

Understanding Social Movements in Kalinga-Nagar, Odisha: Issues and Debate

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Abstract

This article is trying to understand about social movement, mass protestant and the sensitive issue of Kalinga-Nagar, Odisha. This anti-displacement movement at Kalinga Nagar will go down in the records of history as one of the longest mass protests in the Odisha. This article is going to discourse the past, present and future effects of this social movement through short discussion and debate.

Keywords: Social Movement, Social Change, Industrialization and Displacement.

Introduction

The term 'social movement' has enlightened the Indian Sociology. Social movements are directly related to social change and also a product of the social structure. This does not mean that a social movement is a necessary condition of social change; it can take place independently of social movements through the operation of impersonal forces and factors. The study of social movements are one of the largest and most broad sub-fields of sociology. Whereas some researchers study on the rise of specific or micro-level social movement and some other researcher look at macro-level social movements like as, various large scale demographic, economic and political transformations to the emergence of regional, national, and even global social movements. A sociologically meaningful study of a social movement will remain incomplete unless both these aspects i.e. social change and social structure are linked into a single theoretical framework. Generally, social movements were emphasis on social evolution and structure of the movement. This paper mainly focus on the clear conceptualization of social movements in Odisha.

The different typologies of social movements have classified into women's movements, Dalit movements, tribal movements, agrarian and farmers' movements, regional identity movements, and human rights

movements on the basis of the socio-economic characteristics of the participants and the issues involved. All these movements are aimed at acquiring due spaces for different sections of populations and regions, which have been denied the same historically in economy, society, and polity in the development process. The article traces the genesis of social movement in Kalinga-Nagar, Odisha.

The Movement in Kalinga-Nagar

"The anti-displacement movement at Kalinga Nagar will go down in the records of history as one of the longest mass protests in the country. After 12 Adivasi were killed in a police firing, the locals organized a highway blockade that lasted nearly 14 months. Mass mobilization continues to this day in the area, despite negative media reports and the Odisha government's bullying tactics. It seems to be the people's way of declaring that an indefatigable protest is the only option left to those threatened by displacement."

Since the 1990s, with the advent of the New Economic Policy was attract peoples' attention, for which Odisha needs rapid 'industrialization' to mitigate its desperate poverty. During that period, the people may die due to famine, floods and starvation in Odisha. Some people didn't know that Odisha is one of the rich in mineral

wealth. The government can hardly be expected to manage all that resources needed to start industrialization, as it's hardly able to meet its monthly wage bills. So, if the mines are leased out to private investment, and land with adequate infrastructure put on offer for industrial houses, prosperity will replace poverty in no time. Such was the intensity of this concerted campaign, particularly after the mineral resources were opened to private capital, both national and foreign, backed by the aggressive globalization-mantra, that in no time it caught the imagination of the middle class, reeling under the lack of employment opportunities. 'Industrialization' will open up employment opportunities to the educated unemployed, will generate man days for the unskilled poor, the cash-strapped state will earn revenue through taxes, royalties, land-sales etc., and in the near future the poor land of Odisha will overflow with milk and honey. This was the message being disseminated from assorted quarters – the corporate media, the government, the international aid agencies, the funded NGOs, the world-bank, the institutional intellectuals – and it appeared to have some takers. The road map to this neo-liberal 'industrialization' is primarily geared towards "harnessing Odisha's vast natural resources". This state has almost 60% of India's known bauxite reserve, 25% of coal, 98% of chromite, 28% of iron ore, 92% of nickel ore, 28% of manganese etc. – enough to make profiteering private companies salivate. But there is a catch. To get going, to start digging the mines, setting up plants to process the ores, building residential townships, roads, ports etc., at every stage you require land. And bonafide citizens of India, though poor and deprived, and mostly scheduled tribe people, inhabit most of these lands. To acquire their land, these people need to be displaced, by hook or crook. Over the years these people have come to view the 'development' plans of the govt. with suspicion; they feel they're being given the short shrift. Suspicion leads to resentment, and resentment leads to resistance. And whenever there is resistance, the govt. comes down on its own citizens with a heavy hand. Greater the resistance, greater tended to be the repression of the govt. The police firing at Maikanch that led to the loss of three tribal lives in December 2000 is still fresh in the public memory. Earlier in 1997, there was a police firing at Sindhigaon, Gopalpur where people protested against the proposed steel plant by the Tata, a Steel Major. The incident at Kalinga-Nagar, in that way, can be seen as the latest in a series of ongoing conflict between the two sides: between the one favoring 'industrialization', led by the government, and those opposed to it.

