

# Neoliberal Regime of Land Grabbing: A Study of Bhubaneswar

SUCHISMITA SATPATHY\*

## ABSTRACT

*Unprecedented urban growth in India is affecting urban land use and land distribution extensively. This article examines the effect of neoliberal policies and processes – namely accumulation, dispossession, conversion and annexation, on urban land use in Bhubaneswar. Indian government's smart city drive to control unplanned urban growth is also tampering with existing urban land use. Under this backdrop, the author first argues that the ultimate outcome of all this is land grabbing. Further examination also reveals that the existing theoretical perspectives offer only a partial understanding of the land grabbing process, with respect to Bhubaneswar. Complementing the theoretical gap, the use of 'regimes of dispossession' as a concept helps us to compare and critically interrogate the specific economic purposes that the state, at any given time, seeks to legitimise 'development'.*

**Keywords:** *Smart City, Neoliberal Policies, Urban Space, Dispossession, Land Grabbing*

## INTRODUCTION

Unprecedented urban growth in India is affecting urban land use and land distribution extensively at times leading to large scale urban land grabbing. Borras and Franco (2011) describe land grabbing as the 'catch-all phrase to refer to the current explosion of (trans)national commercial land transactions mainly revolving around the production and export of food, animal feed, biofuels, timber, and minerals.' There are number of studies available globally that examine the land grabbing in different parts of the world veiled under neoliberal policies. Ruling elite factions happily employ certain neoliberal reforms, such as removing investment regulations, capital restrictions, and state functions in Mozambique (Wittmeyer 2012; Kay 2015). Similar trend is described as agro-extractivism by Bernardo Mançano Fernandes (2019)

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\*Assistant Professor, BITS Pilani Hyderabad Campus, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Email: suchi@hyderabad.bits-pilani.ac.in

identified as one of the components of the neoliberal agrarian question in Brazil. Agro-extractivism means building territorial policies to free lands for national and international corporations to produce large scale commodities for export. The history of neoliberal policymaking in Africa has so far been widely considered atrocious according to Harrison (2005) but the global financial crisis seems to have compelled a global shift away from the neoliberal Washington Consensus that was promoted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank during the 1980s and 1990s. The policies with state capitalism paired with regulation or restrictions on investment and the financial sector are more preferred. Thus, neoliberal economic policies and private construction projects on dispossessed land are responsible for contentious land wars and inequitable development in rural India (Levien 2015). In Africa, the perceptions of abundant cheap land, few overhead costs, and little government regulation have led to many ambitious and controversial deals or land grabs. Similarly in Indian cities like Bhubaneswar, while certain high-profile acquisitions like Vedanta university project have failed, these blunders have not short-circuited the approval of hundreds of other projects in this city.

Liberalisation of the economy has resulted in specific changes in the way cities are governed (Purcell 2002; Plyushteva 2009). While the Indian state dispossessed land for public sector industry and infrastructure for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the adoption of neoliberal economic policies since the early 90's prompted India's state governments to become the brokers for private real estate capital for the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) (Levien 2018). With adoption of liberalisation policy in India, since the early 1990s, along with the governance system, the land use pattern in Bhubaneswar in the state of Odisha has changed significantly. Modern Bhubaneswar, the administrative headquarters of Odisha, was conceived during the late 1940s as a town of sixteen square kilometres for forty thousand people, located near the villages in the old temple town of Bhubaneswar. Gradually, the city annexed the surrounding open spaces and forest areas, its physical area expanding to 450 square kilometres by 2011. The city has also experienced exponential population growth, accommodating 8,40,000 people as per the census of 2011. It became a municipal corporation in 1994, a development that brought with it, changes in land, housing and building by-laws. Like other cities, land distribution and improvement practices have been subject to continuous bureaucratic and political interventions, affecting the land use pattern (Lin 2015). To add to these developments, under the Government of India's smart city initiative, Bhubaneswar was identified as one of the first cities to be brought under the Smart Cities Mission in 2015. Bhubaneswar competed with other Indian cities to grab the

one thousand crore rupees of central funding by demonstrating that it was equipped with adequate expertise, technology and participatory local governance to implement the smart city project. The smart city project especially targets the land use pattern by promoting mixed land use in area-based developments; planning for 'unplanned areas' containing a range of compatible activities and land uses close or related to one another in order to make land use more efficient. The states implementing the smart city project are bound to enable some flexibility in land use and building bye-laws in order to adapt to change, expand housing opportunities for all, create pedestrian-friendly localities, reduce congestion, air pollution and resource depletion, boost the local economy, promote citizen-administration interactions and ensure security, preserve and develop open spaces such as parks, playgrounds and recreational areas. In order to enhance the quality of life of citizens, the Smart City Project aims to reduce the urban heat effect, and promote a variety of transport options through transit-oriented development, public transport and para-transport connectivity, all these developments combined together increased the value of land in urban space production in the neoliberal market shelving the right to city of urban poor (Nair 2015).

