International Journal of Applied Social Science
Volume 9 (7 & 8), July & August (2022) : 243-254
Received : 15.06.2022; Revised : 30.06.2022; Accepted : 15.07.2022

RESEARCH ARTICLE
ISSN : 2394-1405 (Print)
DOI: 10.36537/IJASS/9.7&8/243-254

Shifts in the Relation between Civil Society and the State: Case of Agragamee in Odisha

AMBUJA KUMAR TRIPATHY
Associate Professor
Lakshmibai College, University of Delhi, New Delhi (India)

ABSTRACT

Agragamee is one of the better known civil society organizations in the country. It is located in the tribal hinterlands of the state of Odisha. Since its origin in the late 1970s and early 1980s, this socially committed organization has witnessed different phases in its relation with the state, while performing its developmental functions. My fieldwork shows that the trajectory of Agragamee's relation with the state began with collaboration and negotiation. As the organization matured, with emphasis on rights-based approach, the relation got transformed intonegotiation with bold expression of difference by Agragamee. Then, there was a phase characterized by contestation and resistance as well. Finally, we come across the current adoption of advocacy as the dominant instrument by Agragamee. This paper aims to analyze the dynamics surrounding the shifts in the relation of the civil society organization with the state, and their implications for Agragamee's political and developmental characters in a nuanced way.

Key Words : Civil society, State, Tribal development, Contestation, Advocacy

INTRODUCTION

This paper is about an important civil society organization, and how that moved from dealing with state-directed development of those decades to engaging with the neo-liberal strategy of the state in the 1990s, offering an analysis of the shifting implications of such collaboration and contention. It takes non-governmental organization (NGO) Agragamee as a political actor, as an 'important institutional vehicle in shaping political discourse and in mobilizing collective interests' (Clarke, 1998: 39). On the basis of extensive fieldwork from 2009 to 2019 in the tribal region of Odisha, the article makes an attempt to look for the transformative possibilities of the NGO through its ability to both empower people and contribute to alternative discourses of development following the literature of the 1990s and later, by analyzing its history and organizational aspects as well as ideological bases, developmental initiatives, and strategies while focusing on the complexities of its changing relation with the state. The discussion in the paper is informed by the framework of questions as raised by William Fisher (1997: 456) from an institutional perspective: are NGOs doomed to repeat the patterns of the societies within which they emerge? Can they empower without simultaneously victimizing? Can they enable as well as constrain? Can they do good without doing wrong?

Agragamee was founded, and continues to be run by Achyut Das and Vidhya Das. Agragamee means 'pioneer' or 'marching forward', one who takes the first step forward. Situated in the tribal KBK region, the organization strives to engage with the question- what is self-sustaining development for the tribals and the rural poor? 'Over its nearly three decades of intense involvement in the tribal regions, Agragamee has sought to define what should be people-centred development' (Agragamee, 2010: 2). In the age of NGO-triggered "associational revolution" (Salamon, 1994: 109), the

How to cite this Article: Tripathy, Ambuja Kumar (2022). Shifts in the Relation between Civil Society and the State: Case of Agragamee in Odisha. *Internat. J. Appl. Soc. Sci.,* **9** (7&8) : 243-254.

organization takes the label NGO as an externally imposed classification and instead designates itself as a social action group or a grassroots organization in order to distinguish itself from what it sees as more conservative associations.

Genesis of Agragamee:

The beginning of this civil society initiative needs to be seen as a part of the broader process in the country that began with a growing realization in the 70s, especially after the declaration of the state of Emergency in the mid-70s, that the state had failed to deliver development. At this juncture, it is observed that 'deep pessimism about politics and government that led middle class, highly educated, sensitized youth to go to villages and urban slums and start voluntary action separate and independent of existing political and governmental establishments' (Bhatt, 1995: 870). This new trend is also known as the "spurt in voluntarism" or "grassroots politics".

The organization was set up in 1981 as Odisha chapter of the Social Work and Research Center (SWRC) of Tilonia, Rajasthan. In April 1987, it established its own identity by registering itself as a separate civil society organization called Agragamee (Fig. 1). Agragamee initially worked in Kashipur in Rayagada district of the KBK region and then gradually expanded to other areas. Certain factors in Kashipur in the then undivided Koraput district of the state in the late 1970s and early 1980s attracted the SWRC team led by Achyut Das. First, in Odisha SWRC wanted to confine itself to a tribal Block informed of its work elsewhere in the country. Kashipur Block is a region of 70 per cent Adivasis and 20 per cent Dalits. Second, the area was challenging on account of lack of communication, infrastructure, and other basic facilities. Economically the region was depressed, and poverty level was quite high. Multiple forms of exploitation were commonplace. The forest cover was declining because of unregulated shifting cultivation practice of tribal people and indiscriminate felling by the contractors. This was leading to ecological disturbance in the area. Further, periodic and permanent out-migration were increasing owing to distress in the region. Third, SWRC developed an understanding that the administration had ignored the tribal people, and some special agencies launched for latter had not delivered the required benefits. Although there was a history of voluntary action in the locality, that had failed to make an impact. Thus, Kashipur was chosen as the site on the basis of preliminary survey conducted by SWRC in April 1980.

