

On Republic Day, violence against India's indigenous continues

Odisha Government intensifies its war against the Dongria Kondh on the eve of Republic Day

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While India observed Republic Day, people at various places read out the Preamble to the Constitution and unfurled the National Flag, the adivasi people of Niyamgiri were reminded once again that mining corporations like Vedanta are the real owners of the country.

The tyranny of the Manubadi Capitalist Government of Odisha was at full display on the eve of the Republic Day with widespread combing operations being carried out in the sacred hills of the Adivasis, Niyamgiri. With a mission to subdue Lakhpadar village, the epicentre of the anti-mining movement and home to the Dongria Kondh leader Lado Sikaka, president of the Niyamgiri Suraksha Samiti (NSS).

Naveen Pattnaik proved it once again that he remains a stooge of mining companies and will not refrain from a massacre of the Dongria Kondh in Niyamgiri as he has done all over Odisha in his two decade old regime of genocide and ecocide.

In the name of fighting the Maoists the police is creating terror and forcefully constructing a highway in Niyamgiri to facilitate mining operations. The Niyamgiri Suraksha Samiti has repeatedly opposed the construction of highways and has demanded that only five feet wide pathways be constructed to serve the needs of the people rather than that of mining companies.

The Odisha Govt has broken every Constitutional safeguard that protects the Dongria Kondh as well as every right enshrined in the UN Declaration of Indigenous People's Rights. The state Government has failed to provide any education and healthcare services in all these years but blames the lack of roads to be an impediment in delivering these services.

How can the lack of roads be a problem when people with ailments are already travelling to far off cities for treatment? Dongria Kondh people suffering from any ailment have to travel to Vishakapatnam, Berhampur, Cuttack, Burla, Koraput and Bhubaneswar to get proper treatment. All primary health centres in and around Niyamgiri where roads are present, like Kurli Panchayat, remain completely dysfunctional.

Why hasn't the Govt created proper hospitals in Muniguda, Bisam Katak, Kalyansingpur or Lanjigarh that are located in the foothills of Niyamgiri but spent Rs.500 crore for creating tourism infrastructure around the Jagannath temple in Puri?

The Dongria Kondh children are compelled to join segregated schools like the corporate sponsored 'Kalinga Institute of Social Science - KISS' in Bhubaneswar. Recently Naveen Pattnaik inaugurated 'Adani - KISS' in the tribal district of Mayurbhanj, yet another segregated campus for Adivasi children and jointly owned by Adani.

The Odisha Minister of Tribal Affairs who is the MLA of the region has not only betrayed the people to serve Vedanta's interests but is also instrumental in creating conflict. His stooges are awarded with contracts of road construction works who further try to wean away Niyamgiri Suraksha Samiti youth activists by influencing them to migrate to far off cities in Kerala, Telengana, etc for employment. The Congress MP of the region who was touted as a People's Mahagathbandhan candidate by left-liberals is evidently part of the mining lobby as well.

Niyamgiri has witnessed terrible repression against the Dongria Kondh for their resistance against bauxite mining. Ever since the Vedanta project was announced scores of people have been tortured and incarcerated in Niyamgiri hills and Lanjigarh where the Govt. forcefully bulldozed villages to construct Vedanta's refinery.

The paramilitary gunned down a 10th class Dongria Kondh student Mando Kadraka in 2016. A few months prior to that activist Drika Kadraka committed suicide in his village after the police tortured him. Kuni Sikaka, a woman activist of the tribe was abducted at midnight from her home by armed forces and then paraded in front of the media as hardcore Maoist. Several other activists like Dasuru, Saibo, Bako, Drenju and others have been tortured and jailed as well.

The police continue to hound NSS leader Lado Sikaka and in 2018 when he had sought permission for a peaceful protest demonstration he was detained and tortured for two days. Earlier in 2010 he had been abducted by the paramilitary and tortured for days until widespread outrage led to his release.

Last year villagers living around the Vedanta refinery in Lanjigarh were protesting against the company for polluting the area, for not fulfilling its promises of employment and education. In a violent crackdown on the protestors, Dani Batra was beaten to death. In the violence one Odisha Industrial Security Force personnel also died and the Police filed cases against 300 people of the area. More than 30 people were arrested and one of them, Pattnaik Harijan of Rengopali village was killed in police custody. Lingaraj Azad, a spokesperson of NSS, was also arrested for helping the Dongria Kondh organise a Gram Sabha in Niyamgiri hills to oppose the forceful construction of CRPF camps in villages.

People protesting against bauxite mining for Vedanta in Kodingamali were also silenced with false cases registered against them by the local mining mafia comprising of ex-MLAs from all parties. In Nov 2019 at least 14 villagers were arrested for protesting against pollution by the Aditya Birla's owned Utkal Alumina project in Kashipur. In January this year more than 40 women and 7 children were arrested for protesting against the pollution by Utkal Alumina and non-fulfillment of employment promises. Arresting women and children is not new for the Odisha Government. as women and infants have been arrested and jailed for months in Lanjigarh as well for protesting against Vedanta in 2010.

Recently, the Odisha Govt announced yet another aluminium plant by Aditya Birla group, just 10 km away from its existing refinery, Utkal Alumina. The complete plunder of the adjoining districts of Koraput and Rayagda seems inevitable now with the Government pumping up its display of brutality. There must be widespread protest against the repressive Capitalist Manubadi Government of Odisha demanding the cancellation of these projects, an immediate halt of combing operations and complete withdrawal of paramilitary forces, immediate release of jailed activists like Dodi Kadraka and clean-up of the environment in Lanjigarh, Kashipur, and Kodingamali, and the people must be compensated by the Government and the companies for the damages incurred upon the mind and body of the Adivasi people.

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