

Struggle for the identity of tribal: A case study through the light of documentary "Buddha Weeps in Jadugoda" by Shriprakash

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Abstract: *Unsafe mining, milling and tailings management by Uranium Corporation of India Limited (UCIL) in Jadugoda district of Jharkhand area for almost 30 years has resulted in excessive radiation, contamination of water, land and air, destruction of the local ecology, and lead for to genetic mutation, and slow death for the people of the region. The researcher analysis the documentary "Buddha Weeps in Jadugoda" made by Shriprakash in 1999 which depicts the gross misuse of power by the authorities in displacing the original inhabitants of the region, and their callousness of its disastrous impact on the tribals of the region. The research work focuses and analysis the struggle faced by tribals for their identity caused by UCIL project through the documentary.*

Keywords: *Tribal, Jharkhand, Displacement, Development, Documentary.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

India is known for its diversity. People live here are from different religion, casts and beliefs. They are from different regions too. The state of Jharkhand was carved out of the state of Bihar in 2000. Jharkhand is a land of hills and forests, rivers and plains, ravines and passes, wild animals and domesticated cattle. Its landmass - the famed *Gondwana* land - is one of the oldest on the earth. Its flora and fauna are a delight to the biologists, its people even more so to the anthropologists and other social scientists. Having only recently acquired its own separate identity, this state is a heaven for all types of people. Jharkhand state is well known for two things - its abundant mineral wealth and its variegated tribal population.

The history of habitation of *tribals* in Jharkhand has been since a long primitive days as is evident from the history. Prehistorically, the state of Jharkhand, formerly known as *Chotanagpur*, was a land of forest. It was rich in minerals. Such incoming migrants inhabited in the river plains and restricted their development in economic and cultural activities. In 1872 only 18 tribes were annexed in the scheduled tribes whereas in 1931, it raised to 26. In the census of 1941 it was 29 and in 1956 there were 30 tribes. In June 2003, the number raised to 32. Thirty two types of tribes inhabit Jharkhand - ranging from the hunter-gatherer *Birhor* through the *swiddeners Maler* to the settled agriculturist *Munda* and *Oraon*. Population-wise, from less than a thousand *Banjara* to more than two million *Santhal* occupy the forests and plains of Jharkhand. But, as they say, not all people are born equal; certainly some are born more equal than the others. As we shall see same is true of the tribes in Jharkhand as well.

In some of the districts of Jharkhand, the tribal population forms a clear majority. Most members of the scheduled tribes of Jharkhand follow the animistic Sarna religion. Sarna is the Mundari word for 'Sacred Grove'. Sarna involves belief in a great spirit called the Sing Bonga. Tribal belief holds the world to be inhabited by numerous spiritual beings of different kinds. Tribal communities consider themselves as living and doing everything in close association with these spirits.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Tribal: Tribal is the collective term for the indigenous peoples of India. In India, Schedule Tribe are also referred as *Adivasi* in India. Tribe means who are distinguished by their social, cultural and economic conditions from other sections of the community. They have self-identification as belonging to a tribal people. Their status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations.

Documentary: Documentary is a type of film that is based on the real world and real people, depicting things as they are or telling about historical events in a supposedly truthful or objective manner. A documentary film tells a story about real life, with claims to truthfulness. The documentary or non-fiction film is an elaborate method of recording the lives and activities of real people, but 'constructed' or 'recreated' nevertheless to tell an interesting story.

3. MATERIAL:

Buddha Weeps in *Jadugoda* (1999) directed by Sri Prakash, is an attempt to record how the lives of people in *Jadugoda* turned into a veritable hell by the Uranium Corporation of India Limited (UCIL). Made right in the middle of threats and harassment by authorities at the UCIL and the district administration, the film demonstrates the gross misuse of power that has displaced its original inhabitants, showing utter disregard to the effect of mining on the local environment and its effects on the health of the people. Backed by official support, UCIL does not bother to follow internationally accepted norms and safety precautions in the handling of uranium. The victims are the *tribals* living near *Jadugoda*, located in *East Singhbhum* district of Jharkhand. They are aware of the danger they are being exposed to, but they are helpless. The film attempts to depict the gross misuse of power by the authorities in displacing the original inhabitants of the region, the utter lack of concern for internationally accepted norms and safety precautions in the handling of uranium and its by-products, and their callousness of its disastrous impact on the people and the region.

