

## Rising voices of women against displacement of POSCO in Odisha

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### Abstract

This paper highlights the matters on various issues relating to the Tribal's struggle and their forest rights in Orissa; Problems & Prospects, Forest Policies & Social Protest against it, Forest based Livelihoods, Forest Acts & Management Strategies, Area under forest, Wildlife & Bio-diversity Conservation, Diversion of Forests Land, Livelihood Development, Forest Resources, Rehabilitation and displacement, Tribal & Forest interface and Development of Alternate Livelihood in Orissa after independence. Industrialization through foreign investors inducing displacement of local people may be an issue with which people may not reconcile easily. The offer needs to be made attractive and make the people willing to accept it. Attachment to hearths and homes, community assets and local resources forms a natural bond among the people in a locality. It is a social reality which is woven with the threads of the psycho-social behaviour of the individual and community in a locality for a number of generations. In all matters of development induced mass displacement State intervention may be desirable with utmost care.

**Keywords:** Displacement, Loss of Livelihood, Rehabilitation, Women's Movement, Common Property.

### Introduction

India has been undertaking development project to improve the quality of life of its people through "planned development" under the successive five-year plans. Such projects include dams, power, mining, industrial and allied infrastructures, transport network, urban development, commercial forestry and other projects. Some of these projects have brought adverse effects in the form of displacement of people from their original place of habitation due to large-scale land acquisition. Development induced displacement in the country has brought several economic, social and environmental problems to the displaced people. Magnitude of people displaced and severity of the problems due to multipurpose dam projects is too high as compared to other projects in the country. They also lead to submergence of high quality of land, destruction of the watershed, disturb the delicate ecological balance and distort the surrounding environment, loss of wildlife and precious irreplaceable flora etc, and most notorious problems of flooding, water-logging and salinity. The experience of post-independence period from projects across the country suggests that the long drawn out process of displacement has caused widespread traumatic psychological and socio-cultural consequences. These include the dismantling of traditional production system, desecration of ancestral sacred zones, graves and places of work ship, scattering of kinship groups, disruptions of family system and informal social network.

### Problem Statement

Development Induced Displacement is a subject of much debate around the world. In India the

development projects starting from construction of Dams, Industrial units, mining's etc. Displacement due to these projects are numerous and vast. People have left their houses and hearth. They have lost their source of livelihood such as agricultural land, fishing sources and other earning properties like, common properties recourses (CPR).

Women have comforted a lot many problems due to displacement. Displacement for man and women are different. Loosing a home may be a simpler issue for men but it is a survival and an issue of shame for women. Without a house men can stay outside and may be in the camp without any basic facility. But women can't stay like that even for few days. They may be vulnerable in various ways. Children including girls may face dangerous situations. They are study and school used to disrupt frequently.

Many times the practices say that Resettlement and Rehabilitation colony are usually placed on a barren land away from peoples habitat and they don't get fertile cultivate land as compensation. Generally cash is given in the name of elderly male persons of the family. Cultural land social aspects are not taken care by the government.

### Aim

Aim of my study is to focus on women's plight and suffering caused due to development induced displacement in mega projects POSCO in Paradip of Odisha. Some specific objectives are analyzed in the context of globalization vs development projects its impact on women. Feminist perspective is to be pursued through the ongoing debate between development and displacement Role of state, civil society and NGO need

critical analysis in relation to situation of the displaced women. Gender neutral perspectives are to be searched in the policies of Resettlement and Rehabilitation, PESA and tribal sub-plan. Question of loss of livelihood, common property resource and environment require an assessment from the point of view of gender perspective. Cultural and psychological dimension of displacement are to be studied. Political assertion of women in the form of protest, resistance, and movement are to be documented. The main objective of our study is to document the voices of women in revolutionary struggle against proposed POSCO project at Paradeep of Gagatsinghpur.

### Objective

1. To capture the focus of feminine consciousness POSCO movement.
2. Another important objective of the study is aimed at understanding various factors responsible for displacement.
3. To study in detail about the POSCO project and its brittle promises specifically for women and children.
4. To study about the real and natural position of women after displacement.
5. To study about the gaps between the policy and practice from a gender perspective.
6. To fathom the loss of cultural milieu
7. To study the amount of violence perpetrated against displaced women in displacement and post displacement period.
8. To study about the livelihood restoration of women in displaced area.
9. To study the socio-economic and psychological environment and its implication for women in a situation of threatened displaced scenario.
10. To discover the gender differential impact of displacement on men and women.
11. To document and analyze the oppression of police force as an agency of state.
12. To discover the role of state and Government for the project affected and displaced people.
13. To know the types of suffering of men and women because of displacement.
14. To note the women's participation in the protest movement against POSCO.

### Hypothesis

For my study I have presumed the following hypothesis:

1. The very entry of the companies made women in secure and vulnerable.
2. Issues of livelihood, shelter and environment are more important for women in comparison to men.
3. Women were least consulted about the installation POSCO project.

4. Women participated in large number the movement against POSCO. Some of them were seriously involved and 'lathi' charge, tear gas, imprisonment and also died confronted in the struggle.
5. Company people of POSCO repressed women rebel a lot.
6. Men and women were not given due compensation.
7. In spite of intense struggle against POSCO Company, many villagers were displaced from their own soil.
8. Leadership is both in the hands of men and women.
9. Women are not consulted during Resettlement and Rehabilitation process.
10. People are not properly located with minimum provision of electricity and water.

