



February 24, 2020

SEMINAR NOTICE

Topic: 'Our Place in the Future': *Chalaaki* as Coping among the Young Men in a Mining Project Refinery Area

Speaker (s): Ms. Minati Dash

Chair: Professor Amita Baviskar, I.E.G.

The seminar details are as follows:

Date & time: Thursday, March 5, 2020 at 3.30 p.m.

Venue: A.M. Khusro Room
Institute of Economic Growth
University of Delhi Enclave
North Campus, Delhi-110 007

All are welcome.

(Oindrila De)

Seminar Convenor

Abstract:

In the 1990s, the Dalit-Adivasi communities in Kashipur in South Odisha fiercely resisted the setting up of a mining company in their area over fears of dispossession. Any work done by the company or the government in aiding the mining infrastructure, such as helipad, sample rehabilitation quarters, bridges and company plant nursery were attacked and destroyed by the villagers-young and old- in early stages itself. The company, villagers recount, could not lay a single brick in the area until 2007. The collective resistance went on for over fifteen years before it declined in 2009-2010. Interestingly, as the collective action declined and the construction work accelerated to advanced stages within a year or so, contours of a socio-economic differentiation among young men emerged. A section of young men appeared on the horizon, who engaged closely with the mining company and routinely obtained economic benefits from it in the form of construction contracts. These men were referred to as *chalaak* (clever) by other villagers. Interestingly, these *chalaak* young men were active participants in the collective action.

This paper is an exploration of *chalaaki* as associated with these young men to understand its role in the socio-economic differentiation that came about in the refinery area villages as the collective action ceased. I ask, what is *chalaaki*? Who possesses it and how? What is its constitution? How does it work? What happens to those who do not have it? Engaging with Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, I explore how the networks struck and skills acquired during the movement get recast into a coveted form of cultural capital in context of decline in collective action. I focus on the personal trajectories and social histories of individuals to understand its mediation by the experience of collective action. I offer to make a case for *chalaaki* as a distinction acquired through participation in collective action that had sought to challenge resource loot in the past and in the changed scenario where economic vulnerabilities and existential uncertainties of the present and the future loom large, was consciously transformed to improve life-chances as a means of coping. The ethnographic fieldwork for this paper was conducted over a nine-month period during 2010-2012 and in June 2018.