

Land Acquisition and Income Disparities

Case Study of a Village in Jharia,
Jharkhand

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1 Introduction

This paper presents a study of the impact of land acquisition and displacement on the livelihoods of people in Belgaria, a village in Dhanbad district in Jharkhand. The study village, Belgaria, is on the margins of the coal mines in Jharia. Agricultural land acquired from the village in 1982 was used to construct a township and rehabilitate about 1200 families displaced by underground fires and land subsidence in Jharia. Using this village as a case study, this paper shows that, in a location with considerable degree of differentiation in ownership of land, the impact of land acquisition on livelihoods of people can vary across households belonging to different classes. Evidence from the new Belgaria township, where families displaced by underground fires were rehabilitated, shows that the resilience with which displaced workers coped with the disruption in access to livelihoods varied across male and female workers, and across socio-economic status of displaced households. Livelihoods of workers who were engaged in casual labour in the coal fields, in particular women workers, were most adversely affected due to displacement.

Jharia, in Dhanbad district, is one of the largest coal fields in India, with an estimated coal reserves of over 17 billion metric tonnes, and the only domestic source of high-quality coking coal that is needed for steel production. The study village, Belgaria, is on the margins of the coal mines in Jharia. Land acquired from the village has been used to rehabilitate about 1200 families displaced by underground fires and land subsidence in Jharia. At present, there are two habitations in Belgaria: the Belgaria Village, from inhabitants of which most of their land has been acquired, and the Belgaria Township, where people displaced from Jharia have been resettled. The paper looks at income inequalities and livelihoods of people living in both these settlements. While Belgaria Village is a former Zamindari village, with a long history of unequal agrarian relations, the Township is a site where working-class people living near the coal mines – and working as casual workers, as coal scavengers or in provision of various kinds of services – have been resettled.

This paper is based on data from a survey conducted by the Society for Social and Economic Research and the Centre for Adivasi Research and Development in Belgaria in May 2015. The survey covered all households living in Belgaria Village and a randomly selected sample of 129 households living in Belgaria Township.

Section 2 of the paper describes land acquisition in Belgaria Village and its impact on livelihoods of households. Section 3 presents a brief account of resettlement in Belgaria Township and the impact of displacement on livelihoods of households in Belgaria Township. Section 4 provides a comparative analysis of income inequality in Belgaria Village and Belgaria Township.

2 Belgaria Village

Belgaria Village, located in Dhanbad district of Jharkhand, was once a zamindari village. The village was inhabited sometime in the late 19th century when three Rajput men from Ballia were rewarded with the zamindari rights over the land in the

We are thankful to Ashok Agarwal, Venkatesh Athreya, Smita Gupta and Brinda Karat for their valuable inputs and support. The usual disclaimer applies.

village by Rani Hemkumari, the then zamindar of Jharia estate. Belgaria is a multi caste village. All Rajput residents of the village trace their descent from the family of one of these three Rajput families. During the zamindari period, the land of Rajput landlords was cultivated by tenants belonging to *Mahato* caste (now OBC), and by landless adivasi workers belonging to *Mahali* tribe, who worked as farm servants for Rajput landlords, apart from weaving baskets, their traditional craft.¹

Abolition of zamindari led to transfer of ownership rights over some of the land to Mahato (OBC) households, though most land ownership remained concentrated in the hands of the Rajputs. Mahali adivasis remained landless and continued to work as farm servants for Rajput landlords and large landowning peasants among Mahatos.

2.1 Land Acquisition in Belgaria Village

In 1982, Government of India acquired all land other than homesteads in Belgaria Village and gave it to Bharat Coking Coal Limited (BCCL), a subsidiary of Coal India Limited (CIL). The resistance from the landlords and peasants to land acquisition was neutralised after Chief Minister Jagannath Mishra personally visited the village and assured the then Sarpanch, who was also the biggest Rajput landlord in the village, that the landowners would be given a fair compensation and employment in BCCL for giving up their land. The terms of land acquisition in Belgaria were not only extremely discriminatory but were specifically designed to gain support of Rajput landlords in favour of land acquisition. Land owners were given a monetary compensation of Rs. 9000 per acre and, for every 2 acres of land acquired, a salaried job in BCCL. Since Rajput landlords owned most of the land, most Rajput families were entitled to multiple jobs in BCCL. Most households identified as many adult men as possible within the entitlement and usually a woman was identified only if there was no adult male to take a job that was available. As we show in Section 2.2, persons having salaried employment in BCCL were well remunerated.