### Methodology

The study is developed with the data from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected by adopting feminist research methodologies such as Dialogue, Storytelling, Oral history, Flock Songs, Group Discussion, Public hearing and Participatory Observation. A survey was with the help of open and close ended structured questionnaire. Personal interview was conducted to document women's experience by retrieving their memory relating to displacement. Focus Group Discussions were also braised to collect primary data. Secondary data were collected from project implementers, state and civil society sources. Literature was collected from the sources of people organization who led the protest movements.

### Review of Literature

Rita Ray argues that the clause of proving herself as divorcee to get R&R benefits divorce is sought. In their case normally the male just deserts his wife, often to later remarry without a formal divorce. The requirement of affidavit to prove as divorcee may have difficulty for the illiterate women to get so. Further the woman is at the mercy of the Officer-in-Charge of rehabilitation. Thus, she argues the resolution is gender discriminatory for the divorcee. In addition to R&R benefits to the divorcees, the Odisha Resettlement and Rehabilitation of Projects Affected Persons Policy, 1994 considered. Widows having no sources of livelihood and the unmarried women above 30 years as separate units for R&R benefits. The policy also mandates issuance of ownership titles for homestead and agricultural land jointly in the names of the project affected person and his/her spouse.

The policy can be argued as gender-biased not considering unmarried girls above 18 years as separate units to get R&R benefits whereas unmarried sons above 18 years avail so. The parent shaving daughters above 18 years gets R&R benefits for the head of

family under one package only whereas the family having sons above 18 years all get R&R benefits in separate packages including the head of family. Although Government emphasize gender equality on all other aspects but it is gender-biased on extending R&R benefits to the girls above 18 years age as is applicable to their male counter parts (Rout: 1999).

Anita Agnihotri (1998) has observed that the gender dimensions of displacement have not been closely studied in the state of Odisha. The problem does not lie in defining the entitlements of a woman head of the household's entitlements in terms of material and money. The complex role a woman perform as a food collector, collector of fuel, and water, as a number of children and partner in agricultural activities gets a more than disproportionate blow vis-à-vis men in the process of displacement.

She has to be placed back in her original place if not at a position of advantage - after relocation. In the State, the major industrial projects (Rourkela Steel Plant, and National Aluminium Company Limited), thermal power projects (Talcher Super Thermal Power Project under NTPC and Ib Thermal Power Station, a State PSU) and coal mining projects (under Mahanadi Coalfields Limited, a subsidiary of Coal India Limited) have adopted their own R&R policies differing from each other, however, it is glaring to mention here that none of the R&R policies has gender perspective to address gender dimension of displacement.

According to Mridula Singh (1992), R&R policy of Uttar Pradesh with regard to Tehri Project is that women are not recognized as a separate entity unit. A widow, unmarried adult daughter and a deserted woman will be considered as dependents. The State policy is even more gender biased. If a couple holds property separately, they will be considered one unit and will receive one package. In this situation, a woman will have to forego her right to the package as it will be given to the head of the family: the man. A deserted children, who was to be displaced by the Tehri project, did move the court under the Amendment Act 1984, for claims in the compensation money received by her husband. There must be other deserted women in both these project-affected areas that have gone unnoticed (Singh: 1992).

In Odisha, strong protest and resistance movement against National Test Range, Baliapal and BALCO Project, could make the Government to rethink about and finally to drop the idea of executing the projects (Reddy, 1993). Similarly protest movements by the affected people in case of Rengali multipurpose dam project could compel the Government of Odisha to come up with R&R policy for the displaced people due to irrigation projects in the State in 1977 (Pandey, 1998a). The Narmada experience of strong protest and resistance movement against the project inducing

displacement and the demand for adequate measures for R&R has clearly shown that in the long run, the R&R policy prescription as well as the nature of development projects executed in India is bound to change (Parasuraman: 1993). Women have taken lead roles in the major struggles against development projects like the struggle against Sardar Sarovar project, the struggle against Maheshwar dam, in Tehri etc. Even in major struggles against projects like Baliapal, Netarhat and Enron thermal power projects, women took lead roles. Women have a worldview quite different from men. Men are apt to be attracted by short term benefits like getting cash for their land, but women generally have a long-term perspective. In the workshop on Engendering Resettlement and Rehabilitation Policies and programs in India organized by the Institute of Development Studies and Action Aid, India in New Delhi during September 12-13, 2002, Vimal Bhai pointed out that the people's resistance against controversial Tehri dam project started in 1978 and continues even today. The project will displace 80,000 people from more than 125 villages. According to him, women and children have been at the forefront of the struggle and have often stopped work at the dam site. The State has been very ruthless with the demonstrators and has crushed protest with a heavy hand. However, it has failed in breaking people's resolve. Gender is a major concern in Tehri since most of the displaced are women and children. Men migrate to the plains in search of livelihood leaving the women and children behind (Asif and Mander, 2002). Amita Baviskar in the workshop organized by IDS and Action Aid, examined the involuntary nature of displacement, particularly in the urban context taking the case study of Delhi where people have been displaced, not just once but several times, propelled by bourgeoisie environmentalism. The desire for clean air and green Delhi has resulted in the closure of thousands of polluting units and slum relocation, as she estimates nearly 3-4 million people have been displaced in Delhi alone and in totalitarian silence. In urban displacement it is extremely difficult to identify the displacer and hence there has been no struggle. The slum dwellers are considered to be illegal people hence they do not have a right to question their own displacement. Tribal people in forests or those displaced from rural areas invite public sympathy but dispossessed urban migrants get stigmatized (Asif, Mehta, and Mander, 2002).

