

NANDIGRAM AND DANTEWADA

AFTER ALL INDIA IS NOT A shining example of the world's largest democracy but instead the newly discovered paradise for corporate capital as the recent happenings in Nandigram, Kalinganagar, Kashipur and Chattisgarh illustrate. Tribals are dying in Dantewada of Chattisgarh because big business needs land. They are evicting people from their land in Nandigram, Kashipur, Kalinganagar and elsewhere because multi-national has found vastly new partners in India's callously neo-liberal regime. But the differences between Nandigram and Dantewada are as striking as similarities, and they lie not in the hubris of the ruling party, which, is much the same, but in the responses of the media and civil society. Even though the scale of Salwa Judum terror is far greater than Nandigram, it has gone almost entirely unreported.

At least 540 persons have been reportedly killed by the Salwa Judum and security forces from June 2005 till the present, including 33 children (some as young as two and five), and 45 women. This is a small fraction of the killings by the Salwa Judum, most of which have gone unrecorded, and does not include the approximately 550 civilians and police personnel that the Naxalites have killed in escalating retaliatory action for Salwa Judum. At least 2,825 houses have been burnt by the Salwa Judum and at least 99 women have been raped. Approximately one lakh people, or one-eighth of the district population has been displaced, half of them are in government controlled camps (concentration camps?) to which they were forcibly evacuated, and the other half are refugees in neighbouring states.

Why has the Chhattisgarh administration been running, this barbarism? Reason : power of Capital.

Surprisingly, not once has any team of parliamentarians gone to talk to the affected people; and not once have NHRC members visited. When two lakh people rallied in Jagdalpur on November 5th this year to protest against the Salwa Judum and land acquisition, by the Tatas and Essar for steel plants, there was not even a whisper in the national press; it is hard to imagine that a rally of even 10,000 would have gone unreported had it been in favour of Salwa Judum or industrial acquisition.

For one thing Chhattisgarh lacks a tribal middle class or a density of civil or political society organisations; many national newspapers do not have correspondents there since it is a new state; in an unprecedented show of unity, both, the Congress and the BJP are jointly prosecuting the counterinsurgency. Above all, Chhattisgarh, also has a Public Security Act, which is even worse than POTA in terms of its censorship, and which has been used to arrest and intimidate people who have protested, like the General Secretary of the PUCL, Binayak Sen.

Gun battles, land mine blasts, identity checks, arrests, looting, rape and torture have become routine in Dantewada region of Chattisgarh because they call it a 'disturbed area', rather naxal-affected area. Maosits or naxalites are there, no doubt. But they resent the rule of paramilitary forces. And to curb naxalism,

they can go to any length and all the normal protections of the rule of law and fundamental rights cease to apply. And yet India is the biggest show-piece of formal democracy. □□□