Agragamee's Vision and Values:

It is important to look at the original mission and underpinning values of Agragamee. The baseline survey imparted the conviction and a sense of urgency to the SWRC team as to the need to have a particular development or change in the region. The organization stresses that it "does not have a clear-cut goal but a vision" (Giri, 2005: 55). The Agragamee vision emerges from its understanding of the nature of state intervention and the nature of conventional voluntary action given its knowledge about the complexities of the locale through the baseline survey.

Source: photograph taken by author during fieldwork

Fig. 1 : Agragamee campus in Kashipur, Odisha

The SWRC team realized that in spite of the initiation of several comprehensive development programs such as community development program (CDP) and other welfare measures under special agencies, the state policy had fallen short of achieving the goal of poverty alleviation and empowerment in this tribal region. Kashipur was one of the 43 special multipurpose tribal blocks in the country during the mid-1950s. It was, later on, included in the Tribal Development Blocks meant for areas of higher tribal concentration. During the Fifth Five Year Plan, Kashipur block was included in Rayagada ITDA (Integrated Tribal Development Approach). It may be noted here that Kashipur block is the key agency to execute poverty alleviation programs like RLEGP (Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Program), NREP

(National Rural Employment Program), and DRDA (District Rural Development Agency) besides other special development programs. However, these programs had consistently disappointing results because of the adoption of a modernizing and homogenizing path of development at the cost of social diversity and self-determination aspects of groups and communities. D L Sheth attributes such failure at a general level to elite knowledge based on a distinction between knowledge and empirical reality. 'As a result, decisions are taken in which the rights of ordinary people are ignored' (Sheth cited in Joseph 2002: 301).

Conventional voluntarism in the region aiming at charity and relief, social welfare, and social reform was found vastly inadequate by the SWRC team. Such voluntarism was inspired by idealism rather than ideology (Baxi, 1986). There was a need to shift the focus to development in order to change the social, economic and political position of the poor and the weak. In other words, there was a need to move to modern voluntarism. To summarize, there was a realization on the part of the SWRC team that the key political agency had failed to eradicate poverty, inequality, and injustice because of its 'top-down approach that often excludes the local community from programme design and implementation' (Subramaniam, 2007: 552), and earlier voluntary organizations engaged in relief and charity had failed because of the lack of a political nature. Based on this understanding of nature of the micro-context, state intervention, and voluntary action, Agragamee made an effort to articulate a broad perspective that would form the underlying basis for its vision and strategic plan. Agragamee's vision is premised on, Vidhya Das told me, 'a strong feeling of the organization that the tribal people of the region have been oppressed for centuries, and their basic right to a life of dignity has been systemically denied in spite of the rhetoric of the post-colonial state about their all-round development' (interview in Kashipur, February 12, 2012). 'Food and voice has been the animating vision of Agragamee' (Menon and Schenk-Sandbergen cited in Giri, 2005:43).

The key underlying bases of Agragamee's vision are human liberation, participation of local communities, decentralization, tribal empowerment, and rights. The broad perspective underlying the vision was perceived by Agragamee as an alternative to top-down model of the state. This alternative approach avoids any strong ideological or dogmatic position and relies on participatory methods. This approach entails theory and practice of planned intervention as articulated in the 1980s. SWRC explains the idea of planned intervention as 'the interaction with the praxis, *i.e.* the action-reflection orientation. If the poor and exploited can be made aware of their situation by set of their own motivated actions with natural responses and analysis, conflicts and compromises, then the challenges for them will look clear' (Agragamee, 1983: 2.3). While making a planned intervention, the fundamental strategy of the organization is to reach maximum people in all the interior areas untouched by the state and make local people aware of the situational challenges and build their skills so that there would be the optimal management of local resources. Also, the strategy focuses on countering the local unjust and exploitative structures by means of mobilization, building up pressure groups within villages through certain educational activities, and strengthening of village-level organizations.

In terms of geographical scope, Agragamee is confined to the tribal districts of Rayagada, Koraput, Kalahandi, Kandhamal, Malkangiri, Nawarangpur, Nuapada, and Mayurbhanj in Odisha. However, it has made its presence significantly felt over the years in the NGO spectrum in India. Over last three decades, Agragamee has undertaken an enormously varied range of activities such as implementing sustainable development initiatives like micro watershed management, family farm, grain bank, *mahila mandal* (women's collective), promoting education and awareness, and protesting neoliberal policies. Broadly, the interventions of Agragamee can be labeled as "developmental", "mobilizational", and "political" roles although they are not mutually exclusive (Bhatt, 1995: 870). The developmental role is concerned with programs aimed at raising the physical quality of life. The mobilization role attempts to mobilize the beneficiaries of development so that they can become active participants. In the political role, the approach is to influence the political system: either its policies, laws and legislations or its processes and performance.

Developmental interventions revolve around two major concerns and resultant imaginings of the organization. First, the situation of food insecurity and the consequent endemic hunger and deprivation in tribal villages led the organization question the viability of highland livelihoods based on shifting cultivation and identify economically-viable alternatives for local people.

Second, since local common-pool resources were found gradually getting degraded upon which local people depend, Agragamee emphasized redevelopment of agroecosystem and natural resource management on the basis of twin principles of ecological sustainability and participatory decision-making. In order to develop sustainable village-based livelihoods, Agragamee began engaging with the critical questions: 'who claims these resources, how are they appropriated, how are they maintained and how are they seen by different user groups or users within the community?' (Bardhan and Ray, 2008: 4).