### **POSCO project of Odisha**

**Pohang Iron and Steel Company** now known as POSCO, a multinational steel-making company headquartered in Pohang, South Korea. It had an output of 39.1 million tons of crude steel in 2011, making it the world's fourth-largest steelmaker by this measure. In 2010, it was the world's largest steel

manufacturing company by market value. On June 22, 2005, the South Korean steel giant POSCO entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with India's eastern state of Odisha to facilitate the construction of an integrated steel plant, captive port, and iron ore mines in Odisha. POSCO, via its wholly-owned and operated subsidiary POSCO India Pvt. Ltd, plans to invest approximately US\$12 billion or Rs.51,000 crores (approximately) in the project, making it the largest single instance of foreign direct investment in India to date.<sup>5</sup>The proposed project, which will be referred to in this Report as the "POSCO-India project," consists of iron ore mines, a steel processing plant, a captive port facility, and related transportation and water infrastructure. The project aims to have a production capacity of 12 million tons per year, requiring 600 million tons of iron ore over a period of 30 years. As per the MOU the company would also develop and operate: 1) mining facilities in the areas allocated by the government of Orissa / Government of India; 2) road, rail and port infrastructure, including a dedicated railway line from the mine belt to Paradeep; 3) An integrated township; and 4) water supply infrastructure. The state agreed to acquire and provide three land parcels to POSCO: about 25 acres (10 ha) of land in Bhubaneswar for POSCO India to establish its Indian headquarters.

The integrated steel plant is proposed to be located in Kujang Tehsil of Jagatsinghpur district, Orissa, about 12 km from Paradeep. The 4004 acres of land of which 437.68 acres (or 10% approximately) is private land, and 3566.32 is government land (2958.79 acres forest land and 607.53 acres non-forest government land).<sup>9</sup>Seventy-three percent of total land to be acquired belongs to the three villages of Dhinkia, and Govindpur (in Dhinkia *gram panchayat*) and Nuagaon (in Nuagaon *grampanchayat*).The land for the proposed project lies in 8 villages of three Gram Panchayats,(GP) i.e. Dhinkia and Govindpur villages in Dhinkia GP, Noliasahi, Bhuyanpal, Polanga and Bayanalakanda in Gada kujang GP, and Nuagaon and Jatadhar villages (the latter, an uninhabited village) in Nuagaon GP. Of the eight villages, two, viz. Noliasahi and Patna fall fully within the project area and the families in these villages would need to be resettled and rehabilitated in other areas.

Jagatsinghpur was a medieval terminology figured in the history of Odisha, remarkably known as Hariharpur during the advent of the East India Company. The paces is predominately recognized due to its existence situating to the close proximity of River Mahanadi and Bay of Bengal heralded many eventual episodes and memorable heritage on the anneals of mankind.

Jagatsinghpur situated in the eastern hemisphere stretching over coastal hinterland, sulfurous soils and

marine boundaries. The place lies between 86°.3' to 86°.45' East Longitude and between 19°.58' to 20 North latitude. It is bounded by Kendrapara district in North. Puri district in the South, Bay of Bengal in the East and Cuttack district in the West. The district consists of 8 blocks and 8 Tahasils and one Sub-Division covering 1759 Square Kilo meters. A newly created district on 1st April, 1993 with small in size and large in population. According to the 2001 census, a total of 22,000 people reside in these areas and, one-third of whom are Dalits, or members of Scheduled Castes. In January 2008, the Xavier Institute of Management, Bhubaneswar, released the results of a socio-economic study covering seven villages affected by the project. The study, which was commissioned by POSCO-India, identified 3,578 families who would be affected, and suggested that 718 families stood to lose their homes. 4004 acres of land earmarked for the POSCO's plant project is going to evict an estimated 22,000 people and indirectly disrupt the livelihoods of another 30,000 people, just in Jagatsinghpur District. People will lose their houses, homestead and agricultural lands, common property resources and all sustainable sources of livelihoods.

After the signing of the MoU, the state government recommended the central government to consider the POSCO project as a Special Economic Zone (SEZ), for Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) and Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) clearances in mid of 2006. The project got initial 'in principle' forest and environmental clearances with conditions from the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) in June 2007. The matter was taken to the Supreme Court, which eventually gave clearance for the forest diversion proposal and ordered the state government to refer the matter to the MoEF, which would take a decision according to the law. With Jairam Ramesh taking charge of the MoEF, and his proactive role in appointing expert committees to inquire into alleged violations of forest and other related laws by the state government, people's hope of obtaining justice was rekindled, only to be dashed later. On 2 May 2011, the ministry gave final environmental and forest clearance to the project,<sup>1</sup> much to people's surprise, as both the expert committees appointed by the Minister, the FRA review committee (headed by Dr N C Saxena) and POSCO review Committee (headed by Ms Meena Gupta), recommended the withdrawal of the project from the area.

