

Kalinga Nagar–One Year Later

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Kalinga Nagar. January 2, 2006. 12 tribals were murdered by the Orissa state police, because they were protesting against the illegal, and inhuman encroachment of their sweet little homes by a profit-mongering private industry giant. As many as 13 industrial plants had been declared to be set up in Kalinga Nagar itself, resulting in evacuation of thousands of indi-genous people from their own lands, sans adequate compensations, relocation benefits, education or healthcare assurances, let alone alternative residences. Countless people were left in the lurch because one private company got greedier and bought the conscience of a few dozens of political opportunists. And when the people were told that their villages were going to be leveled—meaning, their carefully worshiped houses were to be razed off the grounds without seeking any of their approvals, some tribals thought they should protest. A year later the situation has worsened further as the poor villagers have no respite from being haunted by the police and land-grabbers.

After all, it was through constant revolutionary struggles of the common masses, that Orissa had been wrested from its kings and the colonialists to emerge as the first independent province formed on linguistic basis in modern India's history.

Right to self-determination has been inherent in Orissa's history—from the ages of the Kalinga War to the days of Kalinga Nagar. Just the way, the Kalinga War was fought with bloodbath, Kalinga Nagar met the similar fate. Entirely innocent people, yet valiant and brave, unarmed to fight the ancient and modern emperors, protested for sure, and paid the price.

It has been an annual ritual in Orissa, economically one of the poorest states of India. Its working class people doubly oppressed by the military-industrial nexus of the government in power, and by the educated and elite section of its own population that dance to the tunes of opportunism and betray the poor people's causes.

Despite the odds, when tribals staged a non-violent protest, the police state, under obligation from industry pimps, opened fire and murdered them mercilessly. And this, despite the very fresh memories of killings of tribals in Rayagada done under the same BJP-BJD regime led by Naveen Patnaik.

Sitting pretty on his father and Orissa's ex-Chief Minister Biju Patnaik's land-grabbing anti-people legacies, Naveen Patnaik has been the most ruthless curse on a peaceful people. Enacting personality politics to project Biju as a savior, the current CM has been turning massive onslaughts on every form of criticism that exists in the state today, with an inherited arrogance that has rare parallel.

He completes his troika of misfortunes, after Kashipur and Kalinga Nagar, with his approval of Vedanta Alumina Project at Lanjigarh.

Troika of exploitations and how they happened:Kashipur, Kalinga Nagar and Lanjigarh. When Naveen regime sold off Kashipur to their friends in the Aditya Birla Group and Canadian ALCAN, they had to struggle quite a bit.

Months of endured protests by thousands of people organized under different banners were not an easy task to encounter. Along with several activists this correspondent was involved in raising consciousness about Kashipur and found many people showing solidarity with the displaced. In late 2000, the protest movements against Birla Group was gaining consensus among the larger progressive circles. However, the government committed its first blunder by ordering to shoot the completely unarmed tribals Abhilas Jhodia, Raghu Jhodia and Damodar Jhodia in December of that year. Dozens of tribals were critically injured and shot at. Hundreds were arrested illegally.

Arun Shourie, the infamous disinvestment minister had set the trend on behalf of BJP to legalize the most shameful of trades: selling off people's lands to land-grabbers. Orissa government, the ally of BJP, went one step further. It sold them at dirt cheap prices so that the kickbacks would at least be good. As a result, Kashipur project displaced more than 20,000 people with immediate effect, whereas making mere promises to secure jobs for 1000 people for 20 years. All bauxite resources were put on ransom in this 4,500-cr project that involved few top bureaucrats, politicians and the private industries. They had round tables at Orissa Secretariat and had a feast on the murdered tribals.

This project, part of Utkal Alumina International Limited, forced its way in, despite protests, and widespread discontentment. It even violated the law of land that denied sale of tribal lands to non-tribals for mining purpose. However, the project is on, and the lawmakers and their judiciary colleagues are bedfellows. And unitedly, the ruling class of Orissa bribed by the industrial houses has conveniently shoved aside the people's demands, and when needed have shot some commoners to silence.

When it came to Kalinga Nagar, the government thought better than to tolerate any flak. No demonstrations, no protests, no opposition—the government decided—it won't accept any remaining cannons of political democracy. Shoot on sight, Naveen's style of functioning worked with even greater vigor this time. If democracy meant people's mandate, the politicians thought they had got the mandate to kill the people. In the most shocking case of mass murder in the recent history of world, Kalinga Nagar resulted in deaths of 12 tribals (and subsequent mutilation of their bodies inside the police station to obstruct post-mortem/identification). All along, in place of health centers and schools - the most needed facilities in the tribal districts, the Orissa government had been building police stations since last four years. Of course the police stations were being constructed near the project sites, so as to provide protection to the business barons, while killing some locales here and there.

