]. They have the power of kruthrima ain [artificial laws and rules] – they created these laws just to maintain their own interests … and where we live, they call this area adhusith [Adivasi-Dalit infested, as in ‘pest-infestation’] … we are condemned to the life of the ananta paapi [eternal sinners], as colonkitha [dirty/black/stained], as ghruniya [despised and hated]. (Dalit leader, interview notes, February 2007)

Development is also alluded to as violence, that is, as a process involving the physical/material destruction of nature and dispossession of subalterns, or what Shiv Vishvanathan has referred to as development triage (Vishvanathan, 1987) (for similar contemporary analyses see e.g. Escobar, 2004; Kothari and Harcourt, 2004; Kapoor and Shizha, 2010; Menon and Nigam, 2007; Nandy, 2008; Oliver-Smith, 2010; Palit, 2009; Rajagopal, 2003). For example, almost without exception, every struggle referenced earlier, from Singur to Kashipur and Kalinganagar, has involved the use of state-corporate violence against Adivasis-Dalits (Gerber’s findings on resistance to Industrial Tree Plantations in the Global South finds official physical violence in 50 per cent of the cases studied (Gerber, 2010: 33)) who have been killed while protesting, as has been attested to by statements made by various LAM participants:
We have people here from Maikanch who know how the state police always act for the industrialists and their friends in government who want to see bauxite mines go forward in Kashipur against our wishes, even if it meant shooting three of our brothers; we have people here from Kalinganagar where Dalits and Adivasis are opposing the Tata steel plant and there too, 13 of us were gunned down by police … many people have been killed by the state and industrialist mafias. (Field notes, April 2009)

Development also inflicts and relies upon cultural violence including forced assimilation and extermination of subaltern ways – a dispossession of meaning, as has already been alluded to. Both, physical and cultural processes rely on violence from without as, for example, propagated by the state and corporate informants/goons (dalaals) and through the deliberate stoking and active promotion of division, discord and disunity among subalterns by these agents of development and caste-class interests.

There is communal conflict around land and forests because the political powers, in order to keep their control and access to these vital resources, are promoting division and hatred among the communities [Domb, Kondh and Saora]. Our communities once had equal access to land and forests, which today have been controlled using outside methods of the sarkar [government] and the vyaparis [business classes] and upper caste [Brahmins]. They want to perpetuate their ways and ideas among us and always keep us divided. We are all garib sreni [poor classes] and land and forest are vital for our survival. And if they succeed in controlling them, they also end up controlling our lives. As has been the case over the ages, they want us to live in disharmony and difference so that they can be the shashaks [rulers] all the time. (Adivasi elder, interview notes, February 2007)

Recognizing these attempts to divide and rule, LAM partners have always emphasized the need to consciously address difference and maintain unity (ektha) (development of communal harmony is a movement objective in itself – see Table 1) between various subaltern groups. They are fully aware of exploitable differences among subaltern communities and work to address these in the light of divisive tactics employed by these caste-class outsiders.

The consequences of development-dispossession are only too apparent to LAM participants. Capitalist development and the ’unfreedom’ of the social relations of capital (market disciplining) are understood not just in Marxist terms as the ‘unfreedom of labor’ (in capitalist modes of production) (Brass, 2007a: 606) but also as unfreedom in relation to the likelihood of becoming lost peoples, both in terms of dispossession in relation to modes of meaning-making/living and in a physical sense, as DDPs (Development Displaced People – an official euphemism for dispossession) freed from the commons but cut adrift as forced migrants. This is clearly a point of much significance to subalterns but one that is dismissed by some Marxist scholars as a form of primitive conservatism; a dismissal not dissimilar to the colonial disregard for ‘primitives’. Taken together, this constitutes an arguably more profound subaltern analysis of what it means/might mean to be shackled by capital and modern existence rationalities. This is not unlike Da Costa’s (2007: 292) observation that David Harvey’s (2003) preoccupation with ‘expanded reproduction’ and ‘accumulation by dispossession’ ignores the serious consideration of ‘dispossessions of meaning as a core struggle uniting critiques of development’ which subaltern participants in LAM address in no uncertain terms.