### Timeline of POSCO in Orissa

MoU was signed on Jun 22, 2005 between Orissa government and POSCO-India, subsidiary of the POSCO Corporation of South Korea. During August and September 2005, POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti formed to oppose project. A people's blockade

declared in three gram panchayat areas affected by plant. The blockade allows all person sentry and exit except government officials and POSCO employees. There were an incident happened on November 29, 2007 where Police and hired goondas attack PPSS *dharna* (rally) at one entry point with bombs – more than 50 people injured – *dharna* tent demolished. The protesters are driven back in to one gram panchayat (Dhinkia). Police set up camps in the schools of the other two villages, deploy in heavy force.

On August 8, 2008 Supreme Court upholds “in principle” clearance for use of forest land but directs Environment Ministry to proceed “in accordance with law.” No final clearance granted. The case is only between Orissa government, Central government and POSCO; no opponents to the project are represented.

Gram sabha of Dhinkia passes resolution on March 23 2008 electing a Forest Rights Committee and starting process of inviting claims under the Forest Rights Act. The State government takes no steps to implement Act in the area. Claims are till this date with the gram sabha. On August 3, 2009. Following prolonged protest, Environment Ministry issues circular clearly stating that no application for “diversion” (i.e. clearance for non-forest use) can be made without *inter alia* certificates from gram sabhas of the affected area stating that:

1. The process of implementation of the Forest Rights Act is complete and all rights have been recognised.
2. That they consent to the diversion after being informed of the nature and details of the project and rehabilitation project.

On December 29, 2009, Ministry grants final clearance for diversion of forest land in violation of its own circular and the Forest Rights Act.

POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti writes to Ministry against illegal action on January 5 2010 and after three days that on January 8, 2010, environment Ministry “clarifies” that clearance is subject to the August 3rd, and 2009 circular. During February 1-7, 2010 in response to a request from the Collector for the opinion of the gram sabhas. All three in the steel plant area pass resolutions refusing consent for diversion of forest land and demanding recognition of their rights and power to protect forests. As per law, the forest clearances now clearly illegal and has to be withdrawn. From February 2010 PPSS begins a three month *dharna* at main entry point at Balitutha.

Twenty Five platoons of police deployed in the area in the month of May 2010. Forces attack villagers. At least 50 people injured, market areas and protest camps burned.

In June 2010 Negotiations between PPSS leadership and government of Orissa to allow government survey

of land (without police presence) in exchange for chief minister Naveen Patnaik to visit 9 villages for meetings with residents. Survey process was incomplete. Chief Minister Patnaik’s visit never materializes.

During the period of July 1-12, 2010 POSCO / Government of Orissa announces new compensation package. PPSS holds public rally and burns copies of new compensation package.

MoEF appoints N.C. Saxena Committee to investigate implementation of FRA in plant/port area during the period of July and August 2010. Committee submits report indicating failure of Orissa government to implement FRA and cites government of Orissa for deliberate suppression of data and information sought by MoEF.

In the months of September and October 2010 MoEF and Ministry of Tribal Affairs appoint Meena Gupta Committee. Scope of new committee expanded to investigation of violation of all laws, government procedures and rules.

### **Livelihood Resources in Project Area**

For generations, thousands of farmers, fisher folk, forest dwellers, and labourers living in the plant and port area have secured their livelihoods from these lands using traditional and sustainable farming practices. The area’s high water table and unique soils have enabled a sustainable, robust, and high-quality production of betel leaf, cashew, and rice. In addition, residents have long sustained themselves through family gardens, animal husbandry, shrimp ponds, and fishing. Many also rely on forest products for sustenance.

A farmer and father of two teenagers commented: We get everything from this land, from this earth. We heard POSCO wants to come. We will die but we will not leave our land and neither will our children.

### **Betel Leaf Farming**

Local farmers cultivate betel leaf, the area’s primary cash crop, throughout the year. According to one estimate there are 5,000 betel vineyards grown in the area’s three *gram panchayats*, which are tended by 10,000 cultivators. Betel leaves are mixed with lime, spices, and sometimes tobacco to produce *paan*, which is widely consumed throughout Asia. A single betel leaf sells for between 0.60 and 1.0 rupees, and farmers often enjoy strong profits from cultivating betel leaf. Betel leaves grow on vines inside sheltered gardens or sheds. Farmers build the sheds mostly from material gathered locally and from the nearby forest, along with bamboo sticks purchased at market. Betel vineyards do not require large amounts of land to produce a high yield. In fact, the largest area of betel leaf cultivation reported by farmers is only 0.30 acres, and some vineyards are

as small as 0.02 acres. Though betel vineyards require little space, they need both fresh water and a particular type of soil that is unique to the area. The local water table is notably high, with potable freshwater available roughly 3-4 feet below the surface in most places. In addition to providing easy access to water for the betel vineyards, fresh water is readily available for personal and household use in many of the area's homes. This steady supply of safe drinking water stands in contrast with the reality of many rural people in India, who are compelled to struggle for access to adequate water. The area's sandy coastal soil is surprisingly low in salinity and is known locally as "sweet sand." Farmers mix the local sand with mustard seed husks and use it to revitalize the soil in betel vineyards on a monthly basis. Farmers do not use chemical fertilizers in the cultivation process; instead they rely almost exclusively on organic products. Family members help tend the soil and participate in the harvesting of betel leaves, while laborers assist in processing the leaves and assembling the packets of *paan*. Betel cultivation employs both men and women, from childhood to old age. According to a female PPSS leader from Dhinkia village, betel cultivation also has a beneficial impact on gender dynamics in the community. Manorama Khatua, PPSS leader stated, "We have everything here: rice paddy, betel leaf, fish, drumstick [a vegetable]. The environment and atmosphere are great".