Changing Relation of Agragamee with the State:

Agragamee's relation with the state changed from initial collaboration to negotiation in policy making to contestation in the 1980s and 1990s. Agragamee's approach in the early phase was to have close collaboration with the state since it found through its studies that the state was implementing a number of community and beneficiary-oriented schemes for the upliftment of the people in this region in continuation of the CDP of the mid-1950s. Agragamee believed that such programs could not benefit local people, and there was immense scope of collaboration with the state for the reason that if the state resources could be properly utilized then the state intervention would be able to make a marked improvement in the conditions of local communities. Having said this, let us now discuss some critical moments in the trajectory of Agragamee's relation with the state.

Odisha Tribal Development Project :

Involvement in the activities of Odisha Tribal Development Project (OTDP) is a good instance of Agragamee's close collaboration as well as negotiation with the state, while representing the interests of local people. OTDP, as a programme of tribal development for the region, came into being after an agreement was signed between the Government of India and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) on February 4, 1988. OTDP aimed at ensuring ecological rejuvenation of the project area in order to achieve a sustainable economic uplift of the tribal population. The primary objective was, owing to the prevalence of strong feudal power structures in Kashipur, to reduce the non-tribal intermediaries so that tribal people could get better remunerative price for their agricultural as well as minor forest produce. Accordingly, the project was designed to invest in certain sectors such as agriculture production, natural resources development, human resource development, rural infrastructure, land survey and settlement, and implementation management support. Suguna Pathy explains the context: 'unless a judicious planning is made from now onwards (1989-90) to preserve and upgrade the existing natural resources and to maximize production on a sustained basis the area and the people may deteriorate rapidly with time resulting in chaotic condition by the beginning of the 21st century' (2003: 2834). Agragamee joined OTDP but withdrew later.

OTDP underscored the importance of the human resource development (HRD) component with a strong view that people should be involved in the planning and decision-making stages of the programme. Hence, two members from the local communities (Sumoni Jhodia and Loki Majhi) were taken in as the members of the steering committee for OTDP. OTDP invited Agragamee to carry out the tasks under its HRD component and ensure people's participation, involvement of village committees, and transparency. OTDP came to an end in December 1997. The evaluation study of OTDP in 1992 emphasized the human element for better implementation- by recognizing people as subjects and active participants, not as objects and passive receivers. The study also highlighted the point that people wanted more food crops than cash crops, while OTDP stressed the latter. The study expressed serious concerns concerning the land question as taken up by the project and inadequate follow up action. Furthermore, IFAD Completion Evaluation mission for OTDP, which visited the area in 1998, came across certain shortcomings in the implementation of almost all the major components of the project (Das, 2003). The mission states that the project was relatively successful in the infrastructure development component and in land surveying and settlement activities. While the project made some achievements in agriculture and natural resources development component, it performed below expectations in the HRD component. Significance of human resource development was not recognized, and the degree of beneficiary participation was limited in all stages. It unambiguously expresses that tribal development project and programs should be designed with due attention to the socio-cultural and political contexts, and safeguards should be introduced to ensure that the existing local power structures do not become the chief beneficiaries.

Now, let us see the nature of Agragamee's

involvement in the project. When Agragamee was invited by OTDP to look after of the HRD component, Vidhya Das explains, 'Agragamee had much hesitation and conducted a long and involved debate within itself. The challenge was to ensure that the resources coming into the block reached the poor and the needy… finally, hoping for the best, but knowing the situation all too well to expect anything much, Agragamee agreed' (2003: 82). Agragamee is of the view that OTDP, like other development programs of that period, came as a top-down approach, and local people were excluded from planning and conceptualization processes. This exclusion was primarily responsible for the failure of the development programs of OTDP to reach the targeted population and to ensure long-term or even short-term benefits. It also made the whole process open to rampant corruption and misappropriation. Large-scale misappropriation and irregularities, which came to light towards the end of the project, were widely reported[1]. Agragamee also aired its views against the extensive coffee plantations that were supposed to be the part of the project and, consequently, OTDP changed the natural resources development plans to accommodate agro-forestry. Thus, 'Agragamee joined the project', Vidhya Das states, 'but since the beginning it had tensions with the local project management unit' (2003: 82).

In the process of implementation, more differences cropped up. OTDP insisted on engaging private contractors for the village development work while Agragamee supported the demand of local people that development work should be given to village committees. And, OTDP did not approve the emphasis laid by Agragamee on transparency and people's training. Such differences gave rise to opposition and hostility, and even there was a physical assault on the organization staff by the vested interests as Agragamee states. All those developments eventually led to the withdrawal of Agragamee from the OTDP. Ananta Giri observes, 'the encounter with IFAD was a critical turn in the history of Agragamee not because it had to return the already sanctioned grant to IFAD but because of its perception that IFAD continues to systematically destroy the ethos of developmental action based on mutual responsibility that Agragamee had cultivated over the years' (2005: 53-54).