It is time we seriously start to think about this destruction in the name of development … otherwise, like yesterday’s children of nature, who never depended upon anybody for their food security, we will have no option but to go for mass transition from self-sufficient cultivators and forest and fish gatherers to migratory laborers in far away places. After displacement we stand to lose our traditions, our culture and own historical civilization … from known communities we become scattered unknown people thrown into the darkness to wander about in an unknown world of uncertainty and insecurity. (Adivasi leader, field notes, April 2009)
Who wants to go to join the Oriyas and do business and open shops and be shahari [city folk/moderns] if they make you labor like donkeys for one meal? Even if they teach us, we do not want to go to the cities – these are not the ways of the Adivasi. We cannot leave our forests [ame jangale chari paribo nahi]. The forest is our second home [after the huts]. There is no distance between our homes and the forest. You just come out and you have everything you need … My friends, we are from the forest – that is why we use the small sticks of the karanja tree to brush our teeth – not toothbrushes. Our relationship with the forest is like a finger is to flesh [nakho koo mangsho] – we cannot be separated. The past is the present and the present is the past and they are the future, past and present. We are as we are, we are as we have been and we will be as we are and have been. That is why we are Adivasi. (Adivasi elder, interview notes, January 2007)

The sentiments expressed here resonate with notes from Amita Baviskar’s (In the Belly of the River) diaries, where she describes and quotes Khajan, an Adivasi sarpanch (elected head of local government) whose village and fields were submerged by the Sardar Sarovar dam (Narmada dam project):

On the phone, Khajan’s voice is hesitant, blurred with tears. He manages a couple of halting sentences: Amita, maari zingi doob gayi … Maara keton ma boot phirtali [My life has drowned … a boat now sails over my fields] … He had come to Sondwa, the Block HQ, to collect the wheat and rice sanctioned by the DC as ‘relief’. The meager amounts allotted per household will barely last them a couple of months. Beyond that, if the government thinks of them at all, it probably expects them to fight starvation in the time-honored way – through migration. … The bazarias [people of the town] have always despised and feared adivasis like Khajan who were key members of the Andolan [movement], and whose collective mobilization over a 20-year period forced them to change their practices – offer respect and fairer treatment, better prices and wages. These adivasis are now once again at the bazarias mercy. There is ignominy in pleading for a few quintals of grain from a state you once challenged and officials lose no opportunity to make the experience as humiliating as they can. (Baviskar, 2010: 79)

SSM Articulations on Development and the Prospects for Radical Political Praxis

LAM’s analytical perspectives on development and the agents of development are instructive for political praxis and for those who seek to theorize such engagements. Listening to the subaltern, not as infallible communities but definitely as communities facing an unparalleled existential crisis and who are unfortunately more than qualified by virtue of direct experiences with colonial oppression (through time and in terms of magnitude), is revealing.

LAM makes it abundantly clear, for instance, that the movement in relation to ‘development’ is a struggle to maintain subaltern ways as friends of nature and this means addressing cultural (‘our ways’) and material (‘our struggle is around khadyo/food, jamin/land, jalo/water, jangalo/jungle and ektha/unity land, water and forests’ – Adivasi participant, interview notes, February 2007) colonizations by the forces and agents of development and modernization. The struggle is in relation to imperialism (advanced capitalism and accumulation by dispossession – primarily political-economic processes associated with ‘development’ as capitalist colonization of subaltern spaces) and colonialism (imperialism and the dispossession of meanings/ways of subaltern life through, for instance, a systematic deployment of caste-race and ethnic-chauvinist impositions consistent with similar chauvinisms promoted by modernization theorists of development keen to discipline subalterns into psycho-social dispositions deemed necessary for entrepreneurial market orientations consistent with modernization/modern peoples).
According to Tom Brass and a few other political-sociological analysts of peasant movements, these are ‘anti-Marxist new populist postmodernist movements’ (Brass, 2007a: 584; Das, 2007: 364) or the bearers of ‘weak weapons’ (Brass, 2007b: 111, a cynical take on James Scott’s conception of Weapons of the Weak (Scott, 1985)), that is politically impotent movement formations. It is suggested that these are agents of a localized/truncated political action that does not seek to capture the bourgeois state towards revolutionary ends (overthrow of capital); movements that are satisfied with a politics of localism and that do little to transform global/national capitalist property relations (hence the additional accusation of conservatism as opposed to radical activism).