### Cashew, Rice, Shrimp Ponds and Fishing

During the summer months, many farmers grow cashew to supplement their income. A single cashew tree produces 100kg of nuts each year, providing an average seasonal income of Rs.20,000/-. Farmers grow cashew on lands that they either own or rent, and often use the same lands to cultivate rice paddies. Shrimp ponds dot the landscape throughout the region and almost half of the local population practices aquaculture of some kind. The ponds are reportedly located on private lands and yield high returns on owners' investments; an acre of shrimp pond can produce up to Rs.7,00,000/- worth of shrimp in a year. Shrimp production often requires the hiring of labourers, making it a valuable source of employment.

Fishing is an integral part of life in the area, both as a source of food and income. Local estuaries are rich with marine life, and many villagers rely on fish for protein in nearly half their meals. In some areas, villagers' sole source of income is fish from the estuary, which they sell both locally and in neighboring districts.

### Voices of Displaced women

The land acquisition process was initiated to acquire land from the villagers and transfer it to

POSCO. The villagers are opposed to it and have been continuously resisting it since 2005. A broad-based movement has developed in the process under the leadership of the PPSS. In response to the local resistance, the state government has used several tactics to curb the movement and carry forward land acquisition. One of the tactics used was to file numerous false cases against a large number of persons resisting the project. The villagers and members of the PPSS constantly face threat of arrest and prosecution. There have been several incidents of violence including bomb blasts in the past. But the latest bomb explosion that caused three deaths while seriously injuring one has resulted in heightened tensions in the area. The female leader of the movement, Manorama Khatua, explained:

"Because I have been at the front of the movement, the police has lodged forty two cases against me.... I have not left this village for almost 8 years. I have not left the village because I worry that, if I do, the police will arrest me, and anti-social elements will attack me, meaning the goons that POSCO has mobilized".

**Fig. 1: Women's protest march against POSCO project lead by Manorama Khatua**



(Source: <http://www.topnews.in/companies/POSCO>)

Armed with the MoEF's final clearance on 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 2011, the state administration, without any loss of opportunity, resumed acquiring land from May 18 in the villages of Polang, Noliasahi and Bhuyanpal, where most people were persuaded or threatened to hand over their land in lieu of compensation. Betel vines, the major source of livelihood of the people in the area, were pulled down by the administration. Those opposing the acquisition process were harassed by armed police. Basu Behera, the Panchayat Samiti member of Gadkujang panchayat and vice president of PPSS was injured and bleeding due to the police attack. The police faced unprecedented resistance when it attempted to enter the Govindpur village in Dhinkia panchayat as its next target at the beginning of June 2011, considered to be the bastion of the PPSS. Twenty platoons of armed police were deployed to tackle the

situation, with both the District Magistrate Narayan Jena and Superintendent of Police Debadutta Singh present to supervise. More than 3000 people formed a human chain and lay on the ground at the village entry point. Manjulata Dalai of Govindpur village, one of protestor, said, "If the land goes to the company, we will die anyway. It is better to die now in pursuit of protecting our land than dying after losing the land. Another resident added that "I am depressed, nervous, and the police have destroyed some of my betel vine, so my income has been reduced. My entire family protested against destroying the betel vines. But the police arrested the entire family and thereafter, they destroyed our most valuable betel vine. So the whole family is depressed and nervous. I am not in a position to think about what I am going to do with my future, not even formulate a plan for what to do to generate our income for the family". Today the project affected people are no longer in a mood to suffer displacement along with its concomitant attributes like occupational degeneration, social disorientation, pauperization, loss in dignity and often getting cheated of the compensation amount, which serve to make the experience a trauma.

It is well known by now how women are most active in the many protests in the region. Women's participation in the vigils at the entry point and directly facing the wrath of police repression took another turn this year when the land acquisition process was resumed.

On one hand, women's participation in the struggle does not get its due recognition through inclusion in the decision-making processes. On the other, women's struggle against POSCO faces several obstacles as women's access to health services and wage work is severely jeopardised. Their lack of mobility to step out of the villages affects their mobility in all matters big and small, joyous and critical. Stepping outside the village area means getting arrested for them. For example, in mid-October 2011, a 45 year old woman was arrested near Kujang when she was going for some treatment for asthma and persistent coughing. There were pending charges of arson and theft. She was detained for 7 days in Kujang jail and came out on bail. She was overpowered by four police personnel. It was not easy for her to break from their grip. But she resisted to the end and got beaten severely. A simple visit to a doctor in medical emergency can mean an arrest because the police have foisted false cases randomly on the people of the villages opposing POSCO. Prolonged illnesses, neglected gynaecological disorders and denial of health care are the reality of those opposed to land acquisition by the Odisha government for POSCO. At least 14 women are suffering for years with severe gynaecological disorders that need surgery.

