

Mining Club

Democracy without corruption is hypocrisy without limitation. They all do it in the name of people and development—political parties. After all India is people's democracy ruled by people's elected representatives. In many ways politicians cutting across party lines, in India, are corrupt but inefficient. Here corruption is inversely proportional to efficiency while the reverse is said to be true, for the western hemisphere democracies. What has been happening in Karnataka for quite some time over a mining scam involving the chief minister and his family has a political twist, no doubt, but things won't be different if the BJP dispensation is replaced by a Congress one or a discredited Janata formation. All politics is local but scam has resonance beyond the state boundary.

It doesn't matter who is in power—Congress or BJP. Or for that matter even a communist administration in the Indian context makes little difference. All are apologists of the system and corruption as well. The sole aim of all political parties—left and right and not-so right—who are jockeying for power by indulging in accumulating money and muscle power is to loot the exchequer. And mining seems to be the easiest and safest area as it involves forest and forest land.

'Bofors' today may be billed as a peanut if the recent scams are taken as standards of India's matured parliamentary democracy. Not a single day passes without fresh revelation of 2G telecom scam. Now the former telecom minister and prime accused in the 2G spectrum allocation scandal pleaded in a special CBI court that the then Congress Finance Minister in the Union Cabinet should be made a witness and he went a step further by dragging the Prime Minister into the case, albeit the Congress Party took it lightly and avoided the issue on technical grounds. High tech means high corruption. Strangely enough, most corruption charges, of late, emanate from mining sector. It was an equally strong source of corruption even in the yester years. It's now history how the Sirajuddin-Malaviya episode rocked the house even during Nehru's times. If today Orissa is plagued by one mining scam after another it is because the Patnaik family itself had once substantial business interests in mining. Even in the sixties, much before the advent of neo-liberal onslaught, it was not that easy to run small mines in Singhbhum-Keonjhar region without greasing palms of the persons in authority. As for the big things were not difficult as they had right connection in the corridors of power.

Jharkhand and Chattisgarh apart Orissa is now the main destination of mining industry. For these states it is a paradox of 'resource curse'. Not for nothing foreign investors are too eager to take risks in Orissa's jungles. During the last few years huge swathes of forest are being cut to make way for industry, mainly mining and infrastructure, otherwise integral to any mining operation. Some 200,000 hectares of forests are believed to have been diverted to non-forestry use since 1940s and hundreds of thousands of forest dwellers have been evicted from the common property resources. The way the Navin Patnaik government is moving ahead by signing one MoU after another, particularly in the mining and mining-based metal industry, vast areas of forest are likely to be cleared within a very short period.

Mining in erstwhile Bihar's Singhbhum which is a showpiece of natural wonder and its adjoining Orissa region—Barabil, Jamda, Roida etc—got boost during the second world war because of their proximity to Calcutta Port. Bird group and Tatas earned juicy profits by mercilessly destroying virgin soil of the region and systematically evicting the tribals. If the

situation has worsened today it is because the scale of exploitation of good earth and corruption associated with it has increased enormously.

Mining giants are literally feudal lords of new era with added teeth of industrial legal protection. Forests are vanishing very fast—so are old villages and hamlets to make room for urban jungles with new names. It may not be hypothetical to imagine 'Niyamgiri' may be called 'Vedantagiri', five or six years down the line despite Rahul Gandhi's crusade against the state government's policy to destroy the hills and 'Khandahar Mountain' 'POSCO Peak'. Once upon a time there were 'quiet, idyllic, self-reliant forest villages called Kalimati and Sakchi' in the district of Singhbhum of Chotanagpur.

Today, they are buried under the sprawling urbanscape of Jamshedpur in Jharkhand.

So long as Orissa, Jharkhand and Chattisgarh remain the most favoured destination of global and national mining corporations, the much publicised Forest Act 2006, won't be of any help to the indigenous people as they are too weak to fight the might of corporates.

Forest Development in almost every state is the most notorious violator of forest regulations, while India's aggressive industrial policy—passed off as 'development' is likely to decimate further whatever remains of the forest cover which is already too inadequate to sustain ecological balance. Then what matters is the Mining Club, not the people, rather socially and economically disadvantaged people. 31-07-2011 □□□