In contrast with Rajput households, Mahato households had only small amounts of land. As a result, Mahato households got fewer jobs. Households that owned less than 2 acres of land, however, were not given any job.

In contrast, since Mahali adivasis were landless, they were not entitled to any compensation.

Although the land was acquired for the purpose of building a coal depot, it remained unused by BCCL for at least two decades. In 2006, Jharia Rehabilitation and Development Authority (JRDA) started to construct a township on a part of this land to rehabilitate households affected by underground fires in the coalfield.

2.2 Impact of Land Acquisition on Livelihoods

Livelihoods of the inhabitants of Belgaria Village were dramatically affected because of acquisition of land. Acquisition of land resulted in a drastic fall in the extent

¹In 2015, at the time of our survey, there were a total of 111 households in Belgaria Village. Of these, 58 per cent were Mahali adivasi, 21 per cent were Mahato and 32 per cent were Rajput.

Table 1: Proportion of households having income from salaried employment, average annual income from salaried employment and share of salaries in household income, Belgaria Village

Social group	Proportion of households (per cent)	Average income from salaried employment (Rs)	Share of salaries in household income (per cent)
Mahali(Advasi)	10	84 467	11
Mahato (OBC)	86	373 667	89
Rajput (Other)	78	332 744	62
All	44	317 376	61

of cultivation in Belgaria Village. Although all the agricultural land was acquired by the government, landowners continued to have *de-facto* possession over all their land from 1982 to 2006 and over the part other than the land used for Belgaria Township after 2006. However, given the imminent loss of the land, landowners made no investment to improve productivity of land. Most land remained abandoned, with shrubs grown on it, while a small part was used for rainfed cultivation in the kharif season. No investment were made over the last three decades in irrigation to enable double cropping on land. As a result, not only did peasants exit agriculture as a source of livelihood, agricultural workers also had to seek wage employment elsewhere.

Implementation of land acquisition and compensation in Belgaria accentuated inequality in multiple ways. As is common in most projects where land is acquired, the compensation was provided only to landowners and that too in the proportion of land that they lost. But, the compensation policy was doubly discriminatory against small landowners, tenants and landless agricultural workers. No job was provided to those who lost less than 2 acres of land. Tenants, who cultivated land on informal contracts, received no compensation nor were the landless agricultural workers compensated for loss of agricultural employment. This further accentuated economic inequalities in Belgaria.

Salaried jobs in BCCL were highly remunerative. Table 1 shows that workers from 78 per cent of Rajput households and 86 per cent of Mahato households were engaged in salaried jobs. Most of these were jobs in BCCL that had been provided in compensation for the land. On average, these households received over Rs. 3 lakhs in income from these salaried jobs. This accounted for 62 per cent of income of Rajput households and 89 per cent of the income of Mahato households. In contrast, only 10 per cent of Mahali households had income from salaried jobs. These jobs were also less remunerative and the average income of these households from salaried jobs was less than Rs. 85 thousand.

With their accumulated wealth and surpluses from these remunerative salaried jobs, Rajput households had made substantial investments in many other businesses. Construction of Belgaria Township created demand for construction material and many construction-related activities as well as for services like shops

Table 2: Proportion of households engaged in non-agricultural businesses, average annual income from businesses and the share of business income in total household income, Belgaria Village

Social group	Proportion of households (per cent)	Average income from businesses (Rs)	Share of businesses in household income (per cent)
Mahali(Advasi)	3	100 420	5
Mahato (OBC)	5	84 000	1
Rajput (Other)	28	455 778	30
All	11	365 570	17

and transport, supervisors and security guards. Rajput households invested in these and entered into multiple businesses. They set up brick-kilns on parts of the land that was still lying unused to provide bricks for construction. They started supplying other construction material and started operating as labour contractors. In 2015, 28 per cent of Rajput households had income from businesses. On average, these households received over Rs. 4.5 lakhs as income from these businesses, which accounted for about 30 per cent of their total income (Table 2).

