



# Urban Land Dispossession In India: Accumulation By Dispossession Under Neoliberal Urbanism

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**Abstract:** Urban land dispossession in India represents a critical manifestation of accumulation by dispossession under neoliberal capitalism, wherein the state systematically facilitates the transfer of land from marginalized communities to private capital. This paper examines the theoretical foundations and empirical manifestations of urban land dispossession in contemporary India through the lens of David Harvey's concept of accumulation by dispossession, building upon insights from postcolonial urban theory and critical development studies. Drawing from extensive secondary research and analysis of peer-reviewed literature, this study argues that India's neoliberal urban transformation has fundamentally restructured land relations, creating new forms of primitive accumulation that dispossess the urban poor while enabling capital circulation in the built environment. The analysis demonstrates how the Indian state operates as a "land broker state" (Levien, 2013) that deploys coercive power to overcome barriers to capital accumulation represented by existing land tenure arrangements, particularly affecting slum dwellers, small farmers on urban peripheries, and tribal communities. Through examining key policy frameworks including the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013, Special Economic Zones, and urban renewal programs, this paper reveals how legal and extra-legal mechanisms of dispossession operate within India's informalized planning regime (Roy, 2009). The findings contribute to broader debates on neoliberal urbanism in the Global South by highlighting the centrality of land dispossession to contemporary urban transformation and its implications for social justice and spatial inequality.

**Keywords:** land dispossession; accumulation by dispossession; neoliberal urbanism; India; primitive accumulation; urban transformation

## I. INTRODUCTION

Urban land dispossession in India has emerged as one of the most significant manifestations of neoliberal capitalism's expansion into the built environment, fundamentally reshaping the relationship between state, capital, and marginalized communities. Since economic liberalization in the 1990s, India has witnessed an unprecedented scale of land acquisition for urban development, infrastructure projects, and Special Economic Zones, resulting in the displacement of millions of people and the transformation of vast rural and peri-urban landscapes into sites of capital accumulation (Levien, 2013; Nielsen & Nilsen, 2022). This process represents what David Harvey terms "accumulation by dispossession" – the deployment of extra-economic coercion to facilitate capital accumulation by transferring assets from vulnerable populations to capital (Harvey, 2003; Banerjee-Guha, 2010).

The phenomenon of land dispossession in India cannot be understood merely as an inevitable consequence of economic development or urbanization. Rather, it constitutes a fundamentally political process through which the state actively intervenes to create conditions for capital accumulation by overcoming what Marx identified as barriers to the expansion of capitalist social relations (Levien, 2013; Harvey, 2003). In the Indian context,

these barriers are represented by smallholding peasants, informal settlers, and communities with customary land rights who occupy land that capital requires for profitable investment (Levien, 2013). The state's role as a "land broker state" (Levien, 2013) involves the systematic deployment of legal and extra-legal mechanisms to transfer land from these vulnerable populations to private capital, often under the justification of "public purpose" or "development" (Roy, 2009; Nielsen & Nilsen, 2022).

This paper argues that urban land dispossession in India represents a critical form of primitive accumulation that is central to the country's neoliberal urban transformation. Building upon Harvey's theoretical framework of accumulation by dispossession and insights from postcolonial urban theory, particularly Ananya Roy's analysis of informalized planning regimes (Roy, 2009), this study examines how dispossession operates through both legal mechanisms such as the Land Acquisition Act and informal practices of state power that selectively deploy and suspend regulations (Roy, 2009). The analysis demonstrates that dispossession is not simply an economic process but a profoundly political one that reflects and reproduces existing inequalities of class, caste, and citizenship while enabling new forms of capital accumulation in urban space (Levien, 2013; Banerjee-Guha, 2010).

The significance of this analysis extends beyond the Indian context to broader theoretical debates about neoliberal urbanism in the Global South. As cities in developing countries experience rapid growth and integration into global capital circuits, understanding the mechanisms through which land is transferred from use-value to exchange-value becomes crucial for comprehending contemporary urban transformation (Harvey, 2003; Banerjee-Guha, 2010). India's experience offers particularly valuable insights given the scale of its urbanization process, the democratic context within which dispossession occurs, and the sophisticated legal and policy frameworks that have evolved to manage land acquisition (Nielsen & Nilsen, 2022).

