Endemic to Development

Police Killings in Kalinga Nagar

The recent killing of 12 adivasis and one policeman in police firing in Kalinga Nagar in Jajpur district of Orissa must be viewed against the background of the expansive and at times explosive process of capitalist development. Be it Gandhamardhan, Baliapal, Gopalpur, Chilika, Kashipur, Niyamagiri, Lower Sukhtel, and now Kalinga Nagar, the process of bringing “industrialisation” and “development” to Orissa has met with stiff resistance by the people.

O n the morning of January 2, 12 adivasis and one policeman were killed in police firing in Kalinga Nagar in Jajpur district, Orissa. Over a thousand people had gathered in village Nuagaon to protest against the construction of the boundary wall of a proposed Tata steel plant. The land had been bought in the early 1990s by the Industrial Development Corporation of Orissa (IDCO) at Rs 35,000 per acre and later sold to the Tatas at Rs 3.5 lakh per acre. The government had agreed to increase the compensation by Rs 25,000 per acre.

On that day, the assembled protestors were willing to dialogue with the district collector and superintendent of police (SP), who were present on the spot along with over 12 platoons of policemen. Even as a four-member delegation from the local adivasis went to meet these officials, the police launched an unprovoked attack on the gathering. Tear gas was followed by indiscriminate firing, which continued for several minutes. Those trying to flee were shot in the back. Others have been shot in the face and on the chest. About 30-35 injured people were admitted to three different hospitals. In the middle of last week the condition of three persons was still critical. Four policemen were injured. Five of the dead bodies returned to the people had their palms chopped off from the wrists. The cremations took place in the midst of continuous protest and condemnation of the state violence across Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and other parts of the country.

The resistance in Kalinga Nagar had been brewing for many months. In May 2005, adivasis of the area had clashed with the administration on the issue of compensation when a ‘bhoomi puja’ was performed for Maharashtra Seamless, a private company. A police jeep was damaged. In retaliation, the police beat up the villagers and arrested one man and 25 women. Fearing police terror, hundreds of villagers ran away into the forest areas and hid for many days. During this time, two babies died for want of food. The National Human Rights Commission asked the special rapporteur to report on the case. But no action has been taken so far. Prior to this incident, people had protested against the Jindals, another steel unit in the area.

Plunder of Natural Resources

Bhoomi puja has become a euphemism for the plundering of people’s land, forests, and other natural resources by the expansive and at times explosive process of capitalist development that is assuming alarming dimensions today. But be it Gandhamardhan, Baliapal, Gopalpur, Chilika, Kashipur, Niyamagiri, Lower Sukhtel, and Kalinga Nagar among many others, the process of bringing industrialisation and development to Orissa has always met with stiff resistance by the people. Besides the huge displacement and destruction of livelihoods from projects directly, there is other project activity that people are opposing: for instance, displacement by the building of dams for these projects or the diversion of dam water from agricultural to industrial use. Clearly, there is something terribly amiss in the present “development” paradigm that the people of one of the poorest and most backward states of the country are saying no to this form of industrialisation.

As a consequence of government policy of opening up people’s natural resources to foreign capital in the mid-1990s, and with greater privatisation of mining companies, there are a huge number of large Indian and foreign transnational corporations (TNCs) trying to tap natural resources in Orissa and in the region. In the last five years, the Orissa government has signed 43 memorandums of understanding (MoUs), while the Jharkhand government has inked 42 MoUs, and the Chhattisgarh government has entered into 48 MoUs. These corporate giants include POSCO (Korea), Vedanta Alumina (UK), Rio Tinto (UK), BHP Billiton (UK-Australia), Alcan (Canada), Hindalco, Jindal, Larsen & Toubro and Blushan. Overall, mining projects worth Rs 30,000 crore have already begun in Orissa and projects worth a further Rs 1,10,000 crore are in the pipeline.

The Orissa government, like all other state governments in India’s liberalisation, has also been bending over backwards to make Orissa attractive for private capital. This it is doing in three ways: one, by giving all manner of sops, duty exemptions, cheap land, electricity, water, etc. Two, by promising capital that labour will be controlled. Consequently, Orissa’s Industrial Policy states that export-oriented units, those in special economic zones, IT and biotechnology will be exempt from working hours limitations of the Factories Act. In short, these companies are free to exploit.

Suppressing People’s Resistance

The third, and fundamental way, that the state makes matters easier for capital is by suppressing resistance to these projects.
Repression is the other face of globalisation as these policies are solely in the interest of private profit by claiming community resources. In earlier phases of the spread of capitalism, imperial armies would carry out that repressive role. Across India, and currently in Orissa, state police and special forces play that role for transnational capital, both Indian and foreign. And it’s not just in Orissa: we are increasingly hearing about greater repression in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and other states as those states too open their huge mineral wealth to private players. The luring of foreign capital along with the use of repressive state machinery to facilitate the same has become the most distinguishing feature of pushing in these policies because they clearly lack people’s consent.

In December 2000, three people fell to police firing at Maikunch in Rayagada district where both Alcan and Hindalco plan bauxite mining. Police repression and arbitrary arrests of local adivasis intensified again from December 2004. The situation in Kashipur remained volatile throughout the year with heavy police and army presence. On May 11, 2005, in Lower Sukhtel of Bolangir district, villagers opposed the bhoomi puja of a proposed dam and met heavy police violence. Following their protest that day, the police entered the houses indiscriminately and picked up 42 people including nine women. The operations in the Lanjigada district of the Niyamagiri hills by Vedanta Alumina is accompanied by the hiring of goons to terrorise people into leaving their land. In May 2005, a vehicle ran over Sukru Majhi, a tribal activist of the Niyamagiri Suraksha Parishad, mysteriously. The police did not file any FIR.

Mirage of Employment

The ushering in of development and industrialisation accompanied by such sustained, systematised state repression necessitates the packaging of the development agenda. The Mirage of employment is one such sop offered. In such huge capital-intensive industries such as the Tata plant in Kalinga Nagar, the jobs tend to be few in comparison to the colossal loss of livelihoods. The government has asserted that the Tata project would create employment opportunities for the displaced. But in the case of four other plants that have already been set up in Kalinga Nagar, less than one in ten displaced families have got employment. In the proposed UAIL project in Kashipur, there are a few temporary, low-paid jobs for locals in road construction, and a conveyer belt, for Rs 40-60 a day, which they get for 10-12 days a month.

Repression Provokes Further Resistance

The situation in Kalinga Nagar continues to be volatile. The government merely transferred the SP and the district collector, pledged compensation of Rs 5 lakh to the families of those killed and announced a judicial enquiry. People are demanding instead the criminal prosecution of the two officials. Judicial enquiries – whether it is the 1984 killings in Delhi or the firing in Maikunch – are typically used to defuse the immediate situation. The chopping of palms, the more recent accounts of the cutting of breasts and mutilation of the genitals of some of the dead bodies, the question whether some of the tribals were also tortured before being killed, the post-mortems and, most importantly, the firing itself demand nothing short of an independent central enquiry.

Meanwhile, the resistance continues to spread. Adivasis and other local people have blocked the main roads in the area for over 15 days demanding the withdrawal of all industrial projects from Kalinga Nagar. Today they are not willing to yield even a single inch of land and are asking for a complete ban on industries in tribal areas. The events unfolding currently in Kalinga Nagar and other parts of India are extremely significant as these movements are fundamentally questioning the very trajectory of “industrialisation” and “development” in India.

Email: ranjanapadhi@yahoo.co.uk
naga2@vsnl.com