It is noteworthy that although many Mahato families were also provided jobs, given historical disparities between them and the Rajputs, they had not been able to invest in businesses like Rajputs. While salaried employment became their main source of income, some of them continued to even cultivate small parts of their land despite the acquisition.

At the time of the survey in 2015, there was a distinct difference in the socio-economic and political position of Rajputs and Mahatos in the village. Rajput households had bigger concrete houses, equipped with most modern amenities and equipments. They wielded considerable social and political power in the village. While not as wealthy and politically powerful as the Rajputs, economic conditions of Mahato households who had received salaried jobs in compensation for land had also improved considerably over the last three decades. With better economic conditions, they had also began to assert themselves politically in the village.²

While provision of remunerative salaried jobs in compensation and opening up of opportunities for businesses resulted in considerable upward mobility among Rajputs and Mahatos, Mahali adivasi households were completely left out and had not benefited from any upward occupational mobility. Since these adivasi households were landless, they received no monetary compensation or salaried jobs. Their main source of livelihood before the acquisition process was to work as farm servants for the Rajput landlords. Land acquisition took away this source of livelihood as well.

²In 2015, the sarpanch of the local panchayat was a woman from Mahato caste.

Table 3: Proportion of households engaged in casual wage labour (farm, non-farm and MGNREGA), income from casual wage labour and share of wage income in total household income, Belgaria Village

Social group	Proportion of households (per cent)	Average income from casual wage labour (Rs)	Share in household income (per cent)
Mahali(Advasi)	86	42 966	48
Mahato (OBC)	43	37 656	4
Rajput (Other)	19	71 678	3
All	59	44 881	11

In 2015, Mahali were primarily dependent on basket weaving, their traditional occupation, and non-agricultural casual wage labour. Workers from about 83 per cent of Mahali households were engaged in casual non-agricultural labour, working as brick-kiln workers, construction labour, loading and unloading workers, and working in NREGA. Non-agricultural labour accounted for about 48 per cent of their total income (Table 3). Almost all Mahali households – 95 per cent, to be precise – were engaged in Basket weaving, a task in which all men and women, including elderly and children, participated. Although bamboo basket weaving was only a seasonal activity, mainly from January to May, it accounted for about 31 percent of their total income.

The discriminatory and unequal compensation for land acquisition also meant that any later demands for providing employment to the landless or for returning the unused land did not get support of households that had benefited from jobs in BCCL. There had been nascent attempts in the village to organise people around demands for returning large area of land still lying and for provision of employment for the landless and poor peasants. In absence of support from the dominant classes in the village, who had secured jobs in BCCL and did not want to jeopardise that prospect in any way, such efforts did not take off.

3 Belgaria Township

The long history of mining in the Jharia coal fields has led to massive problems of underground fires and subsidence in these coal fields. There is almost a century long history of unsuccessful efforts to curb underground fire and subsidence. Subsidence of land continues to be a regular phenomenon in Jharia coalfield and regularly results in loss of life and destruction of property. Expansion of open cast mining since the mid-1970s has contributed to fanning the underground fires. With fires raging in many underground veins of the coal mines, large densely inhabited parts of Jharia continue to face a serious risk of subsidence (Gupta, 2013).

Since 1983, several Master Plans have been made to deal with the problem. While these Master Plans have combined the need to control fires and subsidence

with the need for rehabilitation of affected families, over the years, in view of failure of efforts to control the fires, the emphasis has shifted to rehabilitation of affected families. In 1997, Haradhan Roy, CPI(M) Member of Parliament from Asansol, filed a Public Interest Litigation in the Supreme Court on the issue of displacement due to subsidence and fires in Jharia coal field. The legal battle spearheaded by Haradhan Roy and Jharia Coalfield Bachao Samiti forced the government to come up with a Jharia Action Plan in 2003 (Agarwal, 2016). In 2004, Jharia Rehabilitation and Development Authority (JRDA) was formed to spearhead the rehabilitation. In 2008, JRDA came up with an updated *Master Plan for Dealing with Fire, Subsidence and Rehabilitation in the Leasehold Of BCCL*.³ The updated Master Plan proposed construction of a total of 25000 houses for BCCL employees and 54159 houses for other affected families over a period of 12 years. However, by 2015, only a fraction of these houses had actually been constructed.