This article examines the effect of neoliberal policies and processes—namely accumulation, dispossession, conversion and annexation, on urban land use in Bhubaneswar. The existing theoretical perspectives, like Marx's theory of use value, or modernist theory, or David Harvey's theory of 'accumulation by dispossession' do discuss the politics behind processes of possession, dispossession, the role of the domestic economy, the role of state capitalism and the changing urban culture. But the analysis of socio-spatial context of drastically changing political economy of land use in Bhubaneswar unfolds the specific modalities of expropriation of urban land under the neoliberal regime in India.

### **Urban Land: Use Value, Exchange Value and the Surplus Value**

'Use value' provides the conceptual underpinning of traditional geographical and sociological treatments of land use problems (Harvey 1973). Use value is essentially tied to the physical properties of the commodity, that is, the material usages to which the object can actually be put, the basic human needs it fulfils. In the capitalist market, exchange value supersedes the use value (El-Barmelgy et al. 2014; Pivo 1984). Exchange value emerges when two commodities are exchanged in the open market because they are always being compared to a third term that functions as their "universal equivalent," money takes the form of that equivalence (Marx 1990). But money masks the real equivalent behind the exchange that is labour. The more labour it

takes to produce a product, the greater its value. The product produced becomes a commodity in the market with exchange value. Land and improvements to land are commodities in the contemporary capitalist economy. It is a kind of unproductive capital that accumulates based on surplus value that is indirectly appropriated from labour. In post-1990 Bhubaneswar, the accumulation of this capital was rampant without any organised resistance.

A patch of land or house may constitute a shelter for one person, a property investment for someone else, or to others a means of storing wealth, proximity to a workplace, a place having high status, a place with congestion, etc. So for different people it will have different use values. When we associate purposes and people with land, use value comes into existence. The most important issue is the purpose for which land is to be used, and which purpose is important to the state, does it want to use it for an IT space or golf course or industry or housing units or keep the land for agriculture? Here arises the need to define dispossession, because the changing land question in urban India revolves around contestations between the purposes for which land is dispossessed. Michael Levien defines dispossession as follows:

I argue that dispossession is fundamentally a social relation of coercive redistribution. While this relationship exists in probably all social formations, it is driven by different forms of accumulation and class interests under different historical phases of capitalism. We can thus think of dispossession as being organised into socially and historically specific regimes. Under different regimes of dispossession, states seek to redistribute resources to different classes (or class fractions) for different economic purposes. Given these purposes and interests, regimes of dispossession have different combinations of means – force, legitimacy, and material concessions – available for making people comply with their dispossession (Levien 2015: 2).

Thus the state has a critical role in the process of dispossession of land. Other than the pan-city model, the other three strategies of the smart city project – retrofitting, redevelopment, and greenfield development – explicitly involve the state's intervention in land use. Yet, neoliberalism emphasises minimal intervention by the state. The neoliberal urban development system, which is based on market-oriented dynamics, can, however only function well when land use decisions are regulated by the state. So land use planning and related institutions are needed to regulate the land and property market. Tuna Tasan-Kok (2012) asks why there has been a transformation from traditionally interventionist land use planning dynamics towards

neoliberal planning dynamics that require more flexible intervention mechanisms. The answer to this question possibly lies in Levien's (2015) idea of regimes of dispossession, where he argues that regimes of dispossession have different combinations of means available for making people comply with their dispossession and transformation from traditionally interventionist land use planning to neoliberal planning dynamics.

Many developments in the last decades have altered Bhubaneswar's land use experiences. One of these has been the contest between 'public' and 'private' uses of land that reflects the allocation of urban land to promote particular types of economic growth. Second, the politics of conversion of land from rural to urban usage in the urban periphery is crucial in land deals. Third, urban land issues are becoming even more important because of the growing demand for land for development projects. To make the situation worse, we have underdeveloped and poorly regulated land markets, ambiguous land rules, misuse/use of 'eminent domain', poor compensation for land acquired for 'public' projects, under-reporting of land values to avoid transaction costs, unabated land conversion in urban sprawl areas, interdepartmental conflicts on jurisdiction over urban land use, etc. A fourth important change relates to several new actors that have emerged in urban India in the post-1990s period, interfering with and influencing land use decisions (Zoomers 2010). They include environmentalists, realtors, IT companies, private banks, international financial consultants, architects, interior designers, Resident Welfare Associations, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), domestic and foreign investors.

As a result of neoliberal political-economic developments, large-scale capital investments are mobilised in the city in the form of property development projects. These large scale capital investors are replacing small scale individual property owners in Bhubaneswar. This development in the property market has divided the urban land and city space into two parts, one dominated by large scale investments, and the other mostly controlled by small scale and individual property owners. While large investments are becoming part of visible formal growth of the city, the small scale individual property investments are forming a part of invisible informality. This invisible informality is surrounded with scepticism in purchase and sale of land at individual level, apprehension of getting cheated and fear of becoming a part of fraudulent land deals.