There had been many protests against the project where women's participation had played a significant role. But all this protest was betrayed by police lathi charge and other means of violence. The PPSS planned a demonstration to be held on 7th of March 2013 on the eve of the International Women's Day. The demonstration took place and the police repression was brutal. Over 35 women and three minor children were among those injured in the lathi charge on 7th of March 2013. Perhaps it does not require any emphasis that women are the worst hit in today's situation. Our women don't at all feel safe and the administration is fully aware of this fact. Despite that they are not doing anything which prompts us to say that they might be behind all these acts of violence. Women activists were cornered and beaten up by plain-clothed policewomen. Bilochan Khatua, Sulochana barik, Solia mallick, Sati Barik, Nayana Dash, Tulashi Dash, Basanti Mandal, Satya Mallick, Pravati Swain, Taaopi Samal, Lopa Samal and many more of Govindpur village were injured. Women claimed that their eyes burned when the police fired teargas shells.

**Fig. 2: Women's struggle fight against Police**



(Source: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/seminude-protest-police-register-cases-/article4491411.ece>)

In a case study shared by a young dalit woman from the fishing community who said how she was beaten up in the two recent incidents of police repression on the early morning of 2nd of February 2013 when the administration came to start the land acquisition process and recently again on 7th of March 2013. She asked the team, "How much more beating we can take, you tell us? We are landless. But we depend on our work here for our livelihood. Each time we protest against POSCO, the government only uses the lathi. My mind is not working anymore ...what can I say? I can only show the marks on my body since we heard you all have come to meet us." Her hands and shoulders were still red and swollen from the beating.

This had happened on 7th of March 2012 when a large demonstration took place in which a few women staged a semi-nude protest.

The presence of policemen was a cause of tension for women and girls at Gobindpur village. The state government has resorted to unethical tactics of jailing and lathi charging the protesters regularly. As women and children are at the forefront of the movement, regular lathi charge on women and children by paramilitary has become a normal. The women protestors are complaining about torture and sexual atrocities in the hands of the police.

**Fig. 3: Gathering of Women against POSCO project**



Source: Mamata Dash, 27 December 2008, "Rising power of a collective – everything else looks so small..."

*"The POSCO hired people always keep an eye on me so I cannot go out to get treatment for the rubber bullets inside me. Many other women have health issues; some have rubber bullets inside their bodies"* says Manorama Khatua a leader of the Women's Wing of the POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti. Over the last 8 years, the Government has made innumerable attempts to break the struggle against POSCO by employing various arm-twisting tactics. Even a cursory review of the mainstream media in India and abroad made it amply clear that as early as August 2005 several "people's groups" made up of residents in the affected areas had formed around the POSCO issue. Some of these groups include the POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti (PPSS, Anti-POSCO Mobilization Committee), the Nav Nirman Samiti (New Development Committee), Rashtriya Yuva Sangathan (National Youth Collective), United Action Committee (UAC), groups of a much older national movement, Sarvodaya, the Orissa Bachao Andolan (Save Orissa Campaign) and some smaller groups

On 3rd February, 2013, at around 4 am in the morning, the administration officials, accompanied by about 15 platoons of police, entered the area to

demolish the betel vines in Gobindpur village under Dinkia gram panchayat. Police officials including male police officials ruthlessly beat villagers particularly the women causing grievous injury to several women and even the Police have not spared the innocent children who have been assaulted and injured. Many villagers were also taken into custody, without providing any information as to who was being taken and to Kujang sub Jail and during this action 60 acres of betel vines have been demolished.

### **In Police Firing at Balitutha in May, 2010**

*More than 100 villagers injured, the condition of 5 persons were serious and 18 persons including 5 women got arrested by the Police under the direct supervision of Orissa Chief Minister'- POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti (PPSS).*<sup>(30)</sup> Even as the Indian government invited the President of South Korea to be the Chief Guest at the nation's Republic Day celebrations, and issued public statements to reassure him of India's full commitment to the POSCO steel plant, villagers in Jagatsinghpur decided to launch an indefinite sit-in at Balitutha until the project plan was called off. Instead of negotiating with the affected residents, the Orissa government's response was to send in 40 platoons of police to the area, who proceeded to conduct a flag-march just outside the protest site on May 14.

On May 15, CPI MP, Bibhu Prasad Tarai, Congress ex-MLA, Umesh Swain, and Congress leader, Jayant Biswal, were all arrested as they were on their way to Balitutha to lend their support to the movement. On the same day, as almost 4,000 villagers collected at the protest site in a show of defiance against the police presence, the police attacked the villagers by firing rubber bullets and tear gas shells at them. This was done in full view of the district collector and the superintendent of police. When the villagers refused to retreat, the police attacked them with batons, injure over 100 villagers, five of them seriously.<sup>33</sup> Women protestors were manhandled by male police. The police did not stop at plastic and rubber bullets, but also used shotguns to fire metal pellets directly into the crowds.

In the melee that ensued, the police first burned down the tents at the protest site, and then went on a rampage and burned shops and houses belonging to people in Balitutha who were not even at the protest. A fact finding team reports that at least 15 shops and 6 houses in Balitutha were burned by the police.<sup>35</sup> The report also notes that, "[a] number of villagers testified that the police set on fire the protest site and the shops and houses but ironically police has filed cases against anti-POSCO movement leader Abhay Sahu and others for arson and looting. Similarly, police has filed false cases against about 800 people who were protesting against the project in a democratic and peaceful



manner.” With police manning all entry and exit gates of the village and threatening to arrest anyone who ventured out of the houses, medical help was also denied to the injured villagers who had to make do with home remedies.<sup>(36)</sup> The police attack on May 15 against a peaceful demonstration, the inhumane beating of villagers, the attempted murder by firing metal pellets, and the subsequent criminalization of protestors by arresting and charging them with crimes, shows how far the Orissa government is willing to go to clear the way for a giant private company.