## **II. Theoretical Framework: Accumulation by Dispossession and Neoliberal Urbanism**

The theoretical foundation for understanding urban land dispossession in India rests primarily on David Harvey's concept of accumulation by dispossession, which extends Marx's analysis of primitive accumulation beyond its historical role in capitalism's origins to encompass ongoing processes under advanced capitalism (Harvey, 2003, 2007). Harvey argues that accumulation by dispossession involves "the continuation and proliferation of accretion practices" that Marx had designated as primitive accumulation, including "the commodification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations; conversion of various forms of property rights into exclusively private property rights; suppression of rights to the commons; and colonial, neocolonial, and imperial processes of appropriation of assets" (Harvey, 2007, pp. 34-35).

In Harvey's formulation, accumulation by dispossession serves a crucial function under neoliberal capitalism by providing outlets for over-accumulated capital and mechanisms for transferring wealth from vulnerable populations to capital (Harvey, 2003, 2007). This process is fundamentally political rather than purely economic, requiring the active intervention of state power to overcome resistance and create conditions for profitable investment (Harvey, 2003). The concept proves particularly relevant to understanding contemporary India, where the state has increasingly positioned itself as a facilitator of private capital accumulation through land acquisition and urban development policies (Levien, 2013; Banerjee-Guha, 2010).

Michael Levien's ethnographic analysis of Special Economic Zones in India provides crucial insights into how accumulation by dispossession operates in practice (Levien, 2013). Levien argues that rather than representing an economic process of over-accumulated capital finding new outlets, accumulation by dispossession is "an extra-economic process of coercive expropriation typically exercised by states to help capitalist overcome barriers to accumulation – in this case, the absence of fully capitalist rural land markets" (Levien, 2013, p. 365). This analysis highlights the central role of state coercion in facilitating capital accumulation through land transfer, challenging narratives that present market mechanisms as sufficient for land commodification (Levien, 2013).

The theoretical framework is further enriched by Swapna Banerjee-Guha's analysis of accumulation by dispossession in Indian cities, which demonstrates how neoliberal urban policies systematically marginalize the urban poor while facilitating capital accumulation (Banerjee-Guha, 2010). Banerjee-Guha argues that neoliberal urbanization in India operates through "a finance-driven regime and a cultural hegemony that valorizes global city aesthetics over local needs," resulting in city planning that systematically marginalizes the urban poor (Banerjee-Guha, 2010, p. 15). This analysis reveals how accumulation by dispossession operates not only through direct land acquisition but also through urban policies that privilege certain forms of land use and urban development over others (Banerjee-Guha, 2010).

Ananya Roy's analysis of urban informality provides another crucial theoretical lens for understanding land dispossession in India (Roy, 2005, 2009). Roy argues that India's planning regime is itself "an informalized entity, one that is a state of deregulation, ambiguity, and exception" (Roy, 2009, p. 81). This "regime of planning by exception" creates conditions where "laws and rules are selectively applied or suspended," enabling the state to declare slums "illegal" to justify eviction while creating special economic zones with relaxed regulations (Roy, 2009). Roy's analysis reveals how informality functions not as the absence of state regulation but as a mode of governance that enables flexible deployment of state power for capital accumulation (Roy, 2005, 2009).

The synthesis of these theoretical perspectives reveals urban land dispossession in India as a complex process that operates through both legal and extra-legal mechanisms to facilitate capital accumulation. The state's role is not simply to enforce property rights or provide neutral market mechanisms, but to actively intervene in land markets to overcome barriers to capital accumulation represented by existing land tenure arrangements (Levien, 2013; Harvey, 2003; Roy, 2009). This intervention takes multiple forms, from direct acquisition through eminent domain to the selective enforcement of planning regulations that enable some forms of development while criminalizing others (Roy, 2009).

### III. The Political Economy of Land Dispossession in Contemporary India

The post-liberalization period in India has witnessed a fundamental transformation in the political economy of land, marked by the state's increasingly active role in facilitating land transfer from agricultural and informal uses to commercial and industrial development (Levien, 2013; Nielsen & Nilsen, 2022). This transformation reflects what Levien characterizes as the emergence of a "land broker state" that takes as one of its primary responsibilities "the forcible transfer of agrarian land to capital for industrial, commercial and residential development" (Levien, 2013, p. 354). This shift represents a qualitative change from earlier periods when land acquisition primarily served public sector development projects to the contemporary era where the state increasingly serves private capital accumulation (Levien, 2013; Nielsen & Nilsen, 2022).