3.1 Resettlement in Belgaria Township

In 2006, Jharia Rehabilitation and Development Authority (JRDA) started construction of Belgaria Township to rehabilitate some families whose houses were in imminent danger of subsidence due to underground fires. Until 2015, this was the only location where affected families other than the families of BCCL employees had been rehabilitated. In the first phase, JRDA constructed 2352 apartments in Belgaria Township, each having a floor area of 203.36 square feet comprising two rooms, a kitchen and an attached toilet. The apartments were constructed in 196 three-storey blocks of 12 apartments each. However, since these apartments were very small, and Belgaria was located far away from Jharia, affected families had been unwilling to accept to move to Belgaria. In view of this, JRDA provided two apartments to each family, thus managing to rehabilitate less than 1200 families in Belgaria Township (Phase I).

Historically, livelihood opportunities in the coalfields – either directly related to coal mining or to various other services that were needed to support this large coal economy – have attracted people from different caste and class backgrounds, and from different regions and linguistic backgrounds, to Jharia. The Belgaria Township was inhabited by families that were previously engaged in informal occupations – either as casual workers in coal mining operations, or as coal scavengers, or as informal workers in provision of various services. These families belonged to different castes and traced their origins to many different places. As seen in Table 4, dalits comprised 39 per cent of the population of Belgaria Township, OBCs comprised 34 per cent of the population. Other caste Hindus accounted for 14 per cent of the population, Muslims accounted for 8 per cent of the population and Adivasis accounted for 4 per cent of the population. Allotment of apartments in Belgaria Township was caste heterogeneous. However, the caste heterogeneity of the habitation did not completely diminish the caste hierarchy. Caste barriers in social and economic relations within the township were pervasive and, in our survey, upper caste families often complained about having to live in close proximity of dalits and talked about how they tried to avoid dealing with them.

³<http://www.jrda.in/download/masterplan.pdf>

Table 4: Proportion of population and households belonging to different social groups, Belgaria Township, 2014-15 (per cent)

Social Group	Population (per cent)	Households (per cent)
Dalit	39	43
Adivasi	4	3
OBC	34	31
Other caste Hindu	14	16
Muslim	8	8
All	100	100

3.2 Livelihoods of Households in Belgaria Township

Displacement on account of underground fires and subsidence of land caused a disruption in livelihoods of households. Many forms of employment became either inaccessible or more difficult to be engaged in. This included various occupations related to coal mining including loading/unloading work, casual labour for private contractors and companies, and scavenging and transporting of coal. Shifting to Belgaria colony, which was far away from most coal-related work-sites, meant that many of these workers had to give up their work or had to reduce the amount of time they were able to work in the mines and other coal-related work-sites. Similarly, many workers who worked in shops in Jharia were unable to continue doing so since travelling from Belgaria early in the morning and returning to Belgaria late in the evening was not possible. Livestock rearing was not possible for families that had been allotted apartments on first or second floors.

The problem of inaccessibility of the work-sites from Belgaria had particularly hit employment of women. In 2015, only 22 per cent of the women in the age group 15 to 59 years were employed while among men of 15 to 59 years of age, the work participation rate was 82 percent. Unemployment and marginalisation of women workers was the most important economic impact of displacement and rehabilitation in Belgaria Township.

While displacement caused severe disruption of access to wage employment initially, working class residents often got together to demand better housing conditions, improvement in transport, schooling and provision of other public services and access to livelihoods. A few residents who were associated with the Communist Party of India (Marxist) took the lead in mobilising residents. Although very little was done to provide livelihood opportunities to residents of Belgaria, collective protests did result in improvement in availability of transport services, primary schooling and some other civic amenities.