The ‘anti-Marxist’ allegation (contrary to how those who fashion this label understand it in relation to the postmodern accusation) rings true to the extent that LAM’s politics is apparently aimed at the colonial projects of both Marxist and capitalist modernizations/development as industrial projects which exploit nature and subalterns/ways (e.g. refer to the point on ‘unfreedom’ as understood by Marxists as opposed to subaltern conceptions of the same). For instance, in West Bengal (as previously alluded to) Left Front actions have instigated an ‘anti-Left’ subaltern response but then again, these Left-colonizations of subalterns will not go unanswered, as is the case with neoliberalism today or British colonization in the past. Such struggles are possibly partially and perhaps unintentionally in keeping with an autonomist strain of Marxist thinking where it is ‘the concentration of political and economic power that has to be combated, whether this power be in the hands of the capitalist class of “representatives” of the working class itself such as trade union leadership or communist party bosses’ (Tormey, 2004: 116). In fact, it is even plausible to surmise based on this research into LAM’s politics that there are partial but significant areas of political convergence/overlap between a Marxist project and certain subaltern political projects vis-à-vis capital (in/direct associations) that has encouraged the formation of a nascent Gramscian historic block and a counter-hegemonic anti-capitalist politics (as is perhaps being demonstrated, with mixed results, in the Latin American context – see Petras and Veltmeyer, 2007), which are feasible developments provided Marxists are prepared to acknowledge their complicity in perpetuating colonial relations of subordination and/or subaltern political projects on their own terms. Such ground realities and prospects are not entirely consistent with the ‘anti-Marxist’ label being used to describe the trans-local politics of SSMs like LAM.

The suggestion that subaltern political projects (which primarily seem to be located outside, beside and/or against moderns/modernization thereby lending some credence to Partha Chatterjee’s (2001) observation regarding ‘political society’ as the space of subalterity – my addition; see Kapoor 2009b, 2009d – in contra-distinction to civil society) which do have ‘a defined political project’ and ‘direct-experience with daily exploitation/unfreedom and response/resistance’ of very real import, can be simply conflated with a postmodern politics of the comfortable (who are still very much located in/around modernity, albeit at odds with it in ways that are not consistent with dominant subaltern conceptions of the same), is a form of theoretico-political mischief that is complicit in perpetuating a destructive left-cannibalism. SSMs and trans-local alliances like LAM are clearly defined by and are cognizant of some very tangible political markers potentially differentiating them from a relatively non-descriptive politics of post-modernism:

(a) a political project that seeks to address the ongoing project of the colonization of nature and subalterns;

(b) identifiable social groups and actors/agents as per a general definition of subalterns (see definition/note 1 and descriptions of groups engaged with LAM in Table 1);
(c) a subaltern collective political consciousness (e.g. prakruthi bandhu and a perspective/motivation that draws from the common experience of being DDPs) and a project which clearly recognizes colonizing agents of the corporatized state, trans/national corporations (and the reproduction of market forces and interests), civil society elements (e.g. mainly welfare/charity NGOs and those engaged in the depoliticization of SSMs/direct action), caste-class outsiders/groups and their interests, and so on, as those who perpetuate colonial control;

(d) a subaltern political-economic-cultural analysis of colonization and poverty, exploitation, domination and the nature of response/resistance which directly informs (praxis) attempts to influence, shape, re-construct/affect and capture elements of the state to meet their own ends (e.g. pressure to define and protect 5th Schedule provisions for Adivasi-Dalit communities in Scheduled/forested areas or to ensure enforcement pertaining to the coastal regulation zones that prevented corporate shrimp farming operations in South Orissa from decimating fisher peoples) in ways that are expected, will produce the necessary structural conditions for decolonization;