Beyond descriptions and doubts, Kalinga Nagar incident was smartly buried. In a plutocracy, the government works for the rich, and so, Orissa government this time too, made all paths clear for its partner in crime: TISCO. The Tata venture in Kalinga Nagar, was done in collaboration with the Orissa Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation (IDCO). Of course this deal was as corrupt and backhanded as possible.

Biju Patnaik during his last tenure at office, had reportedly acquired the lands of Kalinga Nagar at the cost of Rs 35,000 per acre. His son amassed even larger profits by making a business out of this. He sold the public property to TISCO at Rs 3,50,000 per acre. In return, he paid the people: zilch. Oops, with some bullets. But to be fair, the

families of those who were killed were offered Rs 50,000 as price of the human life. And the compensation for building houses: 10 decimal of land!

Of course, the benevolent Tata loves the power tactics of letting its compliances kill off people when they protest, and it suits its inroads to further the business. Same goes with other steel companies that have been also setting up their firms in the tribal heartlands by evicting the people out, including Neelachal Ispat Nigam Ltd, Jindal Steels, MESCO Steels etc. All of them together have been keeping the political circle happy, and vice versa, in a tradition of tragedies.

The tradition has now extended to an alumina refinery near Lanjigarh. Very similar to Kashipur developments, the Lanjigarh project has already launched its thumping notes of oppression. The UK-based Sterlite Industries has been excitedly razing off adivasi villages, including Borobhota, Kinari, Kothduar, Sindhabahili, and their agricultural fields in Kalahandi district. In the process, thousands of villagers have been forced to leave their lands.

But this time, the tactics of the government—already being heavily criticized for its high-handedness - are slightly different. It has adopted a two-pronged approach to gain consensus for the Lanjigarh project.

Vedanta which sounds Indian, even Brahminical, is meant to be so. Although based in England, the company has its eyes set only on former British colony India. Not just on a country that was being ripped off by the Empire until few decades back, but also on the poorest state of India. Again, not just on Orissa, but on the poorest district of Orissa.

BJP, the party of domestic business houses and NRI investors, had this brilliant idea of disinvesting the existing industries of India which would render millions jobless, and without backbone to protest the injustices. Worse, they had Lord Ram legends to divert the people into becoming communalist monsters. And during those times of Vajpayee, they put BALCO (Bharat Aluminum) on sale. Sterlite comfortably offered a meager \$121 million for it. Even Balco labor union had no clue that the company was sold out for this cheap. The union declared strike. Supreme Court of India had declared strikes as illegal (in a country that gained independence through strikes of workers as a major force) and Anil Agarwal got the approval. Again easy. He went ahead and cut off 30% of jobs. Of course without a problem. One of the largest public trusts was now his empire.

BJP, a party that surprised everybody when it splashed every newspaper with full page ads on the very first term of its election campaign, was always funded by Hindu extremists living abroad. The proverbial NRIs always looked forward to their bastion of moneymaking once the command/mixed economy of India took a beating. And for this, they needed the right wing in India to come to power. Even for just one term. Because all one needs to sell the country is a seal.

During Vajpayee's regime, people like Agarwal made fortunes. Not just Balco. Sterlite got its sweet deals in Hindustan Zinc too—three lead-zinc mines and three smelters! More job cuts, pay cuts. Less labor force, more work, more profits. In business texts, they call it efficiency. To people, possibly it sounds draconic.

Gradually after stabilizing the sale process of India, Agarwal aimed at Vedanta's mining operations. His stake in Vedanta being \$1 billion, it attracted attention of London Stock Exchange, since it happened to be the first Indian mining operation to be listed

there. Not to be outwitted, Agarwal had the face of Australian mining magnate Brian Gilbertson to certify the resources of Orissa were good enough. Gilbertson, one of the wealthiest mine-owners in the world, absolutely amazed by the resources said they were heavily undervalued. He said they were way better than any international standard and did not resemble any third world produce.

And so the deal was approved. It had been already struck. Now, everybody's a winner. Except those that rightfully deserved to win. Those that love their little thatched roofs as much as the bigwigs love their palaces. Those poor that refuse to give up their collective lands and community rivers as much as the rich that would guard to their life their safeguarded mansions and exclusive swimming pools. *~ ~ ~*