As transport services became available, male workers started commuting to Jharia for work. Further, establishment of the Township, where a large agglomeration of people lived, also opened up opportunities for provision of various services. In 2015, many workers of Belgaria Township were self-employed, working as auto rickshaw drivers, petty shopkeepers, barbers, cobblers, tutors, tailors,

caterers, wedding decorators and owners of other small businesses. In all, as many as 40 per cent households had income from some form of self-employment, providing services not just in Belgaria Township but also in various adjoining parts of Jharia. Average annual income from such businesses was Rs. 80,140, which was about 34 per cent of the total household income of households in Belgaria Township (Table 5).

Income from businesses, which were far more remunerative than casual manual employment, was the main source of economic inequality in Belgaria Township. As shown in Table 5, participation in businesses was not unrelated to the caste-status of households. Proportion of dalit households that were self-employed, though substantial, was lower than the corresponding proportion for OBC, Other Caste Hindu and Muslim households. Despite the fact that Belgaria Township was extremely heterogenous in respect of castes, religion, linguistic groups and regional origin, there was a significant association of caste with the nature of business households were engaged in. People belonging to *Nai* caste worked as barbers, *Lohras* were engaged in black-smithy, *Ravidas* were cobblers, OBC *Halwais* were street vendors selling sweets and other snacks, while other OBCs, Other caste Hindus and Muslims were engaged in catering businesses and working as private tutors.

Although a relatively small proportion of dalit households were self-employed, these households had substantial business incomes, earning on average over Rs. 1 lakhs per annum. Past savings and the monetary compensation provided to the displaced families were used by these households for investment in businesses. Families which had been provided ground floor apartments were at a significant advantage as they could open small shops in a part of their house.

In contrast, many dalit households were primarily dependent on wage labour as their primary source of livelihood and had very low incomes (Table 6). Just as the proportion of households engaged in businesses was lowest for dalit households among all social groups, the proportion of households engaged in manual wage labour was the highest (Table 6). Wage labourers in Belgaria worked in a variety of occupations, including loading and unloading in coal mines, masons, as tempo drivers, and work on construction sites. Of these, most arduous and least remunerative was working in loading and unloading of coal. Table 7 shows that the proportion of workers who commuted from Belgaria to find manual wage employment in the coal fields was higher (19 percent) for Dalit men than for male workers from other social groups. This disparity – between those who managed to be self-employed and those who were forced to do manual labour – was the source of substantial within-social-group inequality among dalit households in Belgaria.

4 Income inequality in Belgaria Village and Belgaria Township

Table 8 shows the proportion of households in different size classes of income. This table clearly shows that the income distribution in both the township and the village was highly unequal. About 15 per cent households in Belgaria Village and 26 per cent households in Belgaria township had annual household income less than Rs. 36000 (Rs. 3000 per month). Another 26 per cent households in Belgaria Village and 35 per cent in the Township had annual income between Rs. 36000 and

Table 5: Proportion of households engaged in non-agricultural businesses, average annual income from businesses and the share of business income in total household income, Belgaria Township

Social group	Proportion of households (per cent)	Average income from businesses (₹)	Share of businesses in household income (per cent)
Dalit	22	103 617	27
Adivasi	25	90 000	17
OBC	52	77 339	47
Other caste Hindu	50	79 960	34
Muslim	70	47 214	34
All	40	80 149	34

Table 6: Proportion of households engaged in casual wage labour, average income from casual labour and share of wage income in household income, Belgaria Township

Social group	Proportion of households (per cent)	Average income from casual labour (₹)	Share in household income (per cent)
Dalit	87	56 114	57
Adivasi	50	23 700	9
OBC	55	47 234	30
Other	65	55 725	31
Muslim	70	57 636	41
All	71	53 347	41

Table 7: Proportion of men, aged 15 to 59 years, working in Jharia coal field as manual wage labourers, Belgaria Township (per cent)

Social group	Per cent
Dalit	19
Adivasi	0
OBC	8
Other	6
Muslim	0
All	11

Rs. 72000. In contrast, 33 per cent households in Belgaria Village and 7 per cent households in the Township had income more than Rs. 2.5 lakhs.

In terms of the Gini coefficient, income inequality in Belgaria Village (0.57) was higher than the income inequality in Belgaria Township (0.46) (Table 9).

