

## **Transnational Networks and Tribal Protests in Odisha: Challenges and Opportunities**

**Introduction:** The anti-globalisation movements include an array of protests and resistance actions of social groups and individuals in response to the dislocating consequences of neoliberal globalisation and its effects in the spheres of the economy, politics and identity/culture. An attempt has been made here to decipher the dialectical interface between globalisation-induced social movements and transnational networks (TNWs) through the prism of tribal protests in Odisha. The study brings out how social movements emerge to defend and recover threatened forms of life, social organization, economy and ecology when the forces of globalisation threaten to colonize people's life-worlds. Ironically, globalisation also generates mechanisms for contesting it by expanding and complicating the strategic choices available and forcing movement actors to look beyond their national boundaries to counter it. The TNWs which emerge in such paradoxical contexts provide the linking mechanisms through which social movement participants engage in collective action across local and national boundaries and are involved in conflictual relations with their opponents by developing a shared and distinct collective identity. The TNWs have been shown to support local social movements as catalysts, structural units, sources of resource, and by helping to reframe affected people's understandings and norms of marginalisation, protest and empowerment.

The systematic study of social movements has come a long way from its interpretation as 'crowd psychology' and 'collective behaviour', focusing on large-scale mobilisations in the streets as symbols of social dysfunction and irrationality (Smelser 1962) to the 'resource mobilisation' approach of viewing movements as the rational enterprise of movement entrepreneurs (McCarthy

and Zald 1977) pursuing collective interests. The studies of the anti-globalisation social movements (AGSM) (Smith et al. 1997; Smith and Johnston 2002) as an attempt to counter globalisation from above through globalisation from below, assume significance in this context. The anti-globalisation movements include an array of protests and resistance actions of social groups and individuals in response to the dislocating consequences of neoliberal globalisation and its effects in the spheres of the economy, politics and identity/culture. The expansion of capitalism has historically encountered opposition from social groups affected by its disruptive and disempowering consequences (Saguier 2012). Yet, it is during the mid-1990s that the conception of anti-globalisation social movements in the forms of resistance to globalization has entered the sociology literature in a meaningful way.

The AGSM approach begins from the assumption that there have been profound changes in recent movements due to structural shifts caused by neo-liberal globalisation. The AGSMs are depicted as organised in socially embedded, diffuse, horizontal networks; as primarily concerned with culture and identity; and as aiming to constrain state and economic power rather than to gain access to it (Cohen 1982; Melucci 1989).

### **Transnational Networks and Anti-globalisation Social Movements:**

Transnational networks (TNWs) could be interpreted as a set of relationships that connects discrete entities (people, communities, or other groups) in more than one country for the sharing of information, experiences, or resources towards a common objective. The expression "transnational" symbolizes the cross-national organizing processes amid participants of the movement. A transnational network may not essentially be a global social network but necessitates the communication and cooperation of movement actors from no less than two

different countries. A network differs from an organization in that network members are only weakly tied, relatively autonomous and limit their work together to certain, mutually agreed on goals (adapted from Colchester et al. 2003: 2; Granovetter 1983).

The TNWs provide the linking mechanisms through which social movement participants engage in collective action across national boundaries, are involved in conflictual relations with their opponents by developing a shared and distinct collective identity to bring about, avert, or undo social, political and cultural change outside the conventional political institutions through extra-parliamentary strategies.

They have been shown to support social movements as catalysts, structural units of movements, sources of information and resources, and by helping to reframe people's understandings and norms (Diani and McAdam 2003). For each of these functions, the contribution of the TNWs could only be realized in partnership with local and national groups. The broader scope of TNWs enables them to collect information, develop strategies and capacities, and identify contacts outside of the usual scope of national or local groups.

### **Strengths of TNWs:**

Transnational networks contain several advantages some of which are as stated below:

First, funding people to get together – they are able to collect funds which is very necessary to carry out any task from multiple sources to sustain protest activities in different parts of the world.

Second, knowledge of broader policy frameworks – they offer a much larger framework necessary to link a local movement with global developments.

Third, independent assessments and critique – they are able to assess any development on their own and formulate a critique that is quite different from those offered by either political parties or stakeholder close to the state agencies.