With this given backdrop let us come to the incident that has led to this report. On 2nd January 2006, like a new-year's gift from the state govt., people came to learn that police had resorted to firing on a mass of tribal protesters,

protesting against the construction work of a proposed steel plant by the Tata at Kalinga-Nagar in Jajpur district, killing a dozen and injuring scores; one policeman was killed and some injured. Unexpected and shocking as the news was, it invited condemnation from all quarters, particularly human right groups and opposition parties. Members of 3 district units of PUCL (Bhubaneswar, Cuttack and Dhenkanal) jointly constituted a fact-finding team to probe into the incident and resolved to come out with a report. The team had first visited the site of the incident and the adjoining tribal hamlets on 11th January 2006. It had subsequently made 3 more visits. In the course of its visit the team had interacted with the local people, the leadership of the protesting forces, the family members of some of the deceased, the district police and civil administration, and the residents of the two rehabilitation colonies; it also visited the injured at SCB Medical College, Cuttack. Collating all the primary materials received, besides the numerous media-reports and other secondary information to which we could lay our hands, the team has arrived at the following understanding of events:

During Movement

January 2, 2006, the day of the Kalinga Nagar firing will be remembered both as a Black Day and a Glorious Day in the history of Odisha, black because on that day the Government and Police of a democratic State behaved in a manner, as 'South Asian' in its editorial on 30th Jan. 2006 observed, that 'would put to shame even British Gen. Dyer who was responsible for the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre' and glorious, because a group of tribal knowing well that they were no match to the mighty combine of bureaucracy-politicians-industry could dare to voice protest onto the face of the regime-that-be in a clear, loud and resolute manner.

That day, with the help of the administration, the Tata undertook the program of leveling the land where their plant was to come up. Top district officials, including SP and DM, were present. People of the area had assembled to protest. Coming sporadically from several villages, their numbers had gradually swelled to 300-400, including women and children, some of them carrying bows and arrows, tangias (a kind of pick axe) and other traditional weapons, customarily carried by tribal people. They were assembled on the adjacent fields to the site, close to Champakoila village. By all accounts, the mobilization of the police was massive, around 10 platoons that is around 300 policemen, requisitioned by the SP for overseeing the leveling of a piece of land. They had come prepared for combat, for a decisive show of strength, armed and battle ready. They had taken positions, according to unofficial police sources, divided in three contingents on three sides of the Tata site, which

was temporarily fenced by long ropes. (9 contingents were positioned along the rope boundary and one was 'reserve', specially meant to give protection to the top brass present.)

About what happened that day there are several versions. We are trying to narrate what appears most plausible to us. When the leveling machine was doing its work, the protestors wanted to enter the rope cordon and stop the machine; the police tried to stop them. So, there arose a situation where there was pushing and pulling from both sides. In their attempt to scare them the police used 'stun shells' (there are allegations of landmines or bombs being used by the police which the team doesn't find plausible), along with teargas shells, and rubber bullets. All this was done in quick succession, as if the police were in a hurry to finish a formality. (As the organizers informed us, they wanted to discuss with the authorities but wasn't given a chance.) This resulted in a great confusion when people ran helter skelter in fright, and outrage. Some of the policemen, while chasing the demonstrators, had tripped on the uneven land around the site. This in turn encouraged some of the fleeing crowd to return. (Anyone, who has followed the resistance of the weak against the mighty administration, would understand the dynamics and psychology of such conflagration.) The police had started fire, ostensibly to give cover to its fallen colleagues. But, inexplicably, they fired to kill, and some of the agitators fell victim. In the melee one of the policemen, an unarmed havildar, Gopabandhu Mohanty, slipped and fell in the hands of the fleeing tribal. He was killed by the disoriented crowd. After this, the men in uniform and gears ran amok, the officials present doing nothing to restrain them. They were baying for blood, seeking revenge, using the death of a colleague as an alibi. The people, frightened out of their wits, ran, as the police shot unrestrainedly from behind. Bodies, dead and injured, including women and children, lay strewn on the ground. The villagers carried some of their injured and dead people to the villages and admitted the injured into the hospital. The others, dead and injured, were taken to the hospital by the police. The final count, that emerged by and by, were shocking: 1 policeman dead and 4 injured; 12 tribal dead and 37 injured – the dead, as well as the injured, included women and children. (Annex-2 for list of the 12 tribal killed) The PUCL team met some of the injured people, including the four policemen, at Medical College Hospital, Cuttack. The injured policemen were - Shri R.R.Naupani, Shri B.S.Gerung, Shri Asbahadur Gum and Shri H.B.Newar. The team found that all the injured policemen had suffered injuries caused by *lathis*. There was no sign of injuries caused by arrow.