### **Creation of Private Space**

Bureaucrats and Modernist theorists, believe that land grabbing

is the necessary cost of development. Bhubaneswar paid this cost in its early years, responding to the call of the Nehruvian model of development. The capital city was developed, various classes of housing units, market spaces and roads were designed, and many institutions came up without much opposition. Similarly, smart city project, it claims Bhubaneswar needs infrastructural developments, thus there is growing demand for land for development projects. So dispossession is inevitable. Such an approach to development displays dispossession as inevitable cost and ignores the experiences of the different dispossessed groups (Chuang 2015; Levien 2015; Makki 2014). Politics of representation is also shaped by the concrete questions of who owns, who occupies and who controls the city's public space. The growth of cultural consumption and industries catering to it fuel the city's symbolic economy. People who can afford to pay, can use culturally produced spaces like golf clubs, shopping malls and pubs. The number of such places has increased substantially in Bhubaneswar. Who controls the public space also controls the cultural production and the produced cultures control the cities. Both the processes reinforce each other. But the annexation of public space is becoming an important political issue today, with increasing privatisation of public space, rapid construction of special economic zones (SEZ) (Levien 2011, 2012, 2013). A sector-specific SEZ for IT/ITES (Information Technology Enabled Services) /IBPO (International Business Process Outsourcing) industries near Bhubaneswar (Info Valley) is being developed by the Odisha Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation (IDCO) on 320 acres of land, along with an integrated township of over 180 acres. A dedicated park has been planned for the development of 63.229 acres of land at Andharua near Bhubaneswar and is under transfer to IDCO. A World Trade Centre is being planned by IDCO at Bhubaneswar to promote global networking and give international visibility to the industrial potential of the state. The Industries Department has been requested to facilitate the identification and transfer of suitable government land in and around Bhubaneswar for the establishment of the World Trade Centre. ASIDE (Assistance to States for Development of Export Infrastructure and Allied Activities) funds of Rupees Twelve crore have been allocated for the development of the project. Three SEZs have been started in Bhubaneswar in the last decade: the sector-specific IT/ITes SEZ at Chandaka Industrial Estate in Bhubaneswar (600 acres) developed by IDCO, Info City I (202 acres), and InfoCity II (660 acres). Of the various contesting forms of land uses the major driver of dispossession of land in Bhubaneswar is the IT sector. This clearly hints at the primacy accorded to the creation of IT space by the state, which considers the sector to be the prime mover of the city's economic growth

and this highlights the role of the state as a land broker for creation of private space.

### **Conversion of Land from Rural to Urban: Dispossession and Accumulation**

Urbanisation through dispossession, expansion, reclassification and conversion are various processes experienced in the present pattern of urban growth (Chuang 2015; Bhaduri 2015; Makki 2013). On 18 July 2011, the Bhubaneswar Development Authority's (BDA) jurisdiction was increased from 450 square kilometres to 1,110 square kilometres with the addition of 351 more villages. As per the Vision 2030 document (BDA 2010), a total of 205 villages were under the BDA's jurisdiction in 2010, but after this 2011 notification, Pipili and Delang (in Puri district) were also included under the BDA. The total number of villages under the BDA is now 556. This includes 226 villages added from Khordha and 88 from Puri districts. In view of the dwindling open space in Bhubaneswar, the BDA in February 2012 (BDA -Planning and Building Standards Regulation 2012) banned individual constructions in eco-sensitive zones – Bharatpur in the north-west of the Bhubaneswar Development Plan Area (BDPA) comprising forest areas, and Nandankanan Wildlife Sanctuary in the north of the BDPA.

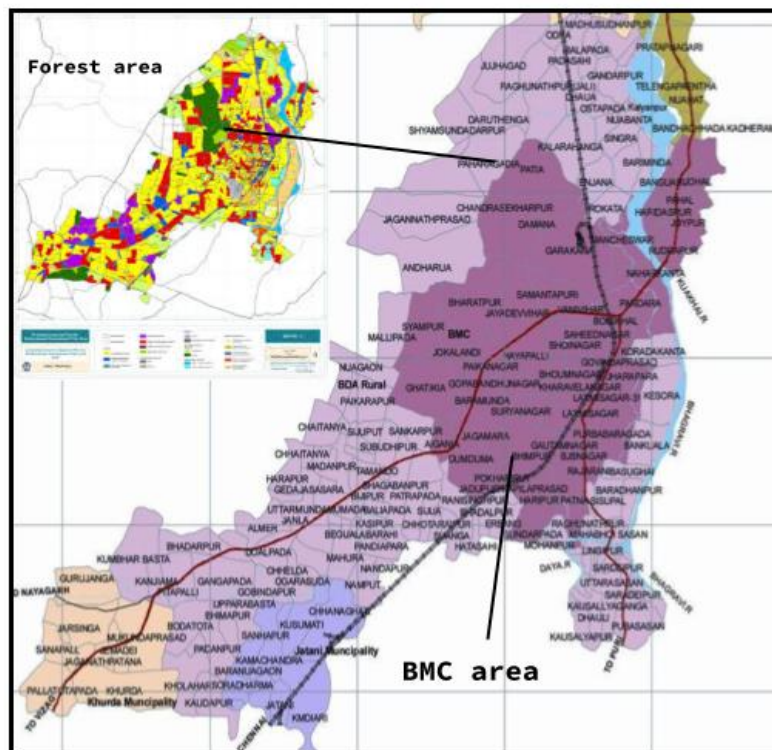
The Odisha government has declared thirteen more spots as eco-sensitive zones. This will permit the construction of five-star hotels, five-star lake resorts, picnic spots, international convention centres, hospitals, food courts and music pavilions, group housing, corporate-type housing with modern technology, theme parks and sports centres in these ecologically sensitive areas around the capital city. Big projects will foster orderly development in these areas, while plotted housing, small industries and small institutions will be completely banned in such areas to avoid messy construction. While this law benefits rich investors, it poses a threat to slum dwellers and tribal communities living in the forest areas surrounding Bhubaneswar.

