

A Sweet Poison

Saga of displacing & pauperising people in Jharkhand

Adivasi Moolvasi Astitva Raksha Manch, Jharkhand, India, October 2009

Published by Adivasi Moolvasi Astitva Raksha Manch, New Garden Siram Toli, Club Road Ranchi, Jharkhand, India

A Sweet Poison

In a capitalist system based on plunder and the nexus of the corrupt politicians and bureaucrats, will Jharkhand government's Resettlement and Rehabilitation (R&R) Policy 2008 bring any substantial relief to tribal who lost everything in the name of development - their ancestral legacy, their lands and what not? This question is critical for those intellectuals, social organizations and advocates of sustainable development who espouse the concerns of the people whose survival depends on water resources, forests and land. This policy was passed by the state cabinet on July 16th, 2008. At a glance, it looks quite attractive, but, in fact, is totally incompatible with the realities of the lives of these people. The provision, in the policy, of providing compensation, jobs, shares and debentures of the company, constructed houses, one percent of company's net profit, livelihood allowance, yearly policy benefits to the displaced is just a hogwash. This policy also talks about the social rehabilitation, whereas the common knowledge is that social, economic, cultural and religious rehabilitation of tribal- indigenous peoples is never possible and no amount of money can ever compensate the loss suffered by them.

The policy states that in case of undesired displacement of 100 or more families, the state government will appoint an Relocation and Rehabilitation(Rand R) Administrator through a notification at the District Commissioner (DC) level. To implement R and R, there will be a team of officials comprising of Development Commissioner as chairperson and secretaries of departments of roads, industries, health, energy, labour, planning and law and a Commissioner (Coordination). The team will also include Members of Parliament (MP's) and Members of Legislative Assemblies (MLA's). It is well-known that all the development schemes including Indira Awas Scheme, National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), Antyodaya Scheme, Annapoorna Scheme and many others are controlled by these corrupt officials only. Their corrupt history is evidence of the fact that the fruits of the so called development have always been pocketed by the politicians, officials, contractors and their agents. The policy states that the fund reserved for R&R programs will be allotted to the R&R Administrator. It is clear that the funds coming in the name of the displaced persons shall be laundered by these people in their own interests and the R&R policy will offer them another golden opportunity to do so.

Those who hail this policy must look into the history of those laws which had been enacted for protecting the basic rights of tribal of Jharkhand. Two such laws are Chhotanagpur Kashtkari Act 1908 and Santhal Pargana Kashtkari Act, which have a provision that the tribal land cannot be sold or transferred to a non-tribal. After 50 years of enactment of these laws, almost 80 percent of tribal land in Jharkhand has been grabbed by non-tribal. The current R&R policy contradicts the Chhotanagpur Tenancy (CNT) Act and Santhal Pargana Tenancy (SPT) Act which state that agricultural land cannot be transferred for industrial purposes. The areas in 5th and 6th schedule were given special powers. What happened to these laws? They were never implemented. Public sector undertakings and projects like Bokaro Steel plant built in 1956, HEC in 1966-67, Chandil Dam in 1986 and UCL in Jamshedpur were touted as symbols of a welfare state. At the time of land acquisition for these plants, each one of them

had an R & R policy and had promised to give jobs, ideal rehabilitation, education and training to the displaced families. But what happened? In the name of jobs and other amenities to the displaced persons, only the officials, mafia and contractors got the benefits. On the contrary, the displaced were turned into paupers and beggars!

Clause 6.10 of the draft policy says that the rehabilitation official will ensure that the rehabilitation is possibly done in a manner that the displaced people are settled in the familiar environment. But the question is how the traditional village or social set up can be re-created. A traditional village is not a cluster of houses, it always has a specific topography. It can not be assessed in terms of giving compensation nor can it be re-created.

In Clause 6.23 of the draft policy it has been provided that the displaced persons will have the option of purchasing shares/debentures or both worth half the value of rehabilitation amount of profit earning corporates. Clause 7.13.1 of the policy states that affected families will be given one percent of the company's net profit. Many questions pop up from these clauses which need to be honestly addressed. Instead, arguing that this policy will brighten the future of Jharkhandis will be a crude joke on the plight of the displaced tribal communities. Ninety five percent of Jharkhandis still are farmers whose livelihood, social and economic systems, religious beliefs, linguistic-cultural identity-everything is intertwined with the rivers, mountains, forests, land, trees, grass, flowers, fruits and in a sense with the the entire Nature. These people produce food grains for six months and rest of the time of the year they sustain themselves by lead a life friendly with Nature. Forest produce like Jack fruit, Mango, Blackberry, Tamarind, Putkal, Koynar, Mahua-Dori, Char-Piyar, Kendu-Sarai, Karanj-Lah, Kusum, Chiraunji, Daatun-Patai, Rugda-Khunkhdi are the backbone of village economic life in Jharkhand. Every village has scores of Jack fruit, Mango, Black Plum, Tamarind, bamboo and Mahua trees and families of the farmers here earn hundred-thousands of rupees every year out of these. During seasonal time, Karanj sells at Rs. 10 per kg, Mahua at Rs. 15/kg, Chiraunji at Rs. 500/kg, Aamsi at Rs. 65/kg, Putkal Saag Sookha at Rs. 150/kg. How can one compensate them for such a high return of their produce? Moreover, five percent of the local indigenous population are traders whose 90 percent income comes from forest produce.