Post- Movement Period

Wider Impact of Kalinga-Nagar Episode: In fact, under the aegis of Visthapan Virodhi Jana Manch (People's Platform Against Displacement) an economic blockade on Daitary-Paradip National Highway was put up and maintained right from the day of incident 2nd January 06 till 9th March, 2007, that is to say, for more than 14 months at a stretch, by far the longest of its kind. The Jana Manch lifted the blockade only after the Odisha High Court intervened and the State Chief Minister showed a conciliatory response to the set of demands that the Jana Manch had put forth. As a condition for lifting the 14 months long road blockade the Jana Manch had demanded that the administration won't use force under any pretext to evict them from their land; that the Tata must not start construction work without their consent; and that a dialogue to explore an alternative to displacement ought to continue. The Chief Minister formally agreed to their demands in writing on March 8, 2007, and the letter was read out to the protestors and their leaders in Kalinga Nagar. It was only then that the people decided to withdraw the blockade, but announced to the whole world that if the government renege on its promises the blockade would be back on track again.

On 2 January, 2006 the police recklessly fired upon the protesting tribals who had sporadically gathered at Champakoili village the site for boundary wall. As a result 12 persons died and as per a conservative estimate 37 persons got severely injured on the spot. The police immediately dragged away the dead bodies except 4 ones which remained in the custody of the shell-shocked tribal. The people under the banner of VVJM, Sukinda sat on a dharna at Madhuban Chhaka on the NH-200. As the shock and grief gave way to outrage and a new resolve to thwart the designs of the government, the ever-swelling numbers of agitators blocked the highway, with seven-point demands. The road blockade continued for more than 14 months until 9th March 2007. On the persistent demand by the VVJM and public at large the remaining 8 bodies were handed over to the families on 4th January 2006. A mass cremation was held at Ambagadia village amidst tears and slogans all around. The place of cremation got renamed as *Veer Bhumi* (Land of Heroes). As if to add salt to the injury, the police had chopped off the palms of the dead bodies which were in their custody. This unprecedented behavior on the part of the police, which had no rhyme or reason not only further fueled the wrath and outrage of the tribal but also invited the full-throated condemnation from all over the world including Amnesty International and India's official bodies like SC and ST Commission and National Human Rights Commission. Shyam Gagrai,

35 succumbed to bullet injuries on 11 March 2006 at All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi.

Commission of Enquiry in Kalinga-Nagar incident

3 January 2006, the Government of Odisha ordered a judicial probe into the Kalinga-Nagar massacre to be conducted under the provisions of the Commission of Inquiry Act. However a month and twenty days later, on 23rd February 2006, the Government issued a notification constituting the judicial commission to probe into the police firing in Kalinga-Nagar headed by Odisha High Court Justice Sri A. S. Naidu. But since then two more tribal Shyam Gagrai and Sanjoy Soy - injured in the police firing on 2nd January had died. Therefore on 6 May 2006, the Justice AS Naidu Commission had to adjourn hearing till 9 June 2006 as the State Government failed to issue a notification to bring the death of these two tribal under the purview of the inquiry commission. In August 2006, the Justice Naidu Commission sought extension of its tenure as it could not complete the inquiry because of the apathy of the State government. As was anticipated, the Superintendent of Police of Jajpur, Sri Binoytosh Mishra, who was present during the shooting of the Adivasi, in course of his deposition on 15 October 2006 made before the Justice AS Naidu Commission of Inquiry defended the police action on the tribal at Kalinga-Nagar. He claimed that the agitators had 'fiercely' attacked the policemen with axes, bows and arrows. However, the fact finding team of Peoples' Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) in its report stated that all the four injured policemen - Shri R.R. Naupani, Shri B.S. Gerung, Shri Asbahadur Gum and Shri H.B. Newar-undergoing treatment at Medical College Hospital, Cuttack "suffered injuries caused by lathis. There was no sign of injuries caused by arrow". It is interesting to note that on 24 June 2006, Justice Naidu Commission sent a piece of iron object that was retrieved from the neck of a victim Tuna Jarika during the post-mortem examination at the community health Centre at Danagadi, for forensic test. Jarika was ostensibly killed with that object.