The expansion of the city is going on at the cost of forest land. The area under the Chandaka-Dampara forest reserve to the north-west of Bhubaneswar is declining as the city expands in this direction. Bhubaneswar has engulfed the Bharatpur reserve forest. The growing cost of land in the city has resulted in the annexation of land in this area by land mafias and realtors. Land parcels bordering the sanctuary from Pathargadia to Jokalandi village, from Baranga to Gurujanga via Mendhasal, Chhatabar, from Baranga to Baanra, and Khurda to Haladia, have been sold out or are for sale. Real estate developers have acquired

a sizable area of land on the periphery and around Baanra. The Forest and Environment Department of the Government of Odisha argues that unless there is an urban limit or municipal limit, the sanctuary's landscape will be drastically affected and the wilderness value will be destroyed (Pattanaik 2010).

There are three slums on the Chandaka-Dampara sanctuary's boundary (See Map 1): Bharatpur, Saliasahi and Harekrushna Basti. The inhabitants of these slums are mainly construction workers. These people make use of water bodies and the biomass on a day-to-day basis. Immigrant labourers from tribal areas like Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar have settled near the Chandaka reserve forest boundary. They have cleared the vegetation, diverted the water channel and changed the land use in this area. Daruthenga village is infamous for illegal distillation units of *mahua* or honey molasses. As these units require huge quantities of firewood, the tribes are grabbing the forest land. The Odisha government has declared the forest area in Bharatpur as a

Map 1. Bhubaneswar Development Plan Area



Source: Vision 2030, IIT Kharagpur.



zone for scientific research, but the emphasis has been on horticultural development and not forest tree development. Expediting the conversion of the land further, the city planners are proposing an alternative road through the forest (Old *Ganjam* Road) as a bypass to the National Highway (NH) to tackle the problem of traffic jams on NH-5. IDCO has identified 736 acres of land at Ramdasapur for a tourism centre. A road running through the sanctuary from Daruthenga to Ramdasapur has been proposed, the development of which will make enforcement of the restriction on public thoroughfare difficult. Aonlapatna near Chandaka has been identified as an IT zone, and IDCO has earmarked 102 acres of land close to the sanctuary boundary for this use. As past experience has shown, this IT park area will encourage investors to develop civic amenities. This buffer zone will, therefore be annexed by the city in the near future, converting green land to brown and then built-up land.

The General Administration Department of the BMC has allotted 464.47 acres of land in the city in 377 cases between 2000 and 2012 to individuals, government offices, government undertakings, and private bodies for hotels, hospitals, educational institutions and NGOs, and 183.44 acres of land were allotted to various NGOs. The process of land allotment in 164 of these 377 cases lacked a defined policy and procedure. Audit scrutiny revealed that though the General Administration Department is leasing out land to IDCO and the BDA for industrial and residential purposes, respectively, these agencies are in turn allotting land to educational institutions, hotels and hospitals. Further, 11.8 acres of land, valued at Rs. 84.21 crore, were occupied by encroachers. The government has not done anything to settle the matter, and the grabbing of land goes on unabated.

