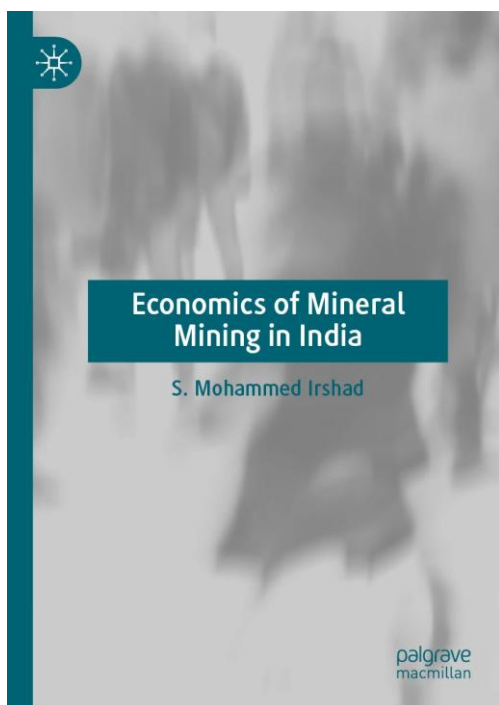


BOOK REVIEW

Extractive economics and ecological rights

Arpita Bisht *

S Mohammed Irshad. 2024. *Economics of Mineral Mining in India*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan. xvii + 220. ISBN 978-981-97-9418-8



Large-scale mineral mining in India frequently leads to severe harm to local communities. This harm includes but is not limited to land dispossession and subversion of their constitutional rights, ecosystem degradation and the destruction of their environmental inheritances, and their displacement from spaces of sociocultural reproduction and means of livelihood sustenance. The dynamics of India's mining frontiers follow similar historical precedents from across the rest of the world.

Contemporary mining finds its historical precedents in the

long sixteenth century. Since then, waves of colonial expansion have been

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founded on similar principles—ensuring the extraction of massive quantities of ecosystems, trade of raw materials across geospatially distant locations, transfers of resources to colonial centres, and the distribution of the accumulated wealth within a small group of people. In the late 1980s (in the post-independence era of the Global South), the “Washington Consensus” launched an era of new resource extraction dynamics—through strategies of neoimperialism and neocolonialism. The structural reforms of the early 1990s and the resultant globalization of neoliberalism ushered in the most recent phase of resource and wealth transfers—this time from the “underdeveloped” or “developing” world to the industrial core of capitalism: the Global North. Across this time period, much theoretical work has been done to understand the links between colonialism, capitalism, and natural resources.

Drawing on these theories, S Mohammed Irshad offers us this important book on mineral extraction in India. In this book, he deftly combines an analysis of political, economic, legislative, governance, and human and civil rights aspects with the ecological aspects of the mining industry in India. The book makes critical contributions by including the historical precedents to mining in India, e.g., current policy and governance dimensions (which continue to be founded on the legacy of British colonial governance), and sociocultural dimensions particular to India (the “primitive accumulation” of land and resources founded on the ever-present caste system of India). It also comprehensively covers the wide range of minerals found in India—for instance, it includes discussions on coal and bulk metals (iron ore, copper, bauxite, etc.), but also on critical minerals, aggregate minerals (sand and cobbles), rare minerals (heavy sands mining), and atomic minerals.

S. Mohammed Irshad presents an analysis of the mining landscape in India that is grounded in the realities of the people residing at the frontiers of resource extraction. He does an excellent job of covering the multiple layers of legislative, administrative, and bureaucratic issues involved in mining, particularly as they apply to people at mining frontiers. In addition to the national policy dimension, the book covers a range of court decisions and presents important information regarding the bureaucratic processes involved in dispute resolution regarding land acquisition, land dispossession, and land rights (including forest rights, cultural/religious rights, and the civil rights of local residents where the mining occurs). Based on extensive research in Odisha, the book demonstrates how industrial capitalism and the state have been instrumental in ensuring that mining operations continue regardless of the will of local communities by transferring operations to national capital, in cases of failure to ensure operations of foreign capital.

There are three major discussions in the book. First, it examines various theories of resource accumulation and resource rights as applicable to the Indian case. The book explores the capitalist relations surrounding land use, distribution, and acquisition in India—as they emerged more and more strongly over the history of independent India. Second, it discusses the increasing privatization of land by private capital from within India, as well as the flow of foreign capital into the mining industry over the last 75 years. In addition, the book includes discussions on the regulatory state and the mining economy, as well as the royalties and income from mining, which are fundamental to understanding how the state supports industrial capitalism in India. Thirdly, it critically discusses changes in legislative frameworks that have guided the mining industry in India and presents us with important perspectives on how the state—through the institutional support it provides—has created conditions where governance, bureaucracy, and economics are all oriented towards benefiting the mining industry. Finally, the book features a serious discussion on the politics of anti-mining movements, uncovering both people’s politics as well as mainstream politics. Here, the author also delves into very important but often neglected aspects of people’s political movements—the dimensions of gender, caste, human rights violations, and indigenous rights violations under industrial capitalism. A much-needed analysis of social movements against mining and extractivism active in other parts of the world is an important section. The concluding chapter provides a broad picture of similar movements in Latin America—which have occurred and are occurring in different political, economic, and historical contexts—but are similar in that the state enables the capital needed to (violently if need be) dispossess and disenfranchise local, often marginalized, and indigenous communities from the spaces of their life, culture, society, and livelihood generation.

The book could have benefited from Immanuel Wallerstein’s work (1974), which demonstrates how the core is dependent on and draws from the periphery, and from Jason Moore’s work on resource “frontiers” (2000), which demonstrates the structural basis for dynamics of exploitation—both of people and nature—through the agencies of capital, technology, and the state. In India, the phenomenon of “internal colonialism” is an important lens to understand the oppression of Adivasi communities, which is missing in this book. Besides this, the book presents fresh and multifaceted perspectives on India’s mining sector. The book can prove useful for academic audiences—both students as well as teachers, since it provides a succinct summary of mining in India. Given its coverage of court cases and

the hurdles faced by mining-affected people, it may also be useful for members of the legal community, journalists, and members of civil society.

Data Availability statement: The data used in this paper is not provided in a repository. This is a book review, which does not have any original primary data included in the work

Conflict of Interest Statement: No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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