Not only was the inequality higher in Belgaria Village, historical patterns of caste disparities reflected clearly in income disparities in Belgaria Village. Table 10 shows some descriptive statistical measures of income disparities across the three castes. Of the three castes/tribe, Mahali adivasi households were the poorest. Although they accounted for 52 per cent of the households, their share in total household income of Belgaria Village was only 17 per cent. In contrast, Rajput caste accounted for 29 per cent of households and 53 per cent of the total village income. The median income of Mahali adivasi households was only about Rs. 58 thousand. In contrast, the median income of Mahato households was about Rs. 3 lakhs and that of Rajput households was about Rs. 4 lakhs. It is noteworthy that the highest income of an adivasi household was Rs. 3 lakhs, while the highest among Mahato households was about Rs. 12 lakhs and among Rajput households was Rs. 18 lakhs. A similar pattern is evident from the boxplots shown in Figure 1a.

In contrast, as seen in Table 11 and Figure 1b, disparities across caste groups were much less striking in Belgaria Township. Although there were differences in median incomes of households belonging to different caste groups, it is clear that as a group, the income shares of different caste groups were not very different from their share in the population.

We have formally tested for the extent of caste disparities using inequality decomposition techniques. Decomposition analysis of inequality is typically done using Generalised Entropy Measures (Equation 1), a class of inequality measures using which total inequality can be decomposed into inequality within groups (I_W) and inequality between groups (I_B) (Cowell, 1977; Toyoda, 1980).

$$GE(\alpha) = \frac{1}{\alpha^2 - \alpha} \left[\frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \left(\frac{y_i}{y} \right)^\alpha - 1 \right] \quad (1)$$

- where alpha represents the weights given to the distance between incomes at different parts of the income distribution
- n refers to the number of individuals in the sample

Table 8: Proportion of households belonging to different size classes of annual household income, Belgaria Village and Belgaria Township, 2014-15 (per cent)

Size class of household income	Belgaria Village	Belgaria Township
0 to 36000	15	26
36000 to 72000	26	35
72000 to 108000	11	16
108000 to 144000	9	9
144000 to 180000	1	3
180000 to 216000	3	4
216000 to 252000	2	1
Greater than 252000	33	7

Table 9: Gini coefficient of annual household income, Belgaria Village and Belgaria Township, 2014-15

	Gini coefficient
Belgaria Village	0.57
Belgaria Township	0.46

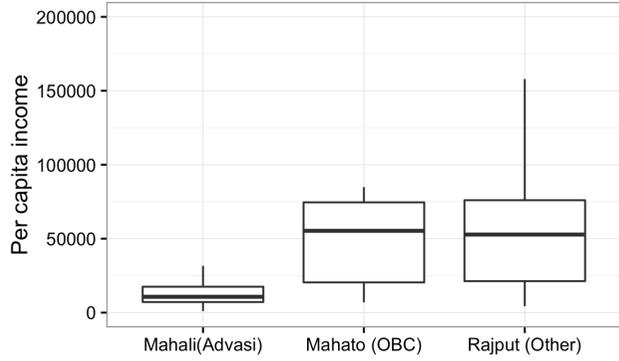
Table 10: Measures of income disparity across social groups, Belgaria Village, 2014-15

Social group	Proportion of households (per cent)	Share in total income (per cent)	Median income (Rs)	Highest income (Rs)
Mahali (Adivasi)	52	17	58 115	321 710
Mahato (OBC)	19	30	316 500	1 239 267
Rajput (Other)	29	53	397 011	1 800 000

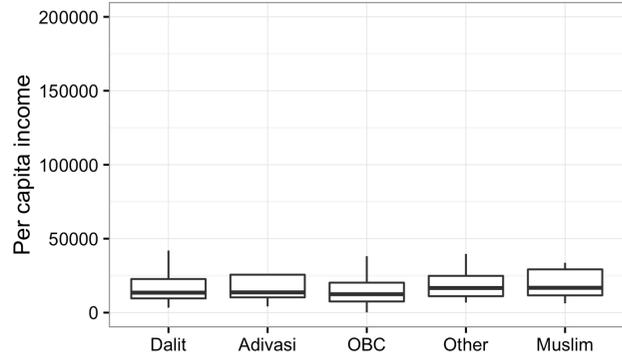
Table 11: Measures of income disparity across social groups, Belgaria Township, 2014-15

Social group	Proportion of households (per cent)	Share in total income (per cent)	Median income (Rupees)	Highest income (Rupees)
Dalit	43	39	58 600	735 640
Adivasi	3	4	98 000	288 000
OBC	31	29	64 750	458 096
Other	16	20	76 600	430 000
Muslim	8	8	110 100	155 000

- y_i refers to income of individual i
- y refers to the mean of income.