Of course the policy ensures employment for every one displaced but the basic question here is that of illiteracy, which is almost 80 percent. In many villages it is difficult to find a single 10th standard pass person. But Villagers are not to be blamed for this. It is the system and the government which is responsible. Since it is hard to find youngsters trained in the discipline of science in this area, many posts are lying vacant in village schools. If this is the situation, then how can one expect the villagers to understand jargon such as net profit of the company and share/debenture. It is to be explored as to how many technical people, mechanical engineers, ITI trained personnel, computer efficient people are there in the areas where the companies are planning to install their plants, because a mastery over these skills will be a pre-requisite for getting jobs in these companies. It is also being said that one percent of the net profit of the company will be given to the affected families. But then who will decide whether the company is making profit or loss? Usually an enterprise shows itself 'in loss' only to guarantee itself a financial stability.

Clause 7.11 says that one member of the family will be given a job but it is a known fact that tribal families usually are large families consisting of 15 to 20 members. Hence the question is how can a single earning member of a family can sustain other 15 members?

Clause 7.12 of the policy states that the families not getting jobs will be given Rs.1000 per acre per month for the next 30 years. This will be given per family under annual policy.

Suppose that a family of 10 members having 5 acres land, gets Rs.5000 per month (p.m.) without doing any work. This family will have to survive and fulfil all types of day-to-day economic and family obligations including marriages of children with this meagre amount only. This amount can also be termed as pension against land. Farmers must not be hoodwinked with this policy. If a farmer has 15-20 acre land which has been acquired, then he will not ideally get Rs. 15000- 20000 per month as per the policy. The policy states that under the annual policy, the maximum amount to be furnished will be Rs. 10,000 per month per family. The same policy states that livelihood wages given will be equal to 25 days of minimum agriculture labor wage per month for one year. A relevant question must be raised here. NREGS is being implemented in the state since last three years. It has provision that if a farmer does not get work within 15 days of his registration, then he will be provided unemployment wages for the next 50 days. From the Prime Minister to the Block Development Officer (BDO) and Village Panchayat Sewaks, everyone is busy in the implementation of this program. It is a well known fact that people like Lalit Mehta and Tapas Soren, who tried to implement this scheme in a genuine manner, had to lose their lives. Mehta was murdered and Soren committed suicide. This shows the level of corruption and repression in this scheme. If such is the case with NREGS, then how can it be possible that a farmer will get living wages equal to 25 days of agriculture wage?

Clause 7.2 of the policy states that each and every displaced family will be given a maximum of 10 decimal land in village and 5 decimal in the city in which the carpet area will be 100 square meters. It was said that a house will be built on this land which will have two bed rooms, a drawing room and a kitchen. Those who do not want house on this land will be given Rs. 300,000 so that they can go elsewhere and build house by buying the land. Those who have livestock to keep will have to arrange for their living along with themselves on this 10 decimal land only.

This draft policy does not talk about the rate on which lands will be acquired. It is also necessary for us to know about the terms and conditions of the MOU between state and the company regarding land acquisition and other provisions. The responsibilities of the company and state towards the displaced persons need to be spelt out. Why is the government hiding these facts ? Why the MOU is not being made public which has commoditised the lives of the common people? Hiding the MOU and approving the R&R policy in the cabinet amounts to betraying the tribal and indigenous population!

In order to show the people its good intention and human face, the company, in the name of corporate social responsibility, is distributing medicines through its Mobile Hospital vans. But the real intention behind this is to grab farmers' lands. Similarly veiled is the conspiracy to grab the agriculture lands and forests behind every proposal to appease the tribal.

ArcelorMittal wants to set up steel plants in Khoonti and Gumla districts by demolishing dozens of villages. Villagers have raised the slogan "We will neither loose our lives nor will give a single inch of our land". They say that their ancestors had populated this land after waging fierce fights with pythons and bears. Hence they will not leave this land at any cost. The government or company will provide employment to only a single person from a family, but this land will feed the generations to come. The social, economic and cultural existence of tribal can survive and flourish only on land, forests and water. Otherwise tribal society will become extinct. Officials from Mittal Company for the first time came to survey this area in May 2005. After surveying some villages, when the team reached Rehargadha, the villagers started protesting and they had to run away. Today, tribal and indigenous people of Torpa, Kamdara, Karra and Rania have pledged that they will not give at any cost a single inch

of ancestral land to the Company. The tribal and indigenous people are self-sufficient in producing food grain for their livelihood and sustenance. In addition, the forest plants and trees also bear many fruits in different seasons. These are not only edible and nutritious, but act as the backbone of rural economy. Anything which grows on land is the social, cultural and economic backbone of local people. The flowing rivers are part of their living. Their language, culture and society itself grows out of them. There are three rivers in this region- Chhata, Karro and Koyal which irrigate thousands of villages in Ranchi, Khoonti and Gumla and then proceed towards Orissa and West Bengal. These rivers provide social, economic and cultural existence to Jharkhand and also help in the progress of neighbouring states. The people not only use the water of these rivers, but also the silt and sand of rivers for generating money. People in these regions are also engaged in fishing from these rivers.