4. METHOD:

In accordance with the purpose of the study to determine the struggle for the identity of tribal through the light of documentary, this study is an explanatory study. The approach used in this study is qualitative research. It is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations. For the research a documentary has been taken and analyzed.

5. ANALYSIS:

The documentary "Buddha Weeps in *Jadugoda*" starts with the view of natural view of *Adivasis* and natural view of village of *Jadugoda*. Rasta Mines Station, Train and working labours for the industry and song in local dialect with *Sarangi* (a local made instrument). Narrator describes the life of *adivasis*. They follow the arrow of *Marang Buru*. *Joharthan*, a sacred place of worship of *Marang Buru*. Jharkhand, the land of nature where the bunts of nature Jharkhand, home of *Santhals*, *Ho*, *Mundas*, *Oraon* and other *adivasis*. They believe that the past has driven away from the land of ancestors. Festivals like *Sohray*, *Basa* and others tell us about our past. The film attracts with its *adivasi* dance on *Santhali* song. "Jharkhand is the homeland of us *adivasis*. Wherever *adivasi* dwell, the land is rich above and full of minerals below. But these rich natural resources are not for our prosperity. They have become our curses," *Jarome Kujur*, a local journalist says.

Locals tell the story of *Jadugoda*. The original name of this place was *Jaragoda*. The area was covered with very thick forest and wild animals roamed in broad daylight. The British first began mining these mountains. You can still find the remains of British mines. You can still find some broken chimneys and abandoned mine ditches

India's nuclear program, which began modestly after independence in 1947, has now metamorphosed into a giant business venture, comprising dozens of functional nuclear power plants, massive mining operations and the establishment of several allied industries. Although there is a tremendous push by the Indian state to expand and multiply its nuclear power plants, the viability, sustainability and safety of these projects are seldom discussed in the public domain. It is thus worth exploring the controversy surrounding the nuclear policies of the Indian state, especially the issues surrounding uranium mining and its impacts on the marginalized tribal communities.

Currently, India has 20 nuclear reactors operational in six different nuclear power plants, generating approximately 3% of the total energy needs of the country. Expansion plans are in full swing for the construction of several others. With the expansion of nuclear-powered energy production, the need for procuring uranium (the basic raw material for nuclear fission) became inevitable.

In 1951, the search for uranium began in India, and the exploration led to, a rural area in a small township adjoining the industrial city of Jamshedpur, then in the eastern Indian state of Bihar. *Jadugoda* is now situated in Jharkhand (a state formed in 2000). It is home to several indigenous communities such as the *Santhal*, *Munda*, *Oraon*, *Ho*, *Bhumiz* and *Kharia* and several others. Jharkhand is one of the richest areas in the whole country in terms of biodiversity and natural resources. It has pristine forests and river systems, as well as one of the biggest reserves of coal, iron ore, mica, bauxite and limestone. Considerable reserves of copper, chromite, asbestos, china clay, manganese, dolomite, and uranium are also found here. *Jadugoda*, once a sleepy little village, rose to fame when uranium was discovered there. In 1957, uranium mining started in *Jadugoda*. To undertake the sole responsibility of mining and milling uranium, the government of India set up a separate company. Thus in 1967, the Uranium Corporation of India Limited (UCIL) was born, and its first assignment was to undertake mining and milling of uranium in *Jadugoda*, which became the heart of India's ambitious nuclear program. Later, uranium was also discovered in adjoining areas. This led to an expansion of the UCIL's mining and milling activity, like an octopus slowly spreading its deadly tentacles.

When uranium, a highly radioactive element, is mined from the deep crust of the earth and extracted from other rocks, its protective shield is lost, and it starts contaminating the atmosphere with its harmful radioactive rays. The extraction of uranium from the mined rock involves complex chemical processes. After extraction of uranium, the liquid waste in the form of slurry is then let into a tailing pond where it is allowed settle down in the open air. Various by-

products and radioactive elements present in the slurry radiate harmful rays that destroy the environment and water bodies and affect living beings in and around the mines. Anyone coming into contact with the tailing ponds can be seriously affected by radiation. The strong gamma rays generated from the tailing ponds can not only penetrate through a human body, but even a 30-centimeter thick concrete wall.