(a) Belgaria Village



(b) Belgaria Township

Figure 1: Boxplots of per capita income, by social group, Belgaria Village and Township, 2014-15

For decomposition of inequality, we use GE(2), a measure of inequality that corresponds to half the square of coefficient of variation. Inequality within the groups (I_w), is measured as the weighted sum of inequality of income within each subgroup, the weights being the relative population shares and income shares. Inequality between groups is calculated by assigning the mean income of each subgroup to all members of that subgroup and then estimating GE(2).

Table 12 shows the estimates of inequality decomposition across caste/tribe groups in Belgaria Village and Belgaria Township using GE(2). Results of the decomposition exercise further confirm that inequality in Belgaria Village was primarily a result of caste disparities. In Belgaria Village, about 30 per cent of total inequality was across different groups. In contrast, only two per cent of total inequality in Belgaria Township was on account of the caste disparities.

Elbers *et al.* (2008) have shown that, given the relative size of different groups in a population, there is a maximum limit for inequality between groups, and thus, it is useful to look at observed between group inequality in relation to the maximum between group inequality. The observed between group inequality was half of the maximum between group inequality in Belgaria Village while observed between group inequality was only two per cent of the maximum between group inequality in Belgaria Township.

In Belgaria Village, the within-group inequality was lowest among the Mahato households, followed by the Mahali Adivasis. Rajput households, which on average had the highest levels of income, also had the highest within-group inequality in Belgaria Village.

In contrast, in Belgaria Township, within group inequality was highest among dalits, the group that had the lowest average income. About 43 per cent households in Belgaria Township belonged to different dalit castes. While a majority of these households were engaged in manual labour, some had managed to invest in petty businesses and obtained substantial incomes from them.

5 Concluding Remarks

Acquisition of land for developmental projects has become a particularly contentious issue because state-led land acquisition is increasingly done for private-sector-led projects and, in many such cases, is deemed to be detrimental to the livelihood of people from whom the land is acquired.

It has been argued by some scholars from within the Marxist tradition that, under contemporary neoliberal order, appropriation of resources by capitalists with an active aid of the state apparatus rather than appropriation of surplus value is the dominant form of accumulation. Such scholars have argued that appropriation of resources in the contemporary world can be usefully theorised as primitive accumulation (De Angelis, 2000; Perelman, 2000). David Harvey, one of the foremost proponents of this argument, coined the term “accumulation by dispossession” to describe this phenomenon under neoliberalism (Harvey, 2003, 2007). Within this body of literature, terms like “land grab” are often used to talk about varied forms of land acquisition in the third world today.

Ben Fine points out that the concept of accumulation by dispossession has been used to “homogenise what are diverse and complex moments in the economic restructuring of capital and the broader social restructuring of capitalism” (Fine, 2006). Marx used the term primary or primitive accumulation to refer to a

Table 12: Decomposition of GE (2) inequality within and across social groups in Belgaria Township and Belgaria Village, 2014-15

Social group	Belgaria Township	Belgaria Village
Dalit	85	-
Adivasi	29	38
OBC	50	29
Other	38	43
Muslim	10	-
Total within group inequality	56	57
Between group inequality	1	25
Total inequality	57	82
Maximum Between group inequality [ELMO]	50	49
Between group inequality as a percentage of maximum	2	50
between group inequality		
Between group inequality as a percentage of total inequality	2	30

process through which the primary producers were separated from the means of production, and these means of production became the property of a class of people who would then constitute the capitalist class and would employ the now-dispossessed class of erstwhile primary producers as wage labourers. Stated differently, primary or primitive accumulation is the process that leads to accumulation of capital prior to the establishment of the capitalist mode of production and the simultaneous dispossession of primary producers, along with a fundamental change whereby the dispossessed primary producers were turned into wage labourers, primarily through the use of extra-economic coercion.

