**[Slide 1]**
In India, coal mining operations have for decades been concentrated in areas inhabited by *adivasi*, or tribal, communities. Mining activities have brought about dispossession of tribal land, displacement of villages, and the erosion of traditional land- and forest-based livelihoods. In my PhD research I look at the impact of mining on *adivasi* communities, drawing on 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork in a village I call Karampot **[Slide 2]** – a Santal tribal village of about 150 households in the state of Jharkhand **[Slide 3]**, located located next to a state-owned opencast coal mine. **[Slide 4]**

In my fieldwork, I explored the ways in which mining activities – in particular expropriation of land for mining – have affected different people in the village, as well as the community as a whole. The groups of Santals I engaged with included, for example,

> (1) first of all the many villagers who, faced with a lack of employment options in the mine and area more generally, eke out a living by illegally scavenging coal from the colliery **[Slide 5]** and peddling it on the highway; **[Slide 6]**

> (2) second, a minority of villagers who've managed to obtain permanent jobs in the colliery as part of a compensation scheme for mining-affected persons;

> (3) and third, a yet smaller number of local tribal political leaders who <u>intermediate the interaction</u> between villagers and the coal company around such compensatory 'benefits'.

I spent 18 months living in Karampot, in which I stayed with a number of different families. These included both coal-peddling households and coal company-employed households, who live in very different types of houses: while coal peddlers live in simple mud huts **[Slide 7]**, company-employed Santals have erected large concrete structures that stick out a mile in the village **[Slide 8]**. While anthropologists often stay with a single family <u>throughout the period of fieldwork</u>, moving between houses in fact allowed me to get an insight into the lives of people in very different <u>socio-economic positionalities</u>.

> My first step in fieldwork was to carry out a household survey of the whole village, recording data on household membership and the livelihoods of each member. This allowed me to get a general overview of the village as well as introduce myself to families. My principal mode of data collection, however, was participant observation, accompanied by open-ended interviews and informal conversations, which I wrote down in field notes in <u>as much detail as I could</u>.

Given my interest in changes in livelihoods as a result of mining, I sought to observe and become involved in the kinds of work that villagers carried out. I joined villagers when they went to the mine to collect coal, often in the dark in order to avoid the security guards; carried back the coal to coke it; packed it in bags and loaded it on bicycles, **[Slide 9]** and pushed these to the highway, **[Slide 10]**, where they sold it. I accompanied the same villagers when they engaged in casual wage labour in the colliery's depot, **[Slide 11]** loading coal on trucks, and offered them my help in this work, to the amusement of the loading supervisors nearby.

Alongside exploring livelihood practices, my daily fieldwork in the village included visiting the houses and courtyards of my interlocutors – often frequented by neighbours as well

wandering dogs, chickens, and goats. **[Slide 12]** These visits, which included countless chats over tea, dinners, and many glasses of homebrewed beer and wine, allowed me observe and participate in people's domestic lives, and have more in-depth conversations about different aspects of their lives. My interactions with different Santals – in different circumstances and from different generations – enabled me to collect myriad perspectives on life in a mining-affected village. Over time, diverse and seemingly contradictory individual stories, trajectories, and views started to fit together, and illuminate structural and relational processes and dynamics.

While I spent most of my time in the village, my fieldwork also extended beyond it. I spent time, for example, in the mining project's offices, **[Slide 13]** near the colliery, to interview coal company officers and management; and sit in on meetings between them and local tribal politicians. I was also able to get access – in the project office and the company headquarters in Jharkhand's capital – to internal company documents and reports, on the history and development of the mining project next to my field site, the process of land acquisition, and compensation policies for dispossessed villagers. I also spent time in the coal company housing colony next to the mine, where other tribals live who are employed in the colliery; and visited other mining-affected villages and collieries in the area. **[Slide 14]** Although my visits in these were brief, they allowed me to gain a comparative perspective on, and further contexualise, my findings in Karampot. This enabled to better understand the ways in which the situation in Karampot represents patterns in the wider area as well as the ways in which it is it is distinctive.

**[Slide 15]**
To be able to do my fieldwork, I'd spent a year prior to it learning Hindi, Jharkhand's lingua franca. I continued to develop my Hindi skills throughout fieldwork, and was helped in the process by my research assistant, who was a tribal from a nearby town. Apart from helping me fill in language gaps, the fact that he was a tribal himself was often helpful in striking up conversations with people in the village.

Fieldwork often requires improvisation and constant adjustment of one's research, and indeed what I ended up doing in Karampot was quite different than what I had initially proposed to study. My original PhD research proposal had focused on the impact of state welfare schemes – in particular an employment generation programme – on tribal rural livelihoods. Later on, though, and almost by chance, I got to know about the so-called 'coal peddlers' – the many labouring poor in Jharkhand's coal areas, including large numbers of tribals, who gather coal illicitly from mines and carry it on bicycles to peddle, and are impossible to miss along Jharkhand's roads and highways. I was intrigued by this form of livelihood and the processes that drive people into it – which also fit into my broader interest in tribal livelihoods – and was keen to explore and understand these. This then led me into the topic of coal mining in India, which was not at all part of my original research proposal. I soon found out that the public employment generation scheme I had intended to look at was mostly absent in my field site, and consequently this aspect was not included in my actual research. The state, however, did remain very much in the picture: both through its ownership of the colliery next to my field site and the coal sector in India more generally, and its public compensation schemes for mining-affected villagers, which wound up playing a central role in my research.

**[Slide 16]**

While ethnographic fieldwork is all about gaining specific, in-depth, localised empirical data, the knowledge it generates can challenge broader assumptions and conceptions, and lead to more general alternative propositions. There are, in this context, two main issues that > stem from my research, which > while emerging from my particular field site have relevance beyond it, to other contexts of mining, dispossession, and indigenous communities.

- First, while narratives on the impact of mining and dispossession often tell a story of uniform impoverishment, marginalisation, and destruction > of romanticised indigenous communities, my research shows how the main consequence of mining can be socio-economic differentiation *within* the community. Mining has affected people in my field site in highly unequal ways: while some villagers have been excluded from the potential benefits of this kind of industrialisation, others have benefitted significantly, and this has led to the generation of > new salient inequalities and divisions > in a community that used to be > relatively egalitarian, and consequently to the erosion of solidarity.

- Second, indigenous responses to dispossession have most commonly been depicted in scholarly and social activist representations > in terms of **overt** opposition, resistance, and even rebellion – based on tribal communities' reliance on land and natural resources as a particular ecological way of life. My research, on the other hand, shows how mining and dispossession can equally result in processes of co-option and shifts in local political power that act > to curb, rather than facilitate, possibilities of protest. Local tribal leaders who at first glance may appear as mining activists can cooperate and broker with coal companies, thus blurring the line between anti-mining activism and collaboration; and this in turn can give rise to a political scenario in which grassroots resistance is constrained > rather than fostered.

Such insights, generated through ethnographic fieldwork, push us to rethink the effects and politics of mining and dispossession, and develop more nuanced understandings > of the interaction between extractive industrialisation > and tribal communities.