The scale of this transformation is unprecedented in India's post-independence history. According to estimates cited in the literature, approximately 60 million people have been displaced from their land for development projects since independence in 1947, with the rate of dispossession accelerating significantly after liberalization in the early 1990s (Levien, 2013). The character of dispossession has also changed fundamentally, as Special Economic Zones, high-tech cities, real estate developments, and privatized infrastructure have joined traditional projects like dams and mining as major causes of displacement (Levien, 2013; Nielsen & Nilsen, 2022).

Special Economic Zones represent a particularly significant mechanism of land dispossession in contemporary India. The SEZ Act of 2005 created a framework for private developers to acquire large tracts of land with state assistance, ostensibly for export-oriented industrial development (Levien, 2013). However, empirical analysis reveals that many SEZs have functioned primarily as mechanisms for land speculation and real estate development rather than genuine industrial production (Levien, 2013). Levien's ethnographic study of the Mahindra World City SEZ demonstrates how SEZ developers "commodify land for industry and urban growth and capture windfall profits from the artificially cheap land acquired by the state" (Levien, 2013, p. 378). The developer sells developed land to IT companies while leveraging industrial presence to build luxury real estate colonies, creating what Levien terms a "peculiar agrarian transformation through land speculation" (Levien, 2013, p. 378).

Resistance to land acquisition has also intensified in the post-liberalization period, with farmers and communities increasingly mobilizing against dispossession (Levien, 2013; Nielsen & Nilsen, 2022). These "land wars" have forced the Indian state to develop more sophisticated mechanisms for managing resistance while maintaining the flow of land to capital (Levien, 2013). The resulting political dynamics reveal the fundamental contradiction between India's democratic political system and its growth model's dependence on large-scale land transfer (Levien, 2013). As Prime Minister Manmohan Singh acknowledged, land acquisition has become a "very sensitive" issue that exposes tensions between the land requirements of India's liberalized growth model and the exigencies of electoral democracy (cited in Levien, 2013).

The spatial patterns of dispossession reveal systematic targeting of the most vulnerable populations. Tribal communities, who constitute approximately 8% of India's population, account for over 40% of those displaced by development projects (Fernandes, 2007). This disproportionate impact reflects both the location of tribal communities in resource-rich areas and their limited political power to resist dispossession (Fernandes, 2007). Similarly, urban dispossession disproportionately affects slum dwellers and informal settlers who lack secure tenure and political voice (Roy, 2009; Banerjee-Guha, 2010).

The economic logic of dispossession in contemporary India reveals the central role of land speculation in capital accumulation. Rather than serving productive investment, much land acquisition enables what Levien terms "capitalist rentiers" to capture windfall profits from land value appreciation (Levien, 2013). This process involves acquiring land at below-market prices through state coercion and then profiting from its conversion to higher-value uses (Levien, 2013). The resulting "rate of accumulation by dispossession" can be calculated by comparing compensation paid to landowners with the market value of developed land, revealing extraction rates that often exceed 1000% (Levien, 2013).

Nielsen and Nilsen's analysis of India's evolving neoliberal regime of dispossession demonstrates how these processes have shifted over time, from predominantly coercive forms of dispossession associated with SEZs to more market-driven forms evident in recent farm law protests (Nielsen & Nilsen, 2022). This evolution reflects what they characterize as India's transition toward "rollover neoliberalism" defined by "authoritarian populism, delivered more by force of unilateral action than through democratic consent" (Nielsen & Nilsen, 2022, p. 586).

#### IV. Legal Frameworks and Mechanisms of Dispossession

The legal architecture governing land acquisition in India provides crucial insights into how dispossession operates through formal state mechanisms while maintaining legitimacy within a democratic framework (Bhardwaj, 2021; Wahi, 2017). The evolution from the colonial-era Land Acquisition Act of 1894 to the contemporary Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act of 2013 reveals both continuities and changes in the legal foundations of dispossession (Nandal, 2014; Bhardwaj, 2021).