An activist who visited the villages shortly afterwards reports:

“And because since 15th May, all the exit points from the villages, through Balitutha and Trilochanpur have been sealed by the police, and with the threat of arrest looming large on anyone from the villages who step out, nearly no one has received medical treatment for their wounds. With festering wounds and fractured limbs, many people, including the elderly, are suffering their ordeal silently in the confines of their homes.”

#### **Jun-July 2013 Event**

From 28th June 2013 onwards, the government of Odisha again started the forceful destruction of the beetle vineyards in Govindpur village of Jagatsinghpur district, Odisha. At least 20 persons including Mr. Tuna Baral, Mr. Tofan Mohanty, Ms. Shantilata Swain were injured in a police lathi-charge who are opposing the forceful land acquisition for POSCO. The police have taken one of PPSS leader Mr. Kalpataru Mantri of Govindpur village. The Jagatsinghpur Superintendent of Police P. Satyabrata Bhoi and his 10 platoons (300 personnel) of police force beaten up elder persons, women and children who opposed betel vine demolition. Some of the protesters attempted suicide by consuming poison at the land acquisition spot, police took them into custody for some hours.

#### **April 2013 Event**

On 3rd April 2013, around 1500 villagers, including women and children, joined the indefinite protest in the Gobindapur village where the armed police forces camping. They have decided that they will continue the protest day and night with the demand for unconditional withdrawal of the armed police camps from the village. Leaders from different political parties like All Indian National Congress, Communist Party of India, Communist Party of India( Marxist), CPI-ML, CPI-ML( Liberation), CPI-ML ( ND), SUCI ( C), Forward Block, Samajvadi Party, Rastriya Janata Dal, Janata Dal ( U ) Aam Admi Party, Lok Shakti Abhiyan, Samajvadi Jan Parishad, Odisha Jan Morcha, Republican Party of India along with a few progressive organizations and individuals of eminence addressed

the meeting on Wednesday, held near the police camp at Gobindapur.

#### **Restriction of Movements of Villagers**

The filing of 230 cases and warrants against almost 2000 persons has resulted in the targeting of not merely active leaders, but entire villages. Most persons are not aware of how many cases they have been implicated in, and the nature of these offences. Almost all villagers opposing the POSCO plant in the villages of Dinkia and Govindpur are under constant threat of arrest and have not left the villages in the last 6-7 years, and whenever they do leave, are constrained to do so surreptitiously. Their experience has shown that villagers resisting POSCO are arrested by the police when they leave the village. In fact, according to one of the activists, nobody from these 3 villages voted in the 2009 state elections due to fear of arrest. In many cases, entire families have been implicated, resulting in none of them leaving the village for years on end. Devendar Swain, aged about 32 years from Dinkia village, says he has about 18 cases foisted against him. There are cases against almost every member of his family, including his father, Pitambar Swain and his uncles, Ayodhya Swain, Brindavan Swain and Suresh Swain, his cousin, Praddep Swain (aged about 26 years) and two aunts Bidulatha. Swain and Pratima Swain. His grandfather's brother son, Alok Swain was arrested on 08/12/2012 and was in jail at the time of our visit. Similarly, the family of Shri Surendra Das, Paatna village has been targeted. Shri Surendra Das was in jail for about one and a half months after being arrested while on his way to attend the ceremony of his sister's child, and had about 25 cases foisted on him. Subsequent to his release, about 10 additional cases have been foisted on him. Today, there are cases foisted not only against him, but also his brother, and his elderly father, Shri Purachandra Das, aged about 78 years. All this has had a very serious impact on the lives of villagers, resulting in the virtual siege of the villagers causing grave threat to the health of people, their relationships and their trade and business. Our conversations with the villagers clearly brought out their anxieties in regard to their future.

#### **Impact on Health**

The inability to leave the village has resulted in a complete lack of access to medicines or any medical treatment to the villagers. There is no doctor who visits the villages, and no health centres in the vicinity, and the virtual siege prevents them from taking medical assistance from outside the village. Manorama Kathua from Dinkia village told us that she had not left the village for 8 years due to the fear of being arrested, and if she had to, then she had to go out stealthily. She complained of severe joint pain, but told us that she

could not visit any doctor, as that would put her in the risk of being arrested. Similarly, Guni Jena, from Govindpur village, who was arrested during the police attack on 15th May, 2010 after being beaten and assaulted by the police, told us that her wounds had still not healed, and even now she was unable to go to a doctor, as that would mean that she would be arrested again. Highlighting the condition of women in these villages, Shri Prashant Paikray said that last year a team of doctors visited these villages and found that at least 30 women needed urgent medical intervention, else their condition would deteriorate.

In fact most of the arrests of persons, almost 70% according to the advocate Shri Bichitranda Chana, took place when villagers were compelled to leave the village to visit the doctor requiring medical assistance. Ramesh Pasayat from Govindpur was arrested on 03/04/2007 when he had taken his son, aged 7 years, who had fractured his hand to the doctor in Kujum. The police arrested him from the doctor's clinic, leaving his son there all by himself. Even the recent arrests of Shri Alok Swain, in December 2012 occurred when he had gone to the doctor after sustaining injuries in an accident.

