

# Dongria Kondhs: Clearing Naxal Cases Before Voting

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## Context

The Dongria Kondhs, an indigenous tribe living in the Niyamgiri hills of Odisha, are gearing up for the upcoming elections. However, for them, exercising their franchise is not just about casting a vote, but also about clearing their names from the lingering shadow of Naxal cases.

## Background

- The adversary of Dongria Kondhs is a large mining company, the Vedanta Resources from Britain, which aims to extract the priceless bauxite from Niyamgiri hills.
- This tribe is deeply convinced that this extraction will undo the mountain in which they are highly dependent for their source of living, as well as cultural identity.
- In the year 2013, Dongria Kondhs were on the winning side in the Supreme Court case when that court dismissed Vedanta's petition for mining in the area.

## Naxal Cases and False Implications

- The Dongria Kondh community faced torturous years of being accused of Naxal cases outrightly during the course of struggle against Vedanta company.
- They were arrested and harassed with the cops claiming that they were Maoist

sympathisers. This resulted in extensive arrests and harassment.

- However, a great obstacle to them for such acts remains even though the Supreme Court exonerated them from all charges.
- The tribe has made its demand now that the settlement agencies clean their names from the police records and issue them certificates to show that they are innocent.

## Priority Before Voting

- For the Dongria Kondhs it is better to have to decide who they will no longer lend their vote to but first their names have to be cleared from the [Naxal](#) cases.
- To them, by virtue of yet to be fully exonerated names, they will not be ready to exercise their franchise rights without the due respect.
- Nothing short of this has gone to the national government as they are envisaging to present a notification establishing them innocent or even better to find all cases against them a closure.

## Struggle for Justice

- The controversy between Dongria Kondhs and the bauxite developers is not new and a continuous fight for justice has been going on for many years.
- They have been protesting, making rallies and are volunteering to sign petitions to their government to make them aware that they have rights over their portfolios.
- They have likewise requested for a fortification for the wreckage results caused by the Vedanta's mining operations.

## Election Priorities

The Dongria Kondhs have made it clear that their priority in the upcoming elections is not just about voting for a particular party or candidate, but also about ensuring that their rights are protected. They are demanding that the government:

- Clear their names from the [Naxal](#) cases
- Issue certificates declaring them innocent
- Recognize their rights over their land and resources
- Provide compensation for the damage caused by Vedanta's mining activities

## Importance of Tribal Rights

- The resistance against the jumbo project of Dongria Kondhs also demonstrates the crucialness of their rights and the necessity of the authority to duly acknowledge and safeguard them.
- Tribals have a unique and central role in the preservation of ecological resources of India. Any violation of their rights to their lands and natural resources incurs a huge loss to both the nations.

## Role of the Government

- The government should ensure that efforts will be made to rectify the problems being

experienced by the Dongria Kondhs and other indigenous people.

- It must meet them to their rights, free them from false cases, and pay damages for the consequences.
- Another critical step to be undertaken by the government is to involve the tribals in the decision-making process and to take their consent before any project starts in their areas.

## Impact of Naxal Cases on Tribal Communities

- The Naxal cases have had a significant impact on tribal communities, leading to widespread harassment, arrests, and torture.
- The tribals have been accused of being Maoist sympathisers and supporters, leading to a stigma that is difficult to erase.
- The cases have also led to a breakdown of trust between the tribals and the government, making it difficult for the tribals to access basic amenities and services.

## Conclusion

The Dongria Kondhs' fight for justice and their priorities before voting are a reminder that the struggle for rights and dignity is ongoing. It is essential for the government to recognize their rights, clear their names, and provide compensation for the damage caused. Only then can the Dongria Kondhs and other tribal communities truly participate in the democratic process and exercise their franchise with dignity.

**Source:** [The Hindu](#)

### UPSC Mains Practice Questions

**Q. Discuss the significance of clearing the names of Dongria Kondhs from Naxal cases as a priority before they vote. How does this action reflect upon the principles of justice and democratic participation? Analyse the potential impact of addressing their grievances on tribal welfare and the overall security situation in the region.**