Due to the geographical location of this area and highly developed highways and railways facilities; Mittal Company wants to set up a plant here. They want to develop Pakra railway station as the centre of all their activities. Companies have a keen eye on these rivers in order to meet the requirement of their plants because there is no technical hindrance in draining water from these rivers as there are no dams around. Official sources say that the plant set up by Mittal will be the largest in the world.

The state and central governments talk of the interests of tribal and farmers on one side; but on the other side they are engaged in serving the interests of big industries and corporate by unleashing repression on tribal communities and hijacking their social and constitutional rights. If we look at the past experience, not only are those people displaced whose lands are acquired but in the process of setting up new colonies in the neighbouring areas people living in these areas are also evicted. Companies and governments talk of giving compensation, but who will compensate those who are displaced in the name of urbanization?

The other question relates to the resettlement of people from the displaced areas into new ones. Will the old residents of resettlement colonies accept the entry of new people? Neglecting their consent, the government and the companies resettle people in these already habited areas because they have neither choice nor land.

At the Heavy Engineering Corporation (HEC) factory site, the displaced villagers have been resettled in the neighboring villages. New names have been given to old villages, like Naya (new) Sarai, Naya Latma, Naya Satranji, Naya Hulhundu etc. At places where resettlement sites are not available, people are left in remote barren areas to die. And those said to be rehabilitated are leading hellish lives in small shanties provided to them. This is not a fringe of imagination but a stark reality of the resettlement of those displaced due to so-called development projects.

Today ArcelorMittal wants to have its strong foothold in this area in the name of developing public facilities. They are talking of opening schools, colleges, hospital, technical training institutes etc. If it is the genuine attempt on their part to bring tribal into mainstream, then they are most welcome. But it is all eye-wash! The company is luring the tribal communities because it wants their land, forests and water to set up a plant which will displace thousands and thousands of people from their culture, language, identity and legacy of their ancestors. It is a known fact that once a tribal farmer is evicted from land, she/he is non-existent.

This area covers Kulda, Tati, Garai, Kenaloya, Samtolya, Sarita, Bongda, Kuda Turdu, Bamhandi, Sainsera, Bakaspur, Rangre, Tilmi, Jalanga, Jaria and Indvan forests. When Mittal sets up a plant here, not only local people will be displaced but the environment will also get

polluted and ecology plundered. The rivers and other water resources will dry up and agriculture fields will be destroyed. To set up the plant, forests will have to be cleared and it will affect neighbouring forests also because large number of outsiders will come in this area for jobs and new economic activities will take place.

When any company brings its capital in a particular region it is not alone. Along with it come other capitalists to start ancillaries. Thus Capital attracts more capital in various productive sectors thereby creating the environment for competition. Amidst such competition how long the local small capitalists would survive can only be determined by the Global capital market. But it is true that the big fish swallows the smaller ones. Therefore, struggle against Mittal or any other company is not limited to the ouster of tribal and indigenous population alone, but this is also a struggle for survival of small capital against the onslaught of big capital.

Whose development and of what kind?

Who will be taught in the schools? Will it be those who have been displaced by the Company from their homes and have been deprived of their livelihood, employment, cultural identity etc.? Who will be treated in Company's hospitals when there will be not a single grain in the stomach of the people and no clothes on their bodies? How many children of the displaced people will be taught by the company? How many will be trained? And for how long? This is not possible at all, because company has come here to do business and book profits. It has not come to do social service. This is not an emotional outburst, but a stark reality which can be experienced in every area where industries have been set up.

Who will get jobs?

The capitalists of the world are competing to sell their produce and services in this global capital market. Now the capitalists are running short of sectors to invest their capital as they have already invested heavily in the basic sectors and services like water, education, food and health to earn maximum profit. That's why they want to plunder our natural resources for diversifying their business and book more profits. In such a scenario only those will be employed who understand this market and are technically sound. People having IA, BA, MA degrees will become redundant. Moreover the Company can not ensure employment to the people generation after generation whereas the natural resources like water, forests and lands have been nurturing tribal communities from generation to generation and will continue to do so.

Before every land acquisition, they say- we will rehabilitate and compensate. The moot question is - compensation for what? Can they compensate for language-culture, social values, history, traditional norms, and ancestral legacy of tribal communities? Will they compensate for herbs, trees, environment and Sarna-Sasandiri? The tribal society is of the view that these can neither be rehabilitated nor compensated!

Dayamani Barla
Convenor, Adivasi Moolvasi Astitva Raksha Manch
Jharkhand, India
E-mail: dayamanib@gmail.com
Mobile: +91-9431104386