Minor Forest Produce:

In the early 1990s, the policies of the Odisha government concerning collection, sale and processing of minor forest produce (MFP) were challenged by the Mandibisi mahila mandal, formed in Mandibisi village in 1992 with the training by Agragamee. For the forest-dependent tribal people of the region, the collection of MFP is a vital economic activity. They collect mahul flowers and seeds, tamarind, mango, hill brooms, Sal leaves, fibre, Kusum, fodder, gum, and fuel wood from the forests. Among these, hill brooms, mahul flowers, Sal leaves, and tamarind are collected in large quantities, since they have a decent market value. Collection of MFP is primarily the occupation of women. MFP collection is undertaken by the poorest sections of the villages as it is labour intensive, and the returns are quite low[2]. However, the tribal people are not allowed to stock, process or sell the MFP in the open market. Vidhya Das explains that these activities are controlled by the government through a system of leases and permits, which is quite unfair since they are 'granted on the whim of political leaders with no clearly defined criteria. Beyond the levy of a fixed amount of royalty there are no terms and conditions either. The lease from the government amounts to a virtual sanction to exploit and loot the tribal people in tribal area… ' (1996: 3227).

The state government set up Tribal Development Cooperative Corporation (TDCC) in the 1960s with the explicit purpose to facilitate marketing and ensure a fair price for primary producers or collectors. The key role of TDCC was to uplift and boost the tribal economy and to safeguard the interest of the tribal people by means of providing reasonable support price for their surplus agricultural products and MFP. However, Agragamee noticed major problems with the functioning of TDCC. In principle, the procurement prices of MFP items were fixed by a price fixation committee formed by the government at the district level every year and the agency having the lease was supposed to pay the prices so fixed to the primary tribal collectors. But in practice, the primary collectors sold most of the MFP items at rates less than 50 per cent of the fixed procurement price. The actual

1. *The Dharitri* (Odia Daily), September 4, 2001.

2. Study by NGO Vasundhra, which can be found at: http://www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in/feature-article/fighting-it-out, last accessed on September 20, 2020.

price varied from one-third to half of the procurement price in the case of hill brooms. Das argues that inefficiency of TDCC 'in procurement has enabled the petty traders and the local businessmen to secure a major market, amounting to more than two-thirds for most part of the items held in lease by the TDCC… Government policies and their misuse is increasingly denying the tribals the access to their livelihood needs. As a sequel, the government has been able to ensure neither the due revenue nor the conservation and protection of the forest resources' (1996: 3228-29). In such situation, Joint Forest Management (JFM) policy was also not of much help. While the policy provided rights over MFP to the village groups who form the *Vana Samrakshan Samiti* (Forest Conservation Committee), it also mentioned that village groups could collect MFP as and how they would like but could dispose that off only through the authorized lease holder.

Against this backdrop, in the year 1993, there emerged persistent struggles of village communities with massive involvement of tribal women across the state to access and use their forest and land resources. Women's mobilization in Mandibisi village in Kashipur block for rights over hill brooms was the most important example of those struggles. While hill grasses are so commonplace in the tribal region of Odisha, Rayagada forest range consisting of Kashipur is particularly favourable for producing the best quality hill brooms. The livelihood of most of the tribal people in this region is solely dependent on the collection and sale of hill grass. It was a long drawn-out struggle of seven years for Mandibisi mahila mandal to get rights over MFP. In the early 1990s, *Ama Sangathan* (Women's Federation)) was formed as a registered society. And, Mandibisi mahila mandal became a member of the federation. The hill broom movement led by Ama Sangathan is well documented. Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act (PESA) now recognizes the critical importance of forest and forest based resources in the lives of the tribes and grants rights over MFP to the Panchayats. And, Odisha became the first state to change the MFP policy to make it in consonance with PESA. The policy document of Odisha government stops the monopolistic leasing out of MFP items to private interests and corporations, enables mahila mandals, village groups, and Panchayat level organizations to collect and sell MFP in the open market for a competitive price. It also prohibits entry to large-scale operations into those areas of processing of MFP which can be taken up only by small-scale industries (Das, 1996).

Anti-Liquor Movement:

After the hill-broom movement, Mandibisi witnessed another major movement- the anti-liquor movement. The massive agitation against the sale of liquor in the region was organized by Mandibisi mahila mandal with the active support of Agragamee. Agragamee considers it as a successful example of women's struggle against liquor supported by its staff. The movement raised wider questions of social and political importance. With the help of Ama Sangathan, Mandibisi women took up this matter after the resolutions of Pali Sabha and Gram Sabha failed to make any impact on the liquor brewers who were carrying on their illicit business in collusion with the local police and administration. Processions and meetings were organized at different venues and finally the picketing of liquor was undertaken by women despite the presence of the contractors' goon squads. For the tribal women, this was a major victory. The brewing of illegal country liquor has not, however, come to a standstill. But women can confront the local breweries without the threat of being harassed by litigation. Local women, as Achyut Das and Vidhya Das note, 'broke the pots of the local liquor vendor and thus strengthened their hold over the tenuous village economy and initiated a chain of reactions for social action' (1992: 1373). The situation reminds us of Kancha Iliah's observation in the context of Andhra Pradesh that the women 'who never figured in the political discourse of the state suddenly found a definite place' (1992: 2406).

