

Justice for Valsa John

Sr Valsa, an activist of the Rajmahal Pahad Bachao Andolan (RPBA) and an ordained nun with the Sisters of Charity of Jesus & Mary, who had been working among Santhal Adivasis in the coal rich region of Dhumka, Jharkhand was brutally murdered by a group of about 40 armed men on the night of 15 November 2011. On behalf of Indian peoples' movements and resistance struggles, NAPM, NFF and NFFPFW condemn this heinous and cowardly act, evidently conceived by the powerful mining mafia, aimed at essentially hunting down individuals and movements to silence the voices of resistance by people.

Sr Valsa John had been working among the Adivasi communities in Jharkhand's coal rich region of Santal Parganhas, Pachwara, for the last 20 years. Since early 2000's, Panem Coal Mine Ltd, a project of Punjab State Electricity Board and EMTA (Eastern Minerals and Trading Agency) from West Bengal, has been operating mines in the coal reserves of Pachwara and 32 surrounding villages. To defend their right over their land and its resources, the Santhal Adivasi community formed the Rajmahal Pahad Bachao Andolan. Sr Valsa along with others such as Majhi Haddam—the traditional administrative headman of the Santhal tribe, worked to organise the community and were in the forefront of the resistance that was building against the exploitation by Panem Coal. Despite the MoU signed between the local community and Panem Coal in 2006, tension has been mounting in the area in recent times, especially with regard to the betrayal by the Company. On 16 November 2011, Sr Valsa was brutally murdered by a group of about 40 men, believed to be hired goons of the coal mining mafia.

Sr Valsa had been under constant threat from Panem Coal Ltd. and had voiced the same to friends and family. The Superintendent of Police has confirmed that she had filed an FIR three years ago where she reported that she was facing death threats. Hours before her death, Sr Valsa had mentioned to her family about threats to life from the mining mafia. It is rather unconvincing that no action was taken by the police to investigate the matter or to provide for her safety, merely because no persons were named in her complaint. The state and some sections of national media have attempted to pass the blame, to discredit Sr Valsa and to fudge the facts by bringing the 'Maoists' into the frame. It is condemnable that the local administration is currently attempting to suppress the truth by intimidating the villagers and andolan activists. It is a matter of national shame that the pervasive nexus between powerful mining companies and the state machinery has cost the precious life of a woman who was working to secure basic rights for the marginalised people.

Ashok Choudhury (NFFPFW)

Mathanhy Saldanah (NFF)

Medha Patkar (NAPM)

Campaign for Survival

The state repression against anti-POSCO protesters has reached a peak with the arrest of POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti leader Abhay Sahoo. The government's constant announcements of its intention to start construction in the area means there will be more violence and brutality against the movement.

This comes after the people of Dinkia and Gobindpur heroically resisted police attacks for more than two months in the heat of summer, drawing the attention of the entire country to the threat to their thriving economy and fragile ecosystem. It also comes in the wake of a grossly illegal clearance to the project from the Environment Ministry, in direct violation of the Forest Rights Act and the EIA notification, despite two of the Ministry's own enquiry committees finding that grant of clearance would be a crime. Moreover, the Centre itself now claims that projects of this kind will be subject, under its proposed new law, to the consent of 80% of the local community – which has been ignored in this case. Meanwhile, dozens of false cases have been filed against the protesters, and it is worth noting that Abhay Sahoo has received bail from the courts in more than 40 cases so far; but every time he is released, new cases are foisted on him. Finally, court cases are pending against the illegal clearance to the project in the High Court and in the National Green Tribunal. Despite all this, the Orissa government is continuing its criminal offensive, and the Centre as usual is doing nothing to stop it or to uphold the law.

Adivasi Aikya Vedika

Andhra Pradesh & 90 other Organisations and individuals