Apart from the gamma rays, several gases are also generated from the tailing ponds. Exposure to gases such as radon can cause irreparable damage to living organisms. Once exposed to gamma radiation, the impact continues for a long time, exposing the affected organisms to other threats and causing irreparable damages to several internal organs. Further, pregnant women exposed to high levels of gamma radiation run high risks of birth defects and – in extreme cases – termination of pregnancy.

A population of around 35,000 people including tribes living within a 5-kilometer radius of the mines were adversely affected by radiation from the tailing ponds. Many villagers lost land and jobs when they were displaced by the mining operations, and many now work in the uranium mines as daily wage laborers. They often didn't get proper protective gear to handle radioactive materials and work with bare hands, exposing themselves to heavy doses of radiation. UCIL, the company was responsible for the health of its workers, on the other hand, always refuted any allegations of violations of labour laws and human rights. The company was outright defensive about its protective measures and refused to acknowledge the problems faced by the laborers.

After a few decades of mining in the region, people living around the mines and the tailing ponds are finally falling prey to radiation. Several cases of cancer and skin diseases have been reported from people living near the tailing ponds. There have also been an increased number of defective births in the area, as well as more cases of tuberculosis and lung and abdomen cancer. A large number of women have experienced disruption of menstrual cycle or loss of fertility. Besides this, several mine workers have died due to various forms of radiation.

According to *Ghanshyam Birouli*, an anti-uranium mining activist based in *Jaduguda*, the symptoms of radiation are more prominent in the generation born after uranium mining started in *Jaduguda*. *Ghanshyam's* own father, who was a labourer in the mines, died of lung cancer. The carelessness of UCIL in disposing the mining waste materials coupled with lack of knowledge about radiation among the tribals have exposed them to high levels of radiation. In the beginning, people believed that the increasing number of diseases were due to the spell of evil spirits and the angry gods and goddesses. To appease the angry gods and the evil spirits, they performed various rituals but without much results. Doctors *Sanghamitra* and *Surendra Ghadekar*, both active members of *Anumukti* (an anti-nuclear activist group), did a comprehensive health survey of people living near the uranium mines and the tailing ponds. As per their reports, the areas around *Jaduguda* mines show a very high incidence of congenital deformities.

The anti-people policies of UCIL surrounding rehabilitation, medical treatment of the affected people and livelihood issues have led to widespread anger and protests against UCIL. The state, along with the rest of the pro-nuclear lobby, has consistently tried to marginalize the affected communities and has left the tribal communities in *Jaduguda* to fend for themselves. However, this has not dampened the dissenting spirit of the communities. There has been a widespread reaction to the practices of the company and the policies of the state. Along with the affected people, several organizations and anti-nuclear organizations and campaigners have been in supportive of the people of *Jaduguda* and have been fighting ever since.

"Since the days of our ancestors we never got any justice not even from the upholders of justice. We were uprooted from everywhere"-A song in local dialect. The documentary is depicting the people of village to the mother land. Decorating home, coloring and repairing it shows their love for their land, home and region. "Those affected by radiation run a greater risk of suffering or dying from cancer. If cancer death are 1% amongst those unexpected to radiation it increases to 2.5% amongst those exposed to radiation. The same is true of children being born with defects,"- says V.T. *Padmanaban*, Centre for Industrial Safety & Occupational Hazards in an interview taken in the documentary.

After extracting uranium from the ore only very little uranium will be left behind the waste. In the dam we treat the waste, traces of radium and uranium are removed. Of course you don't drink this water, but it will be treated. Yes, the harmful dust may fly over you but it is as safe as the sand in the river. Don't worry, we are here to protect you. We grow grass in the Tailing dam and keep it we so that the waste does not reach you. The energy rays that come out will not reach your homes. It will become gas and go up without harming you in any way," says Mr. R. P. *Verma*, Deputy Manager, Mill (UCIL) *Chatijkocho* Village, *Jadugoda* during an interview for the documentary on 17th April 1997. The villagers raise questions,- "there was a warning board "No entry, radioactive area". Why was this put up and then removed?" In reply, Mr. *Verma* replies, so that nobody touches the sand or bathes or grazes cattle there.