Kashipur Movement:

The Kashipur movement marked a critical turn in the relation between Agragamee and the state. Agragamee entered a new phase in its development discourse and witnessed a dramatic transformation in its relation with the state. While it developed a complex and dynamic relationship with a social movement on the one hand, it opted to contest the state acting in collusion with the global capitalist forces. With the neoliberal project of the Indian state, Agragamee notes, 'tribal lands, tribal resources preserved over centuries came under increasing demand, and tribal communities began to be pushed out, as rail-lines, power projects, industries, extractive mines and refineries came to be prioritized over people. All this has had repercussions for the welfare of local rural and tribal communities, and protests and

dissent began to be voiced in different regions across the state of Odisha, and the country as a whole."[3] Faced with this new situation in the mid-90s in the micro-context of Kashipur, the organization actively participated in mass mobilization against the neoliberal development strategy 'leading to direct intervention in political conflicts' (Korten, 1990: 125). The NGO emerged as an, to use Gerard Clarke's words, 'important new arena of political contestation' (1998: 45).

Mining operations began in Kashipur in the early 1990s by the bauxite mining and processing company, Utkal Alumina International (UAIL). UAIL started its survey work in Kashipur block in 1993. With its own model of development for Kashipur, UAIL wanted to set up a mining and processing unit for one million tonne per annum (mtpa) alumina to be expanded to two mtpa in the second phase with bauxite mine from the *Baphli Mali* plateau and a refinery and the accessories in the *Doraguda* valley in Kashipur. The Baphli Mali plateau in the border areas of Rayagada and Kalahandi districts has about 196 million tonnes of bauxite. And, by estimation, this bauxite reserve with an ore to alumina ratio of 3:1 gave the project a life of 30 years (Das, 2001: 2613).

The mining project of UAIL led to strong opposition from local people. In 1993, a team of 18 members from Kashipur met the Chief Minister demanding information about the implications of mining for local communities. When they did not receive any response, people presented petitions and appeals to the government and, as the state in difference continued, they organized peaceful demonstrations, rallies, and roadblocks. From 1995 onwards, people in different Panchayats began a series of movements to resist mining in the bauxite plateaus of the region. Fighting collectively, they formed the *Prakrutik Sampada Suraksha Parishad* (PSSP-Natural Resources Protection Council) in 1996. Under the banner of the PSSP, local people organized several public meetings, demonstrations, and protests against the UAIL mining project. Agitation of the project affected persons (PAP), against coercive and forcible eviction from their lands and homes, gradually gathered momentum.

The state launched retaliatory measures against local NGOs, including Agragamee, for supporting the movement. In 1998, the Odisha government issued a show-cause notice against these NGOs for preventing industrial development in the districts and instructed all government departments and offices not to have any dealings with them. Agragamee campuses were raided by the police and several workers were arrested. On December 16, 2000, the police fired at a gathering of protestors in *Maikanch* village at the foothills of Baphli Mali plateau, and three tribal people were killed. It was widely condemned by civil society at the national and international levels. In 2001, the state government appointed a judicial commission of inquiry and the commission in its report justified the state policing. There were major agitations against the killing and the commission report, but hereafter the movement lost steam. At the time of my third visit in 2012, the movement was in disarray and mining activities were on. Let us now turn to the perspectives of Agragamee, UAIL and independent fact finding teams on the issue.

Agragamee takes the position that as per its vision it has a moral responsibility to be on the side of PAP of the region in their movement for rights and livelihood. Vidhya Das states, 'people in the tribal regions are making a bid to realize the rights and provisions in the Constitution… tribal communities are standing up and demanding that the state treat them as human beings and allow them to exercise their rights as human beings' (2003: 83). This new role of the organization indeed is an extension of its alternative approach, as discussed in earlier sections, involving theory and practice of strategic action to achieve social justice for local people. As a part of this approach, Agragamee has supported the right of local communities to resist loss of their traditional livelihoods and environmental resources. Das argues, 'using provisions such as the 73rd Amendment and subsequently the PESA Act, it helped panchayats gain constitutional validity for their resistance against the mining companies through resolutions in the gram sabhas. It encouraged local leadership to carry their fight forward constitutionally and peacefully…' (2003: 83). Agragamee rather believes that it is a peaceful and legitimate movement of some of the most marginalized communities in the state (Das, 2001).

Agragamee justifies its opposition to the joint strategy of mining-led industrialization pursued by the state and UAIL in the context of Kashipur on the following grounds. The first of these is the issue of the lack of transparency. The UAIL has violated the provisions of

3. Agragamee blogsite,*Agralog: agragamee.wordpress.com/about,* last accessed on October 21, 2019.

Right to Information Act (RTI). It provided only vague answers to the questions of local people concerning environmental impacts of the mines and refineries although it had claimed to have conducted several studies for Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) and others. In spite of several requests, it did not make any of those documents public. Even the mandatory public hearing has not been conducted by the company. Achyut Das and Vidhya Das (2006: 25) elaborate:

> *UAIL does not even appear to have obtained environmental clearance for the project. According to a Canada based Kashipur solidarity group,..despite earlier verbal agreements, Alcan, UAIL's Canadian partner, has refused to disclose any part of the 1995 Environmental Impact Assessment prepared by Engineers India Ltd., during their meeting with Michael Hanley, CEO of Alcan's Bauxite and Aluminium Division on June 16, 2004. According to Hanley, the project's governmental approval had expired three years ago and was thus no longer relevant to the proposed project.*