The protest against the construction of the Vedanta University is one of the most important resistance movements against land grabbing in Odisha. Vedanta Aluminium submitted a proposal to establish the Vedanta University in 2006 on the Puri-Konark road. According to Mohapatra (2008), this university project is the biggest land grab case in the state of Odisha, surpassing all others. The project demanded 10,000 acres of land for the university, but in its Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), the government assured Vedanta that it would provide 6,000 acres of land. The MoU was signed, and the government committed to conferring university status by an Act of Parliament. It seems the aim of the project was 'to provide world-class education in Odisha, obviously not to the aspiring students of Odisha' (Satpathy 2015). The government had agreed not to interfere in the university's affairs and its jurisdiction. But the government has undertaken to provide concessions in taxes, including value added tax, stamp duty,

entry tax on construction materials, R&D equipment, lab equipment, etc. So the project will entail a loss of Rs 10,000 crore to the state exchequer. This project was suspended only when the masses came onto the streets. While some protestors believed that the university would promote western culture, others were concerned with environmental loss. Some others feared the loss of government control, as land use and zoning within a five kilometre radius of the university boundary could not be determined without consultation with Vedanta University. Yet the government promised a four-lane highway up to the project site; development of both sides of the road from Bhubaneswar to the project site would be under the control of the Odisha government and Vedanta for ensuring planned development. The government even ignored the loss of fertile agricultural land, displacement of thousands from 117 villages with insufficient compensation, water shortage in the surrounding area, submergence of nearby villages with flood water, impediments to the supply of clay pots to the Puri temple, and loss of the livelihoods of thousands of families. The rapid expansion of Bhubaneswar has now touched many villages near the proposed project site. However, as a result of pressure from all sides, the project has been stalled. It reveals that the Vedanta University project is nothing but a real estate deal in disguise and land grabbing in Bhubaneswar today is a political process of state redistribution, and not a functional response to over-accumulation. Dispossession for such projects serves private interests, not the public purpose and its developmental character is open to question.

#### **Land Encroachment: Actors and Policies**

According to the City Development Report (BMC & USAID 2006), the super-cyclone of 1999 changed the socio-economic map of Bhubaneswar, which in turn led to the large-scale proliferation of slums in the city. The decade 1991-2001 witnessed a 78 per cent growth in the slum population because of cyclones and the migration of people from the rural hinterland and other parts of the state, as well as from outside the state in search of employment, particularly in the construction sector. Most of the slums came up on encroached land belonging to the Government of Odisha and the railways; the availability of these vacant, unused lands motivated the migrants to settle here. Owing to the absence of planned economic activities and physical infrastructure, the slum dwellers live in deplorable living conditions. The BMC officials reported in 2006 that there were 250 slums within the BMC limits (BMC & USAID 2006). The 2011 census reports that 20.8 per cent of the total population of Bhubaneswar were slum dwellers. The total slum population in Bhubaneswar according to BMC was more than 308,000,

which constituted more than 37 per cent of the total population. Thus there is no unanimity in data regarding slum population. According to the BMC, there are 377 slums in Bhubaneswar (BMC Website). Of these, 99 are authorised. The highest number of slums emerged in the decade 1980–90, and it was during this period that the city experienced a very high rate of population growth. Slums in Bhubaneswar occupy about 5.3 per cent of the BMC's total area housing 37 per cent of the city's population.

Bhubaneswar Development Authority (BDA) is making efforts to create a slum-free city today under various state-led initiatives. The Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY) action plan makes it mandatory to offer a timeline of activities for achieving a slum-free city but the way RAY house allocation happens, is very problematic. Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, Govt of Odisha found that of the 80 houses constructed for rehabilitation at Mahisakhal under RAY, the beneficiary list includes eight family members of deputy mayor of BMC Mrs. K Shanti, 37 government employees, 14 beneficiaries who already own houses in Bhubaneswar and seven beneficiaries are owners of land.

The pro-poor reforms under JNNURM include: (a) internal earmarking within local body budget funds for basic services to the urban poor and provision of basic services to the urban poor including security of tenure at affordable prices, improved housing, water supply and sanitation; (b) ensuring delivery of other already existing universal services of the government like education, health and social security; and (c) earmarking at least 20-25 per cent of developed land in all housing projects (both public and private agencies) for economically weaker sections or the lower-income group category with a system of cross-subsidisation.

The BDA's Plans and Building Regulation Act, 2008, reserves 10 per cent of all new housing projects for economically weaker sections and low-income groups. As reported in media, D. S. Tripathy, president, Confederation of Real Estate Developers' Association of India (CREDAI), Orissa Chapter, opposes the reservation of 10 per cent in the small scale housing projects, and wants BDA to allow the builders to build houses for lower-income groups and economically weaker sections within a 5-kilometre distance from the project site if there is any difficulty in building those houses on the project site. This suggestion is under the consideration of the BDA, which thinks it will expedite the growth of the city and make Bhubaneswar slum-free. Thus, land reserved for the urban poor in the development plans has actually been used for other purposes. As a result, the informal growth of the city continues unhindered. Of the total 1415 apartments constructed in

the last two decades, 583 are illegally constructed in the sense that they disobeyed the BDA guidelines, even 195 apartments got legal notice of getting demolished in April 2016. So informal housing is becoming a norm in the city.