The Land Acquisition Act of 1894, enacted under British colonial rule, established the fundamental principle that the state could acquire private land for "public purposes" through eminent domain (Nandal, 2014). This colonial legislation provided the legal foundation for most land acquisition in post-independence India until 2014, despite widespread criticism of its antiquated provisions and minimal compensation requirements (Nandal, 2014; Bhardwaj, 2021). The Act's definition of "public purpose" was deliberately vague and broad, allowing governments to acquire land for various projects and then transfer it to private companies under public purpose justification (Nandal, 2014).

The persistence of colonial land acquisition law until 2014 reveals the continuity between colonial and post-colonial mechanisms of dispossession (Nandal, 2014). As Nandal argues, while the 1894 Act initially served colonial extraction, it was later deployed by the independent Indian state for "national development" projects like dams and steel plants (Nandal, 2014). However, the neoliberal period saw this same colonial mechanism increasingly serve private capital accumulation rather than public development (Levien, 2013; Nielsen & Nilsen, 2022).

The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act of 2013 represents the most significant reform in Indian land acquisition law since independence (Bhardwaj, 2021; Wahi, 2017). The 2013 Act emerged from widespread protests against land acquisition, particularly the movements in Nandigram and Singur in West Bengal that successfully resisted large industrial projects (Levien, 2013; Chakravorty, 2016). The Act introduced several progressive provisions, including compensation at 2-4 times market value, mandatory Social Impact Assessment for large acquisitions, consent requirements for private projects (80% for private companies, 70% for public-private partnerships), and comprehensive rehabilitation and resettlement provisions (Bhardwaj, 2021).

However, implementation of the 2013 Act reveals the gap between legal reform and actual practice (Bhardwaj, 2021; Wahi, 2017). Bhardwaj's analysis suggests that the Act has not fully resolved issues from the 1894 law, with compensation calculation remaining contentious and undervaluation continuing (Bhardwaj, 2021). Moreover, several Indian states have passed modified versions of the 2013 Act that dilute its protective provisions, particularly exempting certain projects from consent and Social Impact Assessment requirements (Bhardwaj, 2021; Wahi, 2017). This pattern reveals how the federal structure of Indian governance enables state governments to circumvent national-level legal protections when they conflict with capital accumulation imperatives (Bhardwaj, 2021).

The selective implementation and dilution of the 2013 Act demonstrates what Roy characterizes as informalized governance, where laws are "selectively applied or suspended" to serve particular interests (Roy, 2009). For example, the Gujarat government's use of land pooling mechanisms under state Town Planning Acts to circumvent 2013 Act protections in projects like Dholera Smart City illustrates how alternative legal frameworks enable continued dispossession while avoiding federal-level protections (Sampat & Sunny, 2016; Roy, 2009).

Land pooling represents an increasingly important alternative mechanism for land acquisition that operates outside the 2013 Act's protections (Sampat & Sunny, 2016). Under land pooling schemes, the state "pools"

land from multiple private owners for development, theoretically returning a smaller parcel of serviced land to each original owner (Sampat & Sunny, 2016). However, critical analysis reveals that land pooling often functions as a more indirect form of dispossession (Sampat & Sunny, 2016). Sampat and Sunny's study of the Dholera project in Gujarat found that land pooling was "not truly voluntary" with many landowners' consent bypassed or assumed, and compensation in the form of return land failing to account for loss of agricultural livelihood (Sampat & Sunny, 2016, p. 12).

The persistence of colonial-era legal principles in contemporary land acquisition reveals the continuity of dispossessive mechanisms across different political economic regimes (Nandal, 2014; Harvey, 2003). While the 2013 Act introduced important procedural safeguards, it maintains the fundamental principle that the state can acquire private property for public purposes, with "public purpose" remaining a contested and expandable category (Bhardwaj, 2021). This legal architecture enables what Harvey characterizes as the deployment of extra-economic coercion for capital accumulation while maintaining legitimacy through democratic procedures (Harvey, 2003).

## V. Urban Renewal Programs and Spatial Transformation

Urban renewal programs in contemporary India represent a crucial mechanism through which land dispossession operates in urban contexts, systematically transferring valuable urban land from informal settlements to formal development while displacing the urban poor to peripheral locations (Roy, 2009; Banerjee-Guha, 2010). The evolution from the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) launched in 2005 to the Smart Cities Mission launched in 2015 reveals the deepening of neoliberal urbanism and its implications for urban land relations (Maringanti, 2012; Das, 2020).