(e) SSM praxis is tempered by a realistic appraisal of the social structures of containment (the power of the state-market-civil society nexus and of caste-class interests and ruling relations) based on assessments derived from concrete experience with exploitation (e.g. market/economic violence and state violence/use of force) and response/resistances – given the mostly David and Goliath status of these encounters, SSMs have scaled up their action through the likes of the LAM (trans-local alliances) to reproduce a necessary critical mass, while still attempting to maintain a sense of rootedness/place by including subaltern groups facing similar issues and who are from the state of Orissa;

(f) SSMs in LAM are aware of the dangers of disunity and more importantly, of the external (e.g. caste-class interests) and internal (e.g. gender relations) social vectors which destroy communal harmony and ektha (solidarity and sense of community) (see Table 1 and the focus on communal harmony); and finally,

(g) these are political projects that experience real gains in relation to SSM objectives, including (intentionally or otherwise) the roll back, disruption and weakening of the projects of capital (e.g. ALCAN of Montreal divested from the Kashipur mining venture as did Norsk-Hydro before it, partially due to the PSSP-led movement activism in Kashipur; the ADEA has successfully reclaimed over 7000 acres of land for cultivation and consumption by Adivasis and Dalits in some 120 villages; SSM activism is directly responsible for raising the business risk ratings for direct investment in Orissa for trans/national corporations as per World Bank forecasts/assessments of investment climates).

While the significance of SSMs and subaltern activism is apparently self-evident to subalterns on their terms, these movement formations are also indispensable whether as a component of counter-hegemonic (e.g. subaltern forest–rural–peasant–worker partnerships) coalitions and/or as an anti-hegemonic politics that resists, erodes, blocks (is in the way of) and precludes the reproduction of capital through struggles in and around the fields, forests and water bodies targeted by/for modern development (Gerber’s study, referenced earlier in this paper, on resistance to Industrial Tree Plantations in the Global South also states that popular struggles have been successful in interrupting/stopping projects in a fifth of the cases examined). To interrupt, let alone replace capital (Sklair, 2002), is a project that requires multiple forms of penetration, and judging from the duplicity and even complicity of ‘Marxist projects’ (e.g. West Bengal and recently, Kerala in India) and their tendency towards being ‘incorporated into the project of capital’ or of agrarian movements which do the same for that matter (see Petras and Veltmeyer (2007: 397) on
Bolivia and the weak attempt to introduce ‘non-capitalist projects’), questioning the efficacy/political im/potence of subaltern political projects in terms of their alleged failure/inability to address capital is ironic to say the least and is of little value in relation to the political engagements against capital. Tormey (2004: 116) is instructive on this count when he posits the need for more ‘open accounts of how resistance to capitalism arise, and thus to a less doctrinaire account of who as well as what can be considered “progressive” from the point of view of developing an anti-capitalist stance’. What is more, when, from a subaltern standpoint, it becomes hard to see the distinction between a left politics and neoliberalism (as in the case of contemporary West Bengal), perhaps the label ‘anti-Marxist new postmodern populism’ (Brass, 2007a: 584; Das, 2007: 364) could also apply to such professed Marxist-neoliberalisms and not just left-populisms which purportedly fail on the same count.

In the end, SSM politics is and will continue to be of wider significance given the sustained contributions to the struggles against colonial projects and given how indispensable SSMs have become in correcting the colonial trajectory of dogmatic socialisms and the more conspicuous impositions of a neoliberal regime. In Walter Mignolo’s terms (2000: 202) (and perhaps some LAM participants would concur),

Modernity cannot be understood without coloniality; coloniality cannot be understood without modernity … The civilizing process is the triumphant march of the human species, of a variety of civilizing processes, and not just the spread of European/Western civilizations under the banner of progress, civility and development.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this paper has relied on participatory critical-interpretive research pertaining to SSM perspectives on ‘development’ to learn from subaltern critiques of the development project (and the globalization of capital) to amplify critical positions/analysis shared by a subaltern movement politics (LAM) in India. Critical reflections pertaining to certain Marxist dismissals of SSM formations and related im/probabilities for a radical/political praxis were discussed, while pointing to possible convergences and divergences between SSM and Marxist political projects vis-a-vis radical engagements with capital.