According to CDP 2010 (Vision 2030), the city's population is expected to be about three million by 2030. To accommodate so many people in the city, an area of 9,286 acres has been earmarked for residential purposes. Of this, 400 acres have been earmarked for a Special Residential Zone (SRZ); the housing projects being developed on this SRZ will enjoy exemption from sales tax and value added tax. This seems to be a very philanthropic step by the planners. Yet, of the total residential area, only 0.043 per cent will be for weaker sections. As mentioned above, the city has a slum population of more than 37 per cent, this allocation of land is not sufficient to solve the problem when the rate of growth of slums is higher than the rate of growth of the city as a whole.

Most of the urban land belongs to the government, but there is a tendency among government officials to use the land for private purposes rather than for public space. The present government has been allocating thousands of acres of land to the ultra-rich, mostly non-*Odias*, and realtors for industrial and commercial hubs. The investors are provided with loans and land at concessional rates to facilitate the growth of Bhubaneswar. While being so generous to the rich, the government is demolishing slum after slum, as if poor people and slum dwellers have no right to earn their livelihood in Bhubaneswar. In January 2008, it demolished several kiosks run by unemployed youth in the slums.

The only people who have never faced any threat of eviction from encroached prime plots in the heart of the city are the milkmen. To ensure the right to a healthy environment for people in cities, the Orissa Assembly had included provisions under the Orissa Municipal Corporation Act, 2003, that cowsheds must be obliterated within the limits of the BMC with immediate effect. But the Orissa Milk Producers Association had moved the Orissa High Court against this new law. It requested the court to allow milk producers to continue plying their trade and to order the government to rehabilitate them in suitable places in the city before eviction. They further informed the court that the previous government had promised them that they would not be evicted from the city, and that they were ready to pay the price for the land they occupied. But the Orissa High Court rejected their plea. So the association appealed to the Supreme Court against the high court order. The Supreme Court, in deciding Civil Appeal No. 940 of 2006 arising

out of SLP (C) Nos 16362–16363 of 2004, made it absolutely clear that the milkmen must be evicted from the limits of the BMC and must not be rehabilitated anywhere in the city and its periphery. The right to the environment being a fundamental right, the court argued that it was the duty of the state to ensure that people had pollution-free surroundings. There is no legal concept that confers a legal right on an encroacher to be rehabilitated. It was further ordered that the milkmen should not even be allowed to put up cowsheds in villages bordering Bhubaneswar. So there was no legal problem at all with regard to the demolition of cowsheds and eviction of milkmen with their herds of cattle to free the city from the stink, flies, mosquitoes and malaria.

But it is surprising that even after this Supreme Court order, the city has a large number of cowsheds. It seems that the milkmen are the most secure encroachers of prime plots in Bhubaneswar (Pattanayak 2010). The question now is how the milkmen managed to secure their space. At present, there are 4,000 fully functional dairies or cowsheds on encroached government plots in the city of Bhubaneswar, from whom the officials concerned collect a bribe of Rs 4,000 per month per milkman through agents. So this is a monthly scam of Rs 16 million. It is an unofficial fee collected for the use of government plots for cowsheds. The milkmen have successfully negotiated with the administrators via informal means, pressurise, bribe and grab their share of city space and ensure their right to the city.

The kinds of bargaining politics and informal means deployed in such instances are beyond the purview of any particular theoretical strand. These are new strategies in the contemporary regimes of dispossession, where contestation is a major part of the land-grabbing process.

### **Increasing Demand of Land for Developmental Projects**

Development projects in Bhubaneswar range from construction of high rise modern apartments to educational institutions. The pattern of conversion of land in Bhubaneswar is similar to the pattern of other Indian cities. The way housing units, office spaces and market spaces are commodified reveals that Lefebvre's idea of selling of the planning ideology perfectly suits the city (Lefebvre 1996), but Harvey's (2010) idea of reshaping the city for the absorption of surplus does not hold true. The way real estate deals are offered by developers to attract buyers is very important in influencing the urban space. What they are putting on sale is not just the housing, but rather urban planning and the urban lifestyle itself.

Other important developments influencing land use are the growth in corporate healthcare and private educational institutions. Though corporate healthcare facilities are targeted at and aim to profit from IT professionals, the new business class and the emerging middle class in the city, they attract many rural poor to the city for earning their livelihood as construction workers, hospital workers, sweepers and other menial workers. These migrants reside in the slums and provide the required 'labour' for the functioning of the so-called 'planned neighbourhoods'. Engineering colleges and private management schools mushroomed in Bhubaneswar after 1998. During 1996–2010, 53 private engineering colleges affiliated to the Biju Pattanaik University of Technology came up in Bhubaneswar (OJEE 2011). A few institutes of national importance, such as the International Institute of Information Technology, the National Institute of Science Education and Research, the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) and Institute of Life Sciences (ILS) have also come up during this decade in the city. There is flow of private capital into the education and health sectors. Dispossession for such projects has involved combined means like material compensation, coercion and normative persuasion. The increasing price of land near the project area acts as material compensation for dispossession to a great extent. In such a situation, dispossession need not require coercive means. However, in Kasnapada near the newly opened IIT Bhubaneswar campus, villagers protested against real estate dealers and did not allow them to construct a road through their village. Often, violent encounters take place between real estate dealers and villagers. Villagers protest mainly because they believe that residential complexes have been constructed on fertile land, destroying thousands of acres of cashew trees and reducing the green cover; the construction of a road would further facilitate this process. They also observed that it was a profitable business for real estate people, who are cheating the illiterate villagers by paying them a very low price for the land and selling it to people outside at higher prices by emphasising the proximity of the location to the capital city.