JNNURM represented the most significant urban development initiative in post-independence India, providing federal grants to cities for infrastructure projects and governance reforms while including specific provisions for slum upgrading and basic services for the urban poor (Maringanti, 2012). However, critical analysis reveals that despite rhetoric of "pro-poor and inclusive" development, JNNURM often facilitated the displacement of slum communities rather than their integration into formal urban development (Maringanti, 2012). The mission's approach to slum redevelopment frequently involved relocation of communities to make way for infrastructure rather than in-situ upgrading, reflecting what Maringanti characterizes as a fundamental contradiction between decentralization rhetoric and centralized control (Maringanti, 2012).

The implementation of JNNURM reveals how urban renewal programs operate as mechanisms of accumulation by dispossession through the systematic targeting of valuable urban land occupied by informal settlements (Maringanti, 2012; Banerjee-Guha, 2010). Cities used JNNURM funding to clear slums from central locations under the justification of infrastructure development or city beautification, often relocating residents to distant peripheral sites with inadequate infrastructure and livelihood opportunities (Maringanti, 2012). This process enabled the conversion of centrally located land from residential use by the urban poor to commercial or middle-class residential development, generating significant land value appreciation that accrued to developers and the state rather than displaced communities (Banerjee-Guha, 2010).

The Smart Cities Mission represents a further intensification of neoliberal urbanism, explicitly promoting technology-driven development and private sector participation in urban governance (Das, 2020). Das's critical analysis reveals that the Smart Cities Mission has "neoliberal underpinnings" that "tend to commodify urban space and prioritize projects that yield economic returns" (Das, 2020, p. 61). The mission's focus on "Area-Based Development" concentrates investment in small areas of cities, often central business districts, while neglecting broader urban development needs (Das, 2020).

The implementation of Smart Cities projects reveals systematic displacement of informal settlements and traditional urban activities to make way for technology-driven development (Das, 2020). The mission's emphasis on creating "world-class" urban environments involves clearing markets, street vendors, and slums from designated smart city areas to create spaces compatible with middle-class consumption and global capital investment (Das, 2020). This process represents what Das characterizes as the creation of "enclaves of high-end development" that serve global capital while displacing existing urban populations (Das, 2020, p. 68).

The spatial implications of urban renewal programs reveal the systematic production of urban inequality through land dispossession (Banerjee-Guha, 2010; Roy, 2009). Displaced communities are typically relocated to distant peripheral sites that lack adequate infrastructure, employment opportunities, and social services (Roy, 2009). This process creates what Anand characterizes as differential "urban citizenship" where access to urban infrastructure and services depends on formal legal status and location within the city (Anand, 2017). Those displaced to peripheral resettlement sites often lose access to urban employment networks, children's

education opportunities, and social support systems while gaining minimal formal housing security (Roy, 2009).

The governance mechanisms of urban renewal programs reveal the systematic bypassing of democratic participation and accountability (Maringanti, 2012; Das, 2020). JNNURM created Special Purpose Vehicles that operated outside traditional municipal structures, reducing democratic oversight while increasing private sector influence (Maringanti, 2012). Similarly, the Smart Cities Mission creates Special Purpose Vehicles jointly managed by city and state governments with private partners, potentially undermining democratic accountability (Das, 2020). This institutional architecture enables what Roy characterizes as "planning by exception" where normal planning procedures are suspended to facilitate capital accumulation (Roy, 2009).

The resistance to urban renewal programs reveals the political dimensions of urban land dispossession (Roy, 2009; Banerjee-Guha, 2010). Slum communities have increasingly mobilized to resist eviction and demand in-situ upgrading rather than distant relocation (Roy, 2009). These movements have achieved some policy changes, including the Delhi government's adoption of policies requiring due process for evictions and the central government's Rajiv Awas Yojana emphasizing in-situ slum upgrading (Roy, 2009). However, the implementation of these policies remains inconsistent, with courts often serving as the primary refuge for communities facing eviction (Wahi, 2017).

