



the next major world power, the country is set to overtake China in terms of economic development. This meteoric progress is mainly due to India's ability to generate wealth through its own resources. India has one of the largest reserves of iron ore on the planet and is one of the top five exporters.

"Development is the right of every nation and every individual," says Chandra Bhushan of the Centre for Science and Environment. "The issue is how do we exploit our minerals and ensure that the people who live on the land benefit from that?"

According to Professor Kalele, retired professor of economics from Ravi Shankar university, Raipur, "Deforestation isn't the only way the Adivasi are losing out. When an iron ore plant is built, so are dams to provide it with water. The waste pollutes the air and land for miles around".

### **Competition for resources**

In the murky shadows of the looming Siltara Steel plant, Khamman lives with his wife and young son. They belong to the Manghi or "boatmen" tribe. "The days before the factory came were the golden days for me" he says. "But now, we have no water, the stream went black and all the fish died. The fish were our food and my living".

Chanda Bhushan says: "The main problem is space. Our population density is three times that of China so, of course, there are competing uses of and needs for the land. The issue is the mechanisms you have in place to resolve conflicts when they arise."

In Chhattisgarh, the failure to manage this delicate balance has had dire consequences. A brutal and bloody civil war is now raging as Naxalites - Maoist communists - fight the state for land from which they claim the Adivasi have been forcibly alienated. As displacement continues, the situation is set to get worse.

In the early 1980s the Indian state began to address the issue. Since colonial times the Adivasi and their way of life have paid a high price for industrialisation. While The Forest (Conservation) Act of 1980 enshrined in law the right for Adivasi to be relocated when alienated from their land, it was rarely if ever enforced.

The Forest Rights Act 2006 sought to redress this. Hailed as the "Second Independence" by some of the pressure groups who fought for its implementation, the act acknowledges for the first time the "historic injustice" done to the tribal and forest-dwelling communities. It creates "Gram Sabha" - democratic village structures - and imposes a period of consultation before any lands can be taken.

"The Forest Rights Act enshrines all the rights the Adivasi need," says professor Kalili, "but the political will to enforce it simply does not exist. These people don't even have a concept of land ownership in the way that the elite do. How can they possibly enter into consultation on an equal footing?"

Savitri Sharma is the India director of Find Your Feet, a UK-based NGO seeking to empower India's rural poor. "We need to educate the Adivasi to retain their customary rights," she says. "We need to support them to ensure the policies that so far exist only on paper become a reality; and that the Forest Act brings meaningful benefits to their communities."

However, none of this would help Khamman. The boatmen were missed off the list of Scheduled Tribes and no one knows why. This means that even if the rights under the act were implemented, they wouldn't apply to him.

"There is a village just over there," he tells me, "where someone built a factory. The men of the village found the owner and killed him. It feels like the only option we have left".

Sharma says this is "the chilling side of deforestation. People are dying. People on both sides are getting killed".

"I see a very dark future for the Adivasi," adds Kalili. "In this crazy land-grab for minerals, we are destroying a people and their culture. Yes, we need to develop, but we

need to do so within the law and within the realms of humanity."

Sharma tries to introduce Sumira to the concept of land ownership and deforestation.

"What would you do if someone cut down your tree?" she asks, pointing to the grand Banyan. Sumira laughs heartily and her sparkling face slowly changes as she realises the question is serious.

"I would kill them" she says gravely. "There would be a war."

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