### **Beyond Municipalism: Incomprehensible Developments in Temple City**

Contemporary land use in Bhubaneswar is also dictated by factors that are not easily accommodated within the neoliberal political economy framework. The caste domination of land ownership testifies this fact. The temple city of Bhubaneswar was traditionally dominated both politically and economically by the *Brahmins* and *Kshatriyas*. The Bhubaneswar chapter of CREDAI has 55 real estate developers as its

members. Out of these, more than 30 are *Brahmins* and *Kshatriyas*, the traditional upper castes with surnames like Mishra, Pattanaik, Mohanty, Rath, Mohapatra and Samantaray. These people still dominate land market transactions even in the city, where the largest part of the land is owned by the state. Even after the creation of the capital city in proximity to it, these communities continue to influence urban land use. Though there is a change in the economy as reflected by the growing investments in the city, the social structure has not witnessed considerable change.

The land encroachment for religious purposes is another proof to this fact. Responding to four writ petitions on the question of whether unauthorised religious structures like temples, *gurudwaras*, mosques and churches can be allowed on public streets or public land in Cuttack – Bhubaneswar’s twin city – the Odisha High Court issued an order in January 2011 to the effect that religious institutions constructed after 1987 that did not find mention in the Record of Rights of 1987, that were constructed on government lands without permission from competent authorities, and that could not be regularised, should be demolished. This order notwithstanding, the construction of temples continues at its own pace, as a result of which on a two-kilometre stretch of road between the Jaydev Vihar flyover and the Commissionerate, seven temples may be seen on the roadside. According to Janaki Nair (2005), to consider all these activities solely from the point of view of their illegality and to read their meaning as tied closely to material interests in property is to refuse to acknowledge what is clearly a very important aspect of contemporary urban culture. There are many instances where material interests determine the use of public space, but the meaning of such activities is far from exhausted by the language of what she calls ‘municipalism’ or ‘economism’ (Nair 2005: 156). The killing of people by high-speed traffic has created a fear psychosis, and statues of gods and goddesses are installed as a symbol of frustration with the highways which split apart villages and cities. According to the Annual Crime Report of the Police Commissionerate, Bhubaneswar-Cuttack, the number of fatalities in road accidents in the twin cities increased from 625 in 2012 to 672 in 2013. The number of deaths from road accidents in the capital city increased from 158 in 2012 to 190 in 2013. Most of these accidents happened on NH-5 connecting Rasulgarh with Khordha.

### **Changing Land Use**

In each master plan prepared for Bhubaneswar, an effort is made to balance the distribution of land among different uses, because land use is very important in determining the success of any plan. There has been a gradual increase in the share of land allotted for industrial and

commercial purposes under continuous pressure on the government from industrialists and business people. With the expansion of the city, the area under administrative use is declining. The share of open space and agricultural land, which stood at 20.92 per cent in Koenigsberger's Master Plan, came down to 5.98 per cent in the Comprehensive Development Plan (CDP) of 1988–2001 (Vision 2030). Likewise, water bodies have declined from 15.8 per cent to 5.18 per cent in the Vision 2030 plan. The planners are concerned more with resolving the conflict over land uses among different government agencies and clearly demarcating the land under their jurisdictions. Thus, the focus of master plans has never been socio-economic planning. The area earmarked for residential purposes has been encroached upon for non-residential activities, mainly commercial, industrial, educational and recreational, resulting in a mixed land use pattern in most parts of the city. There is a greater concentration of agricultural land in the north-west of the city. The percentage of forest and vegetation has declined alarmingly, with some portion of the forest being converted into agricultural land. In the western part of the city, a large portion of the land identified as agricultural land in previous plan documents is now shown as vacant land in Vision 2030 document, which means that people who were earlier cultivating on that patch of land have stopped doing so.

The growth of unplanned residential areas is higher compared to planned growth. Unplanned residential areas are emerging to the south-west and east of the planned city, and even in between planned units. The built-up area was 10 per cent in 1990, 20 per cent in 2000, and more than 25 per cent in 2009. The area under water bodies decreased from two per cent to one per cent over this period. Changes in vegetation were also observed, from more than 40 per cent in 1990, declining to 33 per cent in 2000 and 27 per cent in 2009 (Bart 2011). Hannes Bart observes that this decline happened first because of the construction of buildings on vacant plots within the city limits; and second, because of the growth of sub-urban settlements along the arterial routes on the outskirts of the city. He further emphasises that these are common features of Indian urbanisation. However, what makes Bhubaneswar a special case is the fact that there are large areas within the city limits that can be developed into modern urban, densely populated quarters rather than allowing the city to sprawl excessively. So the state's planning and decisions regarding land redistribution are important.