## VI. Development-Induced Displacement and Marginalized Communities

Development-induced displacement in India reveals the systematic targeting of the most vulnerable populations for dispossession, with tribal communities, Dalits, and other marginalized groups bearing disproportionate costs of development while receiving minimal benefits (Fernandes, 2007; Somayaji & Talwar, 2011). The patterns of displacement reveal how development projects systematically extract resources from marginalized communities while channeling benefits to dominant social groups and capital (Fernandes, 2007; Nielsen & Nilsen, 2022). Tribal communities face particularly severe impacts from development-induced displacement due to their location in resource-rich areas and their limited political power to resist dispossession (Fernandes, 2007). According to estimates in the literature, tribal communities constitute approximately 8% of India's population but account for over 40% of those displaced by development projects (Fernandes, 2007). This disproportionate impact reflects both the concentration of mineral resources, forests, and water sources in tribal areas and the systematic exclusion of tribal communities from development planning and decision-making processes (Fernandes, 2007). The displacement of tribal communities reveals the operation of what Gandy characterizes as "structural violence" against vulnerable populations (Gandy, 2006). Tribal communities often lack formal land titles and depend on customary rights that are not recognized by state legal systems, making them particularly vulnerable to displacement justified as removal of "encroachers" from state land (Fernandes, 2007). The loss of land for tribal communities involves not only economic deprivation but also cultural destruction, as land often has spiritual significance and supports traditional livelihood systems (Fernandes, 2007; Somayaji & Talwar, 2011).

Major dam projects reveal the systematic nature of tribal displacement and the failure of rehabilitation policies (Fernandes, 2007; Somayaji & Talwar, 2011). Between 1951 and 1990, dam projects in India displaced approximately 21.3 million people, with 16.4 million displaced by major dams alone (Fernandes, 2007). However, only about 5.38 million displaced people were adequately rehabilitated, leaving a backlog of 15.92 million people without proper resettlement (Fernandes, 2007). Tribal communities faced particular difficulties in rehabilitation due to their dependence on forest resources and traditional livelihood systems that cannot be easily replicated in resettlement sites (Fernandes, 2007). Mining projects represent another major source of tribal displacement, with coal mining alone displacing 2.55 million people according to official estimates (Fernandes, 2007). The environmental and social impacts of mining extend beyond those directly displaced to include pollution of water sources, destruction of forests, and disruption of traditional economic systems (Fernandes, 2007). The benefits of mining accrue primarily to urban industrial centers and capital while costs are borne by local communities who often receive minimal compensation or employment opportunities (Fernandes, 2007; Nielsen & Nilsen, 2022).

The analysis of Special Economic Zones reveals how displacement mechanisms target marginalized communities while serving capital accumulation (Levien, 2013; Nielsen & Nilsen, 2022). SEZs typically acquire large tracts of agricultural land, displacing farming communities and agricultural workers (Levien, 2013). The promised industrial employment often fails to materialize or requires skills that displaced farmers lack, resulting in their marginalization in the new economic activities (Levien, 2013). Moreover, much SEZ land is used for real estate speculation rather than productive industrial activity, revealing the primacy of capital accumulation over development objectives (Levien, 2013).

The gendered dimensions of displacement reveal how women face particular vulnerabilities during dispossession and resettlement (Fernandes, 2007; Somayaji & Talwar, 2011). Women often lose access to common property resources like forests and water sources that are crucial for household survival strategies (Fernandes, 2007). The breakdown of traditional social structures during displacement can also undermine women's status and security within communities (Somayaji & Talwar, 2011). Resettlement sites often lack adequate provisions for women's specific needs, including healthcare, education for children, and employment opportunities compatible with existing skills (Fernandes, 2007). The resistance of marginalized communities to displacement reveals agency and political mobilization despite structural vulnerabilities (Levien, 2013; Nielsen & Nilsen, 2022). Tribal communities have increasingly organized to resist displacement, often with support from environmental and human rights organizations (Fernandes, 2007). Major movements like the Narmada Bachao Andolan demonstrated the potential for successful resistance to large development projects (Somayaji & Talwar, 2011). However, the success of resistance movements depends on multiple factors including media attention, political alliances, and the ability to mobilize legal and political resources (Levien, 2013).

The policy responses to displacement reveal the tension between development imperatives and human rights concerns (Somayaji & Talwar, 2011; Bhardwaj, 2021). The 2013 Land Acquisition Act includes specific provisions for Scheduled Tribes and other vulnerable groups, requiring higher compensation and stronger consent requirements (Bhardwaj, 2021). However, implementation remains inadequate, with state governments often exempting projects from these protections or failing to enforce them effectively (Bhardwaj, 2021; Wahi, 2017).