Second, the resultant dislocation and destruction of local population and ecology is expected to be large. The refinery and accessories that UAIL intends to set up would take away 1000 ha of the most fertile land in the Doraguda Valley acquiring land of 12 villages. Bauxite mining is one of the most environmentally-destructive processes known. The slag to ore ratio is 3:1 that means for every tone of alumina produced, there are three tones of highly caustic slag, which would be then dumped in downstream areas, destroying agricultural land and surface and sub-soil water and causing unnamed diseases and ailments. The most visible adverse impact on the environment of mining and processing for alumina is red mud. Although UAIL proposes a 'dry mud stacking' method for managing this waste, Das argues, 'studies indicate that dry red mud stacking would give rise to huge amounts, nearly 150 tonnes of sodium hydroxide everyday… Dumping it into the rivers would raise the pH of the steams in the vicinity of the plant to 13' (2001: 2612). Das further argues that 'UAIL only has access to two streams, the Sana Nala for its water requirements and the Bara Nala for its effluent discharge. When the plant is expanded to the 2 mtpa stage, twice the quantity of effluents will be produced. Where will it be dumped, what would happen to the surroundings then?' (2001: 2612). Also, extraction of bauxite from Baphli Mali plateau would be through open cast mining that would have its own environmental implications such as siltation and drying up of rivers, crop damage, and dam breaks causing destruction of villages and human life.

Then, there would be rehabilitation and resettlement problems. Agragamee finds several claims and declarations of UAIL concerning displacement baseless. For instance, UAIL claims that the project is displacing only 148 families from three villages- Domkaral, Ramibeda, and Kendukhunti. However, Agragamee quotes studies by independent groups demonstrating clearly that in the alumina refinery area there are another eleven villages whose land will be acquired. Residents of these villages will be losing more than 75 per cent of their land. UAIL claims that it has a resettlement plan for the displaced with housing, a tank for bathing, a community centre, a pond for bathing and washing, school, playground, and other facilities. The rehabilitation plan states that each family will be provided with nearly 10 cents of land and a house of 300 sq ft. Agragamee finds these measures inadequate. 'What would happen to those families', Das observes, 'whose land is being acquired but not the household plots. Even the people who are displaced as per the definitions of the company will have scarcely any survival supports, as the company has only promised them rehabilitation colonies in return for their land, homesteads, forests, rivers and hills' (2001: 2613). Additionally, Das notes, 'when the tribal people will be displaced, the majority of them will not get any compensation, as they have been cultivating land only as "encroachers" and not as owners' (2001: 2613).

Third, Agragamee challenges UAIL's claims concerning employment. Although the company says it would provide employment to about 1,000 people, one has to see that the project is going to affect lives of more than 5,000 tribal families. And almost none of those 1,000 employed would be from the 5,000 affected since they do not have enough education or skills required for employment in the company. To sum up, Agragamee gives a balance-sheet of the mining project (Das, 2001: 2613):

> *The UAIL is a 100 per cent export oriented unit. The state gets a royalty of about Rs 42.00 per tonne of bauxite, which would amount to about Rs 12.6 crore a year and perhaps some returns in terms of taxes. For which they would have lost at least 2,700 hectares of land to the company, and god*

knows how much more to siltation, and effluent discharge. Several perennial sources of river would dry up, thousands of people would have lost their land and livelihood to displacement, pollution of waterways, siltation of agricultural land, and loss of cattle, and several species of endangered wild life would have been deprived of their natural habitat.

Coming to the perspective of UAIL, the company argues that it is committed to sustaining the environment, controlling pollution, and minimizing disturbance to the local society. First, the site of bauxite mine, which is a plateau, has no human habitation. It has been chosen with a view to minimize human displacement and loss of agricultural land or forest. The company argues, 'the technology to be used in the plant as well as in disposal of red mud waste is more advanced than any other in India…The people likely to be affected are from one hamlet of Korol, one hamlet of Dimundi and Ramibera village. They have been explained in detail by our people and shown the alternative land for their resettlement' (Choudhary, 1995: 1538).

Second, UAIL believes that there would not be adverse environmental impact since the mining lease does not fall within any declared forest area. UAIL states that it has 'developed alternative compensatory afforestation plans'. Its studies have confirmed that 'soil contamination will be negligible, and 'the "dry stacked" red mud storage area will be properly restored after use, through extensive plantation' (Choudhary, 1995: 1538). Further, UAIL cites studies showing that there would not be any adverse impact of the alumina plant on the drainage system. By minimizing the drill and blast mining method, noise level would be controlled. Atomized dust suppression system would control dust in the mining area. 'The run-off water from the mine will be guided', UAIL notes, 'through check dams, siltation tanks and a network of garland canals so that solid particles are captured and retained' (Choudhary, 1995: 1538).

Third, regarding employment generation and community work in the region, UAIL is of the view that the project will generate direct as well as indirect employment opportunities. Further, the company officials state that they have a plan to upgrade the Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) in the region. Selected youth from the local area would be trained in these institutes. UAIL also claims that it has started community development work in the form of health camps, vocational training in pottery, improved drinking water supply to some villages, and spreading improved agricultural practices (Choudhary, 1995; interviews in Kashipur in 2009 and 2012).