The American Conglomerate General Electric, Germany's Siemens, the multinational Hewlett Packard, the Dutch diversified technology major Philips, Korean steel giant Posco, the IT firm CISCO and real estate developer Gale International are becoming majority stakeholders in the urban revolution worldwide through smart city creation. In the



2014–15 budget, the government relaxed the area and capital conditions for foreign direct investment from 50,000 square metres to 20,000 square metres and from \$10 million to \$5 million respectively, with a three-year post-completion lock-in to incentivise FDI. Indian government's smart city drive to control unplanned urban growth is meddling with existing urban land use. But the main concern here relates to the right to the city of the urban poor, as the smart cities have not created space for them at all.

### **Neoliberal Regime of Dispossession**

Examination of the effect of neoliberal policies on urban land use in Bhubaneswar reveals that the existing theoretical perspectives offer only a partial understanding of the land grabbing process in Bhubaneswar. The land redistribution experience in Bhubaneswar began with the formation of the state capital, when the prime purpose was planning for the administrative machinery and residential housing for government employees. The means of dispossession included persuasion and economic incentives. This regime was followed by institutional growth in the city characterised by state capitalism. During this period, bureaucratic intervention was higher, and land dispossession was considered the cost of development. The city experienced forced evictions as well, so that the means of dispossession included coercion along with persuasion and economic incentives. The 1990s regime of dispossession was characterised by an increase in the number of slums, the growth of private educational institutions, and a shift in the state's focus to the IT and health sectors. Land use was diversified and continuous bargaining between people and the government became a norm for dispossession. The contemporary regime of dispossession is different in the sense that the state is now acting as an agent of private capital, as seen in the case of the Vedanta University land grab case and SEZ allotments.

The concept of 'regimes of dispossession' helps us compare and critically interrogate the specific economic purposes that states, at any given time, seek to legitimise as 'development'. Moreover, it helps us understand the conditions under which dispossession is most likely to encounter non-compliance and be effectively stopped. According to Levien, the notion of 'regimes of dispossession' provides the basis for articulating a political economy of dispossession without the assumptions of economic progress or political inevitability (Levien 2015). However, the idea of regimes of dispossession does not explain one important land-related issue, that is, the criminalisation of the real estate sector. There is increasing involvement of land mafia in the real

estate business. There has also been growing resistance from different interest groups who have a stake in the land use. We have seen protests against projects like Kaling Nagar, Niyamgiri, and Vedanta University. What we find today is an increase in the number of alliances that have been formed across various marginalised groups, such as farmers, agriculturalists, small landowners, tribes, fishing communities, and others who depend on land for their livelihood.

On the one hand, real estate developers, investors and private corporations are urging national, state and city governments to ease restrictions on the transfer, sale, use and development of land. On the other hand, reports by Organisations like the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI 2011) and the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE 2018) observe that the problem of projects getting stalled before completion continues to plague investments in India. Often, the alliances formed to resist land transfers get support from political parties; at other times, political parties influence and accelerate the process of land grabbing. While the alliances seem to foreground the use value of land, the investors are more interested in the exchange value of land, which they find generates huge profits. In the neoliberal period, the state is acting as a land broker for private capital, believing that land grabbing is necessary for the city's development. Using Levien's term, in the current 'regime of dispossession', what we see in Bhubaneswar is the use of multiple means of dispossession that legitimise the process of land grabbing.

#### CONCLUSION

Infrastructural deficit and poor urban services are in general associated with the uneven development of the out growth areas of Bhubaneswar. As the local government is struggling to deal with the changing urban landscape, it also has to manage various competing interests. On the one hand, state and local governments are trying to attract domestic and foreign private capital investments to their regions; on the other, they are struggling to provide basic urban infrastructure and governance services, mobilise local resources, provide proper city planning and deliver basic services at the local level to the city population, which is growing at an unprecedented rate. This has created a perfect space for non-state actors like corporate leaders, real estate developers, private investors, NGOs, resident welfare groups, landowners and farmers to push for an increased role in urban development and governance processes. Bhubaneswar needs to ensure the reinforcement of the urban land ceiling laws, need-based land conversion, freezing of sale of land near project areas, control of real estate transactions, transparency in land records, minimum required

supply of land for any institution and maintenance of the existing green cover. Under this context, we cannot simply reduce each act of the state to be the act of capitalism like the neomarxist, nor can we reduce the massive land grabbing as necessary cost of development like the modernist. Existing state actors are changing in response to the shifting social and political environment following the Central Government's urban policies. However, how Bhubaneswar responds to the policies are more crucial than what comes down from the Centre and the state in determining the future of this city.

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