Would it be correct to characterise land acquisition in Belgaria Village as primitive accumulation?

There was a considerable inequality in ownership of land between Rajput landlords, Mahato rich and middle peasants, and Mahali landless adivasi households when land was acquired in Belgaria. Landless adivasi households laboured on the farms of the landlords and rich peasants albeit under unfree conditions. Acquisition of land did not dispossess all households equally. Furthermore, it perpetuated caste-class disparities because of extremely discriminatory terms on which land was acquired. While the landlords and the rich peasants were given monetary compensation as well as highly remunerative jobs, only a small monetary compensation was provided to poor peasants and no compensation was given to landless adivasi households. Over time, taking advantage of opportunities that became available with the construction of Belgaria Township, former landlord families established businesses that provided large returns. On the other hand, poor

adivasi households were left to seek casual employment in non-agricultural manual labour and continue with their traditional occupation of basket weaving.

The case of acquisition of land in Belgaria illustrates that applying the concept of primary/primitive accumulation to varied forms of appropriation of resources in contemporary world is not only inaccurate but also conceals wide variations and specifics that are crucial to understand the nature of accumulation and changes in class relations. The case study of Belgaria specifically shows that the impact of land acquisition in a village characterised by unequal class relations is differential across classes and social groups. Under conditions of unequal ownership rights and dominance of landlords-rich peasants, acquisition is negotiated differently with different classes and thus has differential outcomes.

Taking cognisance of this aspect is crucial for building resistance against discriminatory and forced land acquisition. Unless vulnerability of the working classes, poor peasants and other marginalised groups is identified as a core issue, the resistance against discriminatory and forced land acquisition runs the risk of being aligned to the interests of the dominant classes rather than to the interests of the poor and the working classes.

On the other hand, analysis of resettlement of households in Belgaria Township, and the trajectory of economic change set off by displacement and rehabilitation, also brings out some important lessons. Relocation to Belgaria resulted in a short-term disruption of employment for male workers and a continued disruption of employment for women workers. With improvement in transport facilities, by 2015, most male workers had resumed work, although many had to find new occupations. Work participation rates among women, however, remained very low.

Together, Belgaria turns out to be a site where a complex dynamic of change has unfolded in the wake of land acquisition and resettlement. The erstwhile landlords benefited the most from this process, landless adivasi households were the ones that were most adversely affected. There had been nascent attempts in the village to organise people around demands for returning large area of land still lying and for provision of employment for the landless and poor peasants. In absence of support from the dominant classes in the village, who had secured jobs in BCCL and did not want to jeopardise that prospect in any way, such demands, however, did not get adequate traction within the village. On the other hand, in Belgaria Township, with a large concentration of working class households, demands for improvement of infrastructure in the township, improvement of better connectivity with schools, hospitals and work places, and improvement in provision of basic services were made. Continuing problems of lack of employment, particularly for women, and gaps in provision of basic services like health care and schooling require that residents are organised and their collective voice is strengthened. This is the immediate future for the Belgaria Township to look forward to.

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This monograph presents a study of the impact of land acquisition and displacement on the livelihoods of people in Belgaria, a village in Dhanbad district in Jharkhand. The study village, Belgaria, is on the margins of the coal mines in Jharia. Agricultural land acquired from the village in 1982 was used to construct a township and rehabilitate about 1200 families displaced by underground fires and land subsidence in Jharia. Using this village as a case study, this study shows that, in a location with considerable degree of differentiation in ownership of land, the impact of land acquisition on livelihoods of people can vary across households belonging to different classes. Evidence from the new Belgaria township, where families displaced by underground fires were rehabilitated, shows that the resilience with which displaced workers coped with the disruption in access to livelihoods varied across male and female workers, and across socio-economic status of displaced households. Livelihoods of workers who were engaged in casual labour in the coal fields, in particular women workers, were most adversely affected due to displacement.

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