### **Impact on Relationships**

The arrest of some of the members of the PPSS has resulted in tragic consequences at home. Prakash Jena, who was arrested on 12/09/2008, lost his mother after she committed suicide in despair. His sister became mentally depressed and continues to suffer from severe depression. Others have fears in regard to pending marriages. Prabhas Ghocayath, an active member of PPSS, told us that although his marriage has been fixed, he is apprehensive of whether it will happen, due to the fear of arrest looming over him. The siege of the villagers has had an obvious impact on their relationships, especially with the outside world. They are unable to meet their families, and ties with families have also been affected due to their constraints.

### **Impact on Trade**

Since most of the villagers are in paan cultivation, there is a need to maintain ties with traders in Bombay, Calcutta and other cities to which the same is supplied. However, the inability to leave the village and maintain business ties has adversely impacted this trade which is the major source of livelihood for them.

### **Loss of Jobs**

The Government has not only been filing false cases against persons active in PPSS, but has also been taking other forms of coercive action. Shri Babaji Charan Samantara, who worked as postmaster in Dhinkia for 28 years, was suspended on 14/12/2007 on the ground that he was involved in anti-state activities.

Aged about 65 years, Shri Babaji Charan told us that even after his suspension he continued his work and delivered the post every day, for about 7 – 8 months. However, around July, 2008, the bag of post was not sent, and he informed us that since then no post has been received by them. He has challenged the order of suspension passed against him, and the Court had held in his favour. However, the order of the Court has been challenged by the Government. The shocking aspect of this incident is that presently there is no postmaster and residents of Dhinkia have received no letters since July, 2008.

Kailash Chandra Biswas was employed as a high school peon, at the Government School, Dhinkia, and started his service in 1987. On 22/12/2007 he was issued a notice suspending him for anti-government activities. He was arrested on 13th August, 2010 when he left the village to attend his mother-in-law's funeral, and says he was falsely charged with arson and of hurling bombs. With his chief source of income arbitrarily taken away, he is in a financially very difficult position. Due to his financial constraints, he is unable to challenge take legal redressed against the order of his suspension.

### **Continuing Threat of Arrest**

Although some of the villagers implicated in various cases have been granted bail, the threat of arrest continues to loom over them, as the police continuously register cases against them. Further, the police repeatedly attempt to arrest persons when they appear in court in other cases in which they are implicated and have been granted bail. Prakash Jena from Govindpur village who was arrested and released on bail in May, 2009 had gone to court to appear in a matter where he had been granted bail, when he found out that the police had surrounded the court to arrest him. He is still unable to leave the village because of the large number of cases foisted upon him. Similarly, Prabhas Ghocayath from Panpoli village, Balia Panchayat who has been arrested twice so far, was arrested the first time from the court premises when he had gone to surrender. The police also tried to arrest him a third time when he had gone with another PPSS member to appear in Court.

### **Financial Implications**

The filing of a large number of cases results in large scale expenditure, in the form of legal expenses incurred by the villagers in order to be granted bail. Each of the accused person is required to go to the courts at the district level, and often to the High Court to be granted bail, and the legal and other expenses involved in the same drains them financially. Further, this embroils the activists in court battles compelling them to run around for bail and run from court to court

proving their innocence preventing them from being engaged in their struggle for justice.

Over the last 8 years, the Government has made innumerable attempts to break the struggle against POSCO by employing various arm-twisting tactics. However, what is perhaps the greatest betrayal of the State against its own people is the use of the criminal system to implicate villagers in a large number of false cases to intimidate them, in still fear in them and break them into submission. It is widely acknowledged that in the present criminal system, the process is itself the punishment, and not the eventual acquittal or conviction.

The experience of being incarcerated, arrested, and processed through court and the financial implications of the same is in itself the primary form of punishment administered to persons accused of a crime. The foisting of such cases leaves the villagers with no option, than either to incur large financial expenses to get legal redress or to go into hiding from the police. Given the obvious financial constraints faced by the villagers, they are compelled to stay in hiding from the police resulting in their inability to leave their village for periods ranging from 6-8 years. The village has itself now become a prison making it impossible to have access to the outside world, impacting their health, trade and relationships.

On several occasions, Indian authorities have engaged in the illegal use of force against project-affected communities, resulting in serious bodily injuries to many individuals, whose access to medical care was then restricted. Project-affected communities face a constant threat of arrest and detention on fabricated or inadequately-investigated charges. "I have a dream that POSCO will go away from this land, and we will get a chance to live our life like we did previously. We don't want to become beggars; we don't want to depend on anybody. We want to live an independent life of our own, which is based on our hard work. We want to have a dignified life." - A father of two young children in Jagatsinghpur district, Odisha.

"The last time I felt safe was before POSCO came." A betel farmer who was injured in a police firing and whose brother was jailed as a result of resisting forced evictions for the POSCO-India project.<sup>41</sup> For the 20,000 women, men and children the struggle for their lands and livelihoods continues. They are living in siege like conditions, treated as encroachers on their own land. "We will fight for our lands till we die. It will be easier for the company to take over when we are dead. Anyway the government does not value life here", says a resident of one of the people who stands to lose his land and livelihood should POSCO's mega-steel plant come through.

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