SSMs are likely to continue to proliferate in India given the demise of the party-political left formations in the 2009 elections that acted as partial conduits for addressing SSM suffocation/aspiration in formal institutional spaces and because, as Sudipta Kaviraj (1996) notes, the Indian state is faced with the prospect of proletarianization of rural populations (through primitive accumulation, displacement and dispossession) and the disciplining of the working class into the new regimes of trans/national capital (accelerated development) while simultaneously attempting to establish its democratic credentials. That is, unlike in the West where capitalist industrialization stabilized itself before facing democratic demands, India is having to deal with the compulsions of democracy and human rights while enforcing a capitalist transformation, thereby creating an opportunity structure for movements (including SSMs) in/directly seeking to address the rule of capital.

The escalating decibel level of SSM challenges to compulsory modernization (colonization), state socialist and/or corporatist state–market–civil society penetrations will, at minimum, continue to expose the dominant tendency to construct the response to rural/forest dislocations and dispossession in liberal terms, that is, terms that are focused on addressing the individual dislocated person, or as Menon and Nigam (2007: 72–73) express it:
There is no understanding of communities as the subjects of dislocation or ways of life that are destroyed. There is an abyss of incomprehension on the part of the Indian elites toward rural and tribal communities. Ripping them out from lands that they have occupied for generations and transplanting them overnight into an alien setting (which is the best they can expect) is understood as rehabilitation and liberation from their backward ways of life.

Given this scenario, activist-academic Chittaroopa Palit’s observation perhaps resonates with LAM’s politics of the people, ‘Thus, the ultimate challenge is to resist the processes that legitimize displacement and the dispossession of the poor and marginalized. This is what groups scattered all over the country – women, fisherfolk, adivasis and others – are doing’ (Palit, 2009: 294).

Notes
1. A term first coined by Antonio Gramsci to refer to peasants and laboring poor/common people and a subaltern common sense (a possible basis for a unifying peasant political consciousness) in Italy. It is being used here, bearing in mind that this is an Indian conception of the subaltern, with its related ambiguities (Guha cited in Ludden, 2005), in a sense that is not identical to the prior Gramscian formulation/activation, to refer to the rural landless poor (migrant (under-)employed labour), poor (small-scale) peasants, pastoralists/nomads, Adivasis (original dwellers/tribals in official terminology), Dalits (‘untouchable’ castes), Other Backward Castes (OBCs) and Development Displaced Peoples (DDPs), specifically from these categories, and including women in any of these groupings. Similarly, many of these social groups could also be defined by their socio-cultural location as ‘ecological ethnicities’ (Parajuli 1990) or what the LAM statement refers to as ‘traditional communities’ and ‘nature’s friends’ (prakruthi bandhu). Subalterity is also understood here as the dialectics of super-ordination and subordination (between these groups and class, caste, gender, urban and/or ethically dominant groups sometimes embedded in and across multiple modes of production) in global and national hierarchical social relations of exploitation (including but not restricted to those that reproduce capitalist property relations).
3. The author acknowledges the assistance of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) for this research into ‘Learning in Adivasi (original dweller) social movements in India’ through a Standard Research Grant (2006–2009). Reflections and grounded discussions in this paper are both informed by this research.
4. These Left projects are, of course, conveniently disowned and dismissed by some Marxist academics as ‘reformist’ and ‘uninterested in the introduction of socialism’ – see Tom Brass’ (2007a: 606) comments on the agenda/politics of the CPI and CPM in India.
5. For Marxist objections to this conceptualization, see Tom Brass (2007a: 603–611). My usage here is not in relation to subalterns and citizenship (Gyanendra Pandey’s pre-occupation ably critiqued by Brass) but more in keeping with the notion expressed by SSMs and LAM of being outside, beside and against state-market-civil society spaces/actors given SSM preoccupations with colonization.

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