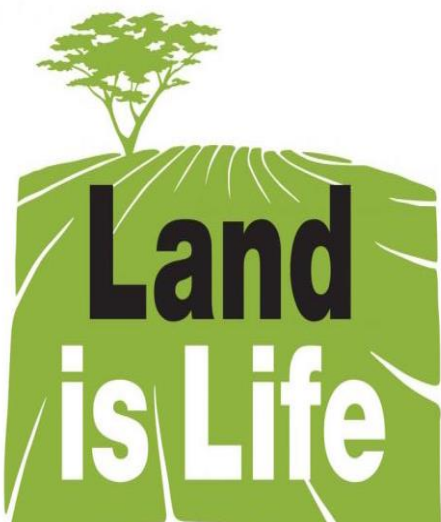


## Land Grab is the Greatest Menace to Peace

*The earth upon which the sea, and the rivers and waters, upon which food and the tribes of man have arisen, upon which this breathing, moving life exists.*

—Prithvi Sukta, Atharva Veda

**LAND IS LIFE.** It is basis of livelihoods for peasants and indigenous people across the third world, and is also becoming the most vital asset in the global economy. As the resource demands of globalisation increase, land has emerged as a key site of conflict. In India, 65 per cent of the



are dependent on land. At the same time, a global economy, driven by speculative finance and unbridled consumerism, needs land for mining and industry, for towns, highways, and biofuel plantations. The commodification of land is fuelling corporate land-grab in India, both through the creation of special economic zones and through foreign direct investment in real estate. Land, for most people in the world, is people's identity; it is the ground of culture and economy. Seventy-five per cent of people in the third world live on the land and are supported by it. The earth is the

biggest employer on the planet. In fact, every vital, living resource of the planet that maintains the fragile web of life is in the process of being grabbed. Every inch of land that supports the life and livelihoods of tribal and peasant communities is being grabbed, leading to land wars. Money cannot compensate for the alienation of land as an eighty year old Parshuram, who lost his land to the Yamuna Expressway, said, 'You will never understand how it feels to become landless.'



### Is it not Against the Constitution?

While the Constitution recognises the rights of the people and of the panchayats to democratically decide the issues of land and its development, the government is giving these a go-by. On the POSCO project, three panchayats had refused to give up their land. The use of violence and destruction of livelihoods that the current trend is reflecting is not only dangerous for the future of Indian democracy, but also for the survival of the Indian nation-state itself. Handing over fertile land to private corporations who are the new zamindars, cannot be defined as public purpose. Creating multiple, privatised, super highways and expressways does not qualify as necessary infrastructure. The real infrastructure that India needs is an ecological infrastructure for food security and water security.



### The Biggest Land Grab

One of the biggest land-grabs taking place in India is for Special Economic Zones (SEZs). The Union Government, after prolonged deliberations, notified SEZ Rules and started operationalising



the SEZ Act, 2005 from February, 2006. Since then, the government had cleared hundreds of SEZs. The emphasis is on enhancing exports and creating an environment for attracting FDI by offering tax sops. While units in the

zone have to be net foreign exchange earners, they are not subjected to any pre-determined value addition or minimum export performance requirements. Nor are they bound by the laws governing labour relations and terms of employment. Any private, public, joint sector or state government or its agencies can set up SEZs. Foreign companies are also eligible.

### **Sentiments Behind Land**

If I own a plot of land, the understanding is that I have trusteeship of the land, but that it really belongs to the community. The understanding that we have equal access to the use of forest, water bodies and mineral systems is very strong. Our political system is based on this – all have access to land, hence all are equal. Everyone has a voice in the panchayat and everyone is heard. The indigenous people in India understand their relationship with the earth, land and resources quite differently from the modern nation state’s understanding of private ownership. They understand land in the traditional framework of community ownership and individual use.

The excerpt from the Declaration of National Forum for Forest People and Forest Workers will lay bare the sentiment of the people in India.

*‘We, the forest people of the world – living in the woods, surviving on the fruits and crops, farming on the jhoom land, re-cultivating the forest land, roaming around with our herds – have occupied this land since ages. We announce loudly, in unity and solidarity, let there be no doubt on the future: we are the forests and the forests are us, and our existence is mutually dependent. The crisis faced by our forests and environment today will only intensify without us.’*

### **Conclusion**

To sum-up, we may refer to the recent article published in the Economic and Political Weekly (EPW), February 22, 2025, Vol. LX, No. 8, Page 68-75, ‘The incidence of land grabbing by local developers, that leads to illegal colonies and unauthorised housing in the informal land markets has been increasing.’

‘The results underscore the pervasive and complex nature of the informal land market in the region, which is characterised by systemic corruption, collusion among various actors, and endemic land grabs. The proliferation of unauthorised and illegal colonies is the result of local developers, who frequently originate from dominant caste backgrounds, exploiting loopholes in land policies and

administration. Despite the efforts of entities such as the NGT, enforcement remains inadequate, suggesting a more profound issue of complicity within the state apparatus. This complicity allows developers to operate with impunity, which exacerbates environmental degradation and undermines urban planning endeavours. The informal land market in urban peripheries is dominated by dominant landowning castes, who leverage their social networks and economic influence. The role of caste dynamics in land development is significant. This results in socio-economic disparities, as landowning castes are disproportionately benefited in comparison to non-landed castes, particularly Dalits, who are frequently exploited in land transactions. These disparities are further entrenched by the manipulation of legal mechanisms, such as the use of Dalit face/employees to circumvent land transfer restrictions.’ (Page 74 of EPW, dated February 2025).