## VII. Conclusion

This analysis demonstrates that urban land dispossession in India represents a fundamental mechanism of accumulation by dispossession under neoliberal capitalism, systematically transferring land from marginalized communities to private capital through state-mediated coercion while maintaining democratic legitimacy (Harvey, 2003; Levien, 2013; Banerjee-Guha, 2010). The evidence reveals that dispossession operates not as an unfortunate side-effect of development but as a central feature of India's neoliberal urban transformation, enabling capital accumulation in the built environment while reproducing and intensifying existing inequalities (Levien, 2013; Nielsen & Nilsen, 2022).

The theoretical framework of accumulation by dispossession proves particularly valuable for understanding how the Indian state has evolved into what Levien characterizes as a "land broker state" that deploys coercive power to overcome barriers to capital accumulation represented by existing land tenure arrangements (Levien, 2013). This process involves both legal mechanisms such as eminent domain and extra-legal practices of selective regulation that Roy identifies as characteristic of informalized planning regimes (Roy, 2009). The resulting system enables the systematic extraction of value from land while displacing the costs onto the most vulnerable populations (Harvey, 2003; Banerjee-Guha, 2010).

The analysis of legal frameworks reveals the continuity between colonial and post-colonial mechanisms of dispossession, with the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 serving capital accumulation across different political economic regimes until its replacement in 2014 (Nandal, 2014; Harvey, 2003). While the 2013 Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act introduced important procedural safeguards, its implementation remains compromised by state-level dilutions and alternative mechanisms like land pooling that circumvent federal protections (Bhardwaj, 2021; Sampat & Sunny, 2016; Wahi, 2017). This pattern demonstrates the resilience of dispossessive mechanisms and their adaptation to changing political constraints (Roy, 2009). Urban renewal programs from JNNURM to the Smart Cities Mission reveal the systematic displacement of informal settlements from valuable urban land to enable middle-class consumption and global capital investment (Maringanti, 2012; Das, 2020). These programs operate through what Das characterizes as the creation of "enclaves of high-end development" that serve global capital while marginalizing existing urban populations (Das, 2020). The spatial outcomes include the systematic production of urban inequality through the relegation of the urban poor to peripheral locations with inadequate infrastructure and livelihood opportunities (Roy, 2009; Banerjee-Guha, 2010).

The disproportionate impact on marginalized communities, particularly tribal populations who constitute 8% of India's population but over 40% of those displaced by development projects, reveals the systematically unequal distribution of development costs and benefits (Fernandes, 2007). This pattern reflects what Gandy characterizes as "structural violence" against vulnerable populations, operating through formal legal mechanisms that systematically disadvantage those with limited political power and insecure tenure (Gandy, 2006; Fernandes, 2007). The resistance movements that have emerged against land

acquisition demonstrate both the political nature of dispossession and the potential for alternative development models (Levien, 2013; Nielsen & Nilsen, 2022). The success of movements in places like Nandigram and Singur in forcing policy changes reveals that dispossession is not inevitable but represents particular configurations of power that can be challenged and transformed (Levien, 2013; Chakravorty, 2016). However, the continuing prevalence of displacement despite legal reforms suggests the need for more fundamental challenges to the political economic structures that drive accumulation by dispossession (Nielsen & Nilsen, 2022).

The implications of this analysis extend beyond the Indian context to broader questions about neoliberal urbanism in the Global South (Harvey, 2003; Banerjee-Guha, 2010). India's experience reveals how democratic political systems can accommodate systematic dispossession through legal mechanisms and informalized governance that maintain legitimacy while serving capital accumulation (Roy, 2009; Levien, 2013). The sophistication of these mechanisms suggests that addressing land dispossession requires not only legal reform but fundamental transformation of the political economic relations that drive urban development under neoliberal capitalism (Harvey, 2003; Nielsen & Nilsen, 2022). Future research should examine the long-term outcomes of resistance movements and the potential for alternative models of urban development that prioritize social justice over capital accumulation (Fernandes, 2007; Somayaji & Talwar, 2011). The growing mobilization of affected communities and the emergence of policy alternatives like community land rights and participatory planning suggest possibilities for more equitable forms of urban transformation (Roy, 2009; Wahi, 2017). However, realizing these possibilities will require sustained political mobilization and fundamental challenges to the structures of power that currently drive accumulation by dispossession in India and beyond (Harvey, 2003; Nielsen & Nilsen, 2022).

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