People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) and People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) visited the mining site, analyzed contesting claims and counterclaims, and prepared reports. These reports mostly support the arguments put forward by Agragamee. First of all, the reports point out lack of clarity and transparency on the part of UAIL. For instance, the PUDR report states, 'clearly, there is no precise idea about the number of affected people… What is significant is that the affected people are never consulted, they are always told. Their opinion is never sought prior to starting work on the projects…In such a situation there is hardly any opportunity for the people to make informed choices.'[4]

Second, although UAIL claims to have conducted several studies on the environmental impact of the mines and refineries, there is silence on the part of both UAIL and the state government on the environmental consequences of this project in terms of adverse impact of open cast mining on human life and livelihood, health, air quality, ecology and biodiversity, natural resources, and infrastructure. These reports take a serious note of the red mud- one of the by-products of open cast bauxite mining. Despite UAIL's claim that it would manage red mud and other solid effluents by stacking that in large open ponds, it is estimated that this would cause nearly 150 tonnes of sodium hydroxide to be leached into the soil every day. This, in turn, would raise the pH levels of the soil in the region much beyond acceptable limits leading to severe environmental damage. Then, there is the problem of large-scale loss of vegetation and natural habitat. Manufacturing of aluminium, including the intermediate processes of bauxite extraction and conversion to alumina, is an extremely resource-intensive one requiring vast amounts of water, electricity, land, and other natural resources. Thus, the project would result in

4. PUDR Report entitled 'Halting the Mining Juggernaut: People's Struggles Against Alumina Projects in Odisha' (2005) available at *https://pudr.org/sites/default/files/2019-02/kashipur%20Struggles%20Against%20Alumina%20Projects%20in%20Orissa.pdf:3,* last accessed on October 19, 2019.

the desertification of the region with increased risks of landslides, flash floods, and loss of cultivable land and forest resources that are crucial to the lives of local communities.

Certain major flaws have been noticed in the rehabilitation policy. While UAIL document says PAP- those who lose their lands and to whom compensation would be paid- would be given preference in jobs after the displaced people (DPs)- those who lose their homes- , but this provision is made subject to availability and skill. Further, as per UAIL package each displaced family would be given 1/10th of an acre for homestead purposes and pucca house of 480 sq feet with facilities. And, both DPs and PAPs are eligible for, according to the PUDR team, 'land for land to the extent government cultivable land is available'. However, the team did not find land for land actually offered in the villages it visited. Although UAIL document lays down several rates of compensation for eleven different categories of land, depending on their quality, the compensation package ignores those who currently cultivate the *dongar* (hill) constituting a fair number among the PAP.

From Contestation to Advocacy:

In the early 2000s, as the Kashipur movement was in decline, gradually the relation between Agragamee and the state improved- state government began making overtures and Agragamee started realizing that 'a civil society organization cannot', as Achyut Das told me, 'afford to have a direct confrontation with the state for long' (interview in Kashipur, February 11, 2012). Agragamee softened its stand after witnessing the phase of repression, but the original resolve of the organization did not change. The mode of resolve changed from direct confrontation with the state to a mode of advocacy. Agragamee maintains the position that it 'despite all odds, Agragamee will continue in its chosen path of tribal development, combining programs and projects for the welfare and wellbeing of the tribal community, with advocacy for rights, and helping local communities fight injustice and exploitation.'[5] Advocacy of various forms are attempted to build public opinion and to assist in the formulation of better public policy. Agragamee strives for coalition-building, evolves epistemic community, and tries to exert collective influence on the state at the policy-making as well as implementation levels. Currently, Agragamee is working in collaboration with the state government and central government on millet mission and reviving traditional agriculture practices project respectively. At the same time, Agragamee is supported by Karl Kubel Stiftung (KKS), a German agency, in the eco-village project premised on the ideas of food and nutrition security and food sovereignty.

Conclusions :

Agragamee has turned out to be a major intervening agency over last three decades in the tribal region of Odisha. While hill broom and anti-liquor movements against specific state policies are the well-documented success stories, Kashipur movement made Agragamee realize about its limitations as an NGO in direct resistance against the forces of globalization. Chambers and Kopstein note that civil society plays several kinds of roles in relation with the state which are not mutually exclusive- in "partnership" with the state, in "support" of the state, in "dialogue" with the state, and in "opposition" to the state (2006). There are four distinct moments of political action of Agragamee as we saw in the preceding sections- joint forest management (JFM) programme, minor forest produce and hill broom movement, anti-liquor movement, and Kashipur movement. In the initial phase, the organization played the role of a partner with the state. Then increasingly it became a critic of various policies of the state. Inrecent years, in addition to organizing capacity-building and training programmes, Agragamee plays the role of public sphere- a site for the production of a rational critical discourse in a creative and critical dialogue with the state. Advocacy, as the new role of Agragamee, needs to be seen, in continuity with its original vision and the earlier role of mobilization- involving capacity building, self-reliance, community participation, and empowerment- in the changed scenario (interview with Achyut Das in Kashipur, July 6, 2019). This is less radical and more pragmatic approach as compared to direct contestation. However, it does not make Agragamee less political since advocacy 'does not perceive people as passive recipients of benefits and services but as active participants demanding rights from the system… people are conscientized, mobilized and organized to fight against corruption, oppression and injustice' (Bhatt, 1995: 871). Thus, advocacy, along with collaboration and negotiation with the state, does not have

5. Ibid.

any unfavorable impact on the political and developmental character of Agragamee.