The first ever protest against UCIL actions in *Jadugoda* was way back in 1979, when the Indian Federation of Trade Union (IFTU), a labour wing of the Communist Party of India (CPI), supported the mine workers in their protest for radiation allowance. Soon other organizations joined the people of *Jadugoda* in their struggles against uranium radiation. A trade union organization called *Singhbhumi Ekta* (*Singhbhum's* Unity; *Singhbhum* is a district in Jharkhand) and the All Jharkhand Students Union (AJSU) collaborated to protect the rights of workers of UCIL.

Later, several organizations were formed to resist the expansion of mining activity in the region. Jharkhandi Organization Against Radiation (JOAR) was formed to resist nuclear development in the region, to prohibit further expansion of mines, to educate the local tribals about the dangers of radioactivity and to keep *Jaduguda* from becoming India's nuclear waste dump. The Jharkhand Organization for Struggling Humans (JOSH) is another organization fighting against land acquisition for uranium mining in *Bandhuhurang*, a new UCIL site adjacent to *Jaduguda*. These organizations along with several others have been on the forefront in *Jaduguda*, fighting on several issues related to radiation, livelihood, land alienation, and contamination of farmlands, rivers and other water bodies.

With the objective of creating more space for people's participation in development projects and environmental clearances, the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF) issued a notification in 1997, making public hearings mandatory for environmental clearances. For its expansion plans in *Jaduguda*, UCIL needed environmental clearances. For this, public hearings were mandatory. In *Jaduguda*, UCIL has not properly addressed many issues, including those related to land acquisition, rehabilitation, health issues of radiation-affected people, waste material handling, water pollution and contamination of agricultural land. Most of the public hearings conducted by UCIL have been manipulated by the company itself, with heavy police presence and hired goons preventing affected communities and activist organizations from attending various hearings. Several such hearings were conducted without the full mandate of the affected people.

The struggle of people bringing in result. The company apologize with the promises that the land will not be acquired. Compensation, rehabilitation and job per person was promised.

On the other hand, tribal in *Jaduguda* have been demanding no expansion of uranium mines and have been fighting for decades to bring the existing mine under international safety guidelines. Besides this they have also demanded that land acquired by UCIL but still unused be returned to the villagers. Neither these issues nor the other environmental and health demands of the villagers have been properly dealt with by the company. Thus the clearances granted to it are biased and not based on the people's verdict.

During the last 60 years of its tryst in *Jaduguda*, UCIL has built a legacy of contamination, environmental destruction and health hazards for thousands of people living around the mines and the tailings. Even as the company is constantly upgrading and expanding its operations, its policies are continuously being challenged by organizations and concerned citizens. The company should respond to the demands of the people and protect them from harmful radiation, comply with international safety standards in handling radioactive materials, cleanup the contaminated areas, respect the reports of independent health surveys done in the area, and provide proper medical care to the radiation-affected victims. The company also should conduct public hearings as per the law of the land and should not resort to manipulative tactics and violence while dealing with the affected people.

UCIL is no different from other mining companies in this country when it comes to reckless mining and alienation of tribal communities. While their ancestral land and resources are being looted by greedy corporations with the full support of a violent state, the tribals in *Jaduguda* and elsewhere remain a witness to a saga of destruction that has been going on for the last several decades. Socially and economically disadvantaged, many live in abject poverty and perennial hunger.

While the tribals in *Jaduguda* are nailed to the cross of trauma, radiation-induced pain, hunger and death, they continue to agitate for the resurrection of a tomorrow where they will be able to live in a socially just society with peace and dignity.

6. FINDINGS:

The documentary raises many questions on the safety of villagers and land of *adivasis*. The whole film is informative. The documentary has worked for the development of *adivasis* and their livelihood. The film is made with the