Fourth, wider repertoire of strategies and ability to increase capacities - international networks have access to a wider range of information about strategies and capacities that have been tried or developed elsewhere that they can share with local groups;

### **Limitations of TNWs:**

First, some TNWs do not see it as their mandate to work with local groups. They feel they can have more of an impact working through focal points and larger scale organizations that have a wider reach;

Second, the possibilities or need for collaboration are often not apparent to TNWs unless they are active at the local level. This puts them in a difficult situation where they can only become aware of local needs for collaboration if they are already active;

Third, the activities of local groups are often informal, unanticipated, urgent and small-scale. Raising funds for such activities can be difficult at short-notice, even for international networks;

Fourth, TNWs may also lack the flexibility to respond quickly to calls for assistance. With many requests, they may not be able to easily distinguish from a distance which causes are the most important;

The rise of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in Mexico's poorest southern areas in 1994, for instance, was in response to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) which is often taken as a landmark event in what has come to be a new form global resistance

politics. As an indigenous and peasant movement, the Zapatistas resist imposition of a universal model of development advanced by NAFTA and based on the commodification of nature.

### **Tribals, Mining and Global Capital – The Role of Transnational Networks in Niyamgiri Resistance Movement**

The following case study of an AGSM could be interpreted in terms of Karl Polanyi's double movement i.e., the imperative of economic transformation and the need for social protection. This protective movement, as the classical Polanyian counter-movement, opposes the neo-liberal globalisation and its market epistemology. Historically, the Polanyian counter-movements refer to the self-protective measures taken by society to cope with the disruptive and polarizing effects of industrial capitalism in England during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The contemporary significance of these counter-movements emerges from their attempt to negate the globalisation project to the extent it represents the universalisation of capitalist modernity - at least in its neoliberal form. These AGSMs represent a protest against neo-liberal globalisation's untenably contradictory promise of social regulation and social emancipation, wherein emancipation collapses into market regulation i.e., to be free is to accept market regulation. Resistance to globalization is about the struggles to overturn the trend towards a capitalist economy disengaged from its socially-defined functions. It has led to counter-movements in the forms of societal contestation against the effects of a market-driven integration (Munck 2007).

The following account of a subaltern (Adivasi) resistance to global capitalism in the state of Odisha, places emphasis on community autonomy, identity politics, communal rights and rights to a variety of traditional practices, which represents a defence of the environment, a critique of

the commodification of nature inspired by an indigenous spiritual worldview. The counter-hegemonic resistance by the tribals is directed against the capitalist practice of creating wealth at the expense of depriving peoples of their rights, leading to unprecedented levels of social inequality, disempowerment and ecological destruction.

### **The Trans-Local Space in Niyamgiri Movement**

The Niyamgiri movement has unfolded in a trans-local space involving particular configurations of actors with changing identities and networks that both transcend and transgress national boundaries. The trans-locality of anti-globalisation resistance movements like the one in Niyamgiri is characterized by the multiplicity of local spaces distributed across different nation states and involving particular configurations of actors, resources, territory and relationships of power (Sassen 2006). These spaces are trans-local because they both transgress and transcend locality and have the ability to change the local spaces from which they emerge. The local in trans-local is not about a fixed space but is about a network, describing not the just characteristics of populations or cultures or places but focusing instead on the movement of people, ideas, cultures and political identity (Mandaville 1999).

The Niyamgiri resistance movement as a trans-local AGSM involved a motley web of individuals and organizations opposed to the bauxite mining project. A number of local, state, national and international NGOs, political parties and their associated organisations, citizen's groups and Delhi and Bhubaneswar-based activists have become involved in the movement. The complex interplay of networks both national and transnational is more than evident in the movement. A multinational NGO campaign by Action Aid started in 2007 and gained momentum as other transnational groups like Survival International joined the movement. The global human rights group Amnesty International entered the fray by criticizing human rights

violations in the refinery area and around the proposed mine. The NGOs used a variety of horizontal and lateral networks to mobilize their resources against mining (Kraemer, Whiteman and Banerjee 2013). The state (Govt. of Odisha) is also a key actor in this network and represents a more vertical mode of governance in its authority of granting permits and providing development infrastructure. Private actors in the form of corporations (VAL) and its contractors, NGOs and community organizations are also key players in this trans-local space. The interactions between the tribals, the state, the corporation and NGOS took place at multiple trans-local sites: at the location of the mine itself and the surrounding villages, at the state capital, at the national capital as well as the company's headquarters in London.

**Conclusion:** An attempt has been made here to decipher the dialectical interface between globalisation-induced social movements and transnational networks through the prism of a tribal protest against mining by a transnational corporation in Niyamgiri. The case study brings out how social movements emerge to defend and recover threatened forms of life, social organization, economy and ecology when the forces of globalisation threaten to colonize people's life-worlds (Habermas, 1971, 1987; Escobar, 1995: 222-226). Ironically, globalisation also generates mechanisms for contesting it by expanding and complicating the strategic choices available and forcing movement actors to look beyond their national boundaries to counter it. The TNWs which emerge in such paradoxical contexts, as in the Niyamgiri movement, provide the linking mechanisms through which social movement participants engage in collective action across national boundaries and are involved in conflictual relations with their opponents by developing a shared and distinct collective identity.

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