A critical dilemma that Agragamee started facing in the late 1990s was a crisis of funds and the ways to deal with that. A serious concern for the organization is restrictions and conditions imposed by the funding agencies. For example, the funders emphasize advocacy and disfavour mobilization on the part of NGOs. Vidhya Das argued in a conversation, 'what if some of our campaigns inspire local people to fight for their rights?' (Interview in Kashipur, February 15, 2012). If advocacy is a framework of depoliticization diverting NGOs away from sensitization and social mobilization toward the provision of services, it becomes a major concern for NGOs with commitment to social transformation like Agragamee, which are experimenting with alternative development initiatives on the ground. This dominant instrumental view of NGOs makes it extremely difficult for Agragamee to work with a focus on rights, participation, empowerment and social mobilization. It validates a concern expressed in the early 1990s that, 'what is needed is not only a more detailed empirical examination of foreign funding and donor agencies and their impact on the thought and working processes of different NGOs, but reflections on the larger political and ethical implications of constantly relying on grants to engage in social interventionist activity' (Sheth and Sethi, 1991: 63). This concern, increasingly felt in recent times, is making the organization reflect on and explore possibilities of enhancing its bases of self-reliance. Strengthening the internal mechanisms of revenue generation and reducing dependence on external funds remain key challenges for Agragamee.

Acknowledgements :

This article is based partly on my presentation in an international conference at Amity University, Noida and partly on my working paper published in the Working Paper Series of Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC), Bengaluru during my term at Centre for Political Institutions, Governance and Development (CPIGD) in ISEC. I am grateful to the directors of Agragamee (Achyut Das and Vidhya Das) for their support and valuable inputs during my long fieldwork. And, I thank the anonymous external reviewers of the working paper and reviewers of this paper.

REFERENCES

Agragamee (1983-2020). *Annual Reports*. Kashipur: Agragamee Publication.

Bardhan, P. and Isha, R. (2008). 'Economists, Anthropologists, and the Contested Commons' in P. Bardhan and I. Ray (eds.), *The Contested Commons: Conversations between Economists and Anthropologists*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Baxi, U. (1986). 'Activism at Crossroads with Signposts', *Social Action.* 36 (October-December).

Bebbington, A. J. and Bebbington, D. H. (2001). 'Development Alternatives: Practice, Dilemmas and Theory', *Area.* 33.1

Bhatt, A. (1995). 'Voluntary Action in India: Role, Trends and Challenges', *Economic & Political Weekly,***30** (16).

Chambers, S. and Kopstein, J. (2006). 'Çivil Society and the State' in J. S. Dryzek, B. Honig and A. Philips (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Choudhary, N.K. (1995). 'Development or Destruction', *Economic & Political Weekly,* **30** (26).

Clarke, G. (1998). 'Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Politics in the Developing World', *Political Studies.* **XLVI**.

Das, A. and Das, V. (1992). 'Development and Tribal Women', *Economic & Political Weekly ,***27** (27).

Das, A. and Das, V. (2006). *Chronicle of A Struggle and Other Writings*. Kashipur: Agragamee publication.

Das, V. (1995). 'Development or Destruction- New Mining Projects in Odisha', *Economic & Political Weekly,* **30** (22).

Das, V. (1996). 'Minor Forest Produce and Rights of Tribals', *Economic and Political Weekly.*31 (50).

Das, V. (1998). 'Human Rights, Inhuman Wrongs- Plight of Tribals in Odisha', *Economic & Political Weekly,* **33** (11).

Das, V. (2001). 'Mining Bauxite, Maiming People', *Economic and Political Weekly.* 36 (28).

Das, V. (2003). 'Kashipur: Politics of Underdevelopment', *Economic & Political Weekly,* **38** (1).

Fisher, W. (1997). 'Doing Good? The Politics and Antipolitics of NGO Practices', *Annual Review of Anthropology,* **26**.

Giri, A. K. (2005). *Reflections and Mobilizations: Dialogues with Movements and Voluntary Organizations*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Ilaiah, K. (1992). 'Andhra Pradesh's Anti-Liquor Movement',

Economic & Political Weekly, **27** (45).

Joseph, S. (2002). 'Society vs State? Civil Society, Political Society and Non-party Political Process in India', *Economic & Political Weekly,* **37** (4).

Kamat, S. (2004). 'The Privatization of Public Interest: Theorizing NGO Discourse in a Neoliberal Era', *Review of International Political Economy,* **11** (1).

Korten, D. C. (1990). *Getting to the 21st Century: Voluntary Action and the Global Agenda*. W. Hartford, USA: Kumanian Press.

Sarangi, D.R. (2002). 'Odisha: Surviving Against Odds, Case of Kashipur', *Economic & Political Weekly,* **37** (31).

Salamon, L.M. (1994). 'The Rise of the Nonprofit Sector', *Foreign Affairs,* **73**.

Sheth, D.L. and Harsh, S. (1991). 'The NGO Sector in India: Historical Context and Current Discourse', *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary & Nonprofit Organizations,* **2** (2).

Subramaniam, M. (2007). 'NGOs and Resources in the Construction of Intellectual Realms: Cases from India', *Critical Sociology,* **33**.

****