Displacement

Even under previous governments in the state, innocent people died when they stood up against moves to evict them from their land to make way for industry. The past killings of citizens relating to a steel plant at Gopalpur and an alumina plant at Maikancha bear testimony to the "move them or kill them" attitude of all governments. If Kalinga Nagar type of blood baths have to be averted, the political and bureaucratic mindset has to change, sooner than later. In 1992, Kalinga Nagar was earmarked as a steel complex. At present, it houses many companies such as MESCO, Neelachal Ispat Nigam (NINL), Jindal Stainless, Visa Steel and Maharashtra Seamless (the

flagship of DP Jindal Group). As per Sudhir Patnaik [Patnaik 2006], displacement at Kalinga Nagar started in 1997-98. The state government initially paid displaced people Rs 35,000 per acre, which has since been doubled, whereas the land is sold to companies at around 10 times this amount. Hundreds of families have been displaced and many more are expected to be moved in the future. There were 700 families; now there are 250, with no news of the other 450 families! As Patnaik points out, the majority of local people in Kalinga Nagar (tribal, Dalits and general population) do not have proper land titles, though they have been cultivating the land for four to five generations. But the government only compensates those who have proper land titles. Naturally, many locals were and are worried about it. In fact, the recent Kalinga Nagar protest was not against industrialization; the locals were merely demanding compensation for those who do not have land titles. Besides, the level of consciousness of the movement at Kalinga Nagar has increased over the years due to able leadership, whose resolve against involuntary displacement for "development" projects or industries has become stronger, because of their awareness about the plight of displaced people at different places in the state and outside the state. In fact, one of the current leaders, Rabindra Jarika, who has been "arrested" by Jajpur police on October 25, 2005, has a master's degree in sociology from Utkal University, Bhubaneswar. Interestingly, Rabindra Jarika was "whisked away" when he was returning from a national tribal meet in Bhubaneswar. Kalinga Nagar tribal were initially somewhat in favor of industrialization, since they had been sold dreams of a great future. As Patnaik observed, when the agitation started there three years back, they merely wanted land for land, and any land would have probably sufficed. Monetary compensation is often useless; it cannot give people the same quality of life they enjoyed before being displaced. If the land-for-land principle is followed, that is better; but where would the government get land as fertile as people had before? In Kalinga Nagar and other proposed industrial plazas, large patches are agricultural-quality land.

Seven Demands of VVJM:- Soon after the 2 January episode the VVJM put forward a 7-point Charter of Demands before the State Government and insisted on its fulfillment as a condition for removal of the road blockade on Paradip-Daitary Express Highway. Although they have withdrawn the road blockade with effect from 9th March 2007 following the intervention by Odisha High Court and assurance of CM to consider their demands in due course, the organization still theoretically adheres to the Charter as the main plank of their agitation. They proclaim that their agitation is still on and shall ever remain so, until the cause for which their compatriots were martyred in the police firing o 2nd

January was fulfilled. The quintessence of their manifesto at the moment is to oppose involuntary displacement to take place any further in their area, and press for proper rehabilitation of the families already displaced. Although the modus operandi of their resistance has changed over from militancy to moderation under the force of circumstances, the spirit of resistance is as unbending and resolute as it was in the phase of militancy. It is worthwhile to recount here the 7-point Charter of VVJM around which the tribal struggle in Kalinga Nagar has been hovering since the fateful 2nd January 2006:

- Put an end to all displacement. Five acres of land be given to families who have already been displaced.
- The Chief Minister, the Finance Minister, Minister of Mines, Industry, Scheduled Caste & Scheduled Tribe Welfare Minister be removed from Ministry, and the Minister of Finance and Chief Minister be booked for murder charge.
- The Home Secretary and DGP be suspended and SP and Collector of Jajpur District and ADM, Kalinga-Nagar (who were in office then and directly responsible for the police firing) be suspended and booked under Section 302.
- Rs.20 lakh as compensation for the family of each dead and Rs.10 lakh to the family of injured.
- MNCs and Monopoly companies be driven out from the soil of Odisha.
- Adivasi be given the rights over mineral resources, land, water, forests and industry in tribal areas.
- Unconditional release of leaders and activists of the movement and withdrawal of all cases pending against them.

Conclusion

The above all discussion it is evident that an adequate framework for the study of social movements should take into account the historicity, the elements of present social structure and the future vision of the society in which they originate and operate. It is the dialectics between historicity (past experiences), social structure (present existential conditions) and the urge for a better future (human creativity) which provides the focal point for analysis of social movements. That is, a theory of social movements implies not only a theory of social structure but also a vision about the future of society. I must hasten to add that the interlocking of the past–present–future implies that social movements reflect the confluence between the persistent, changing and evolving elements of a system. Further, the framework also suggests that an analysis of social movements in India, a nation-state, can be our legitimate concern. At

a deeper level the framework implies that men make history and constantly learn from their historicity. Movements are neither mere accidents nor entirely the resultants of manipulations by leaders and demagogues but the consequence of conscious efforts of men to change systems in the light of their past experiences, avoiding pitfalls. Finally, the continuous occurrence of movements implies that man is not imprisoned by present structures and no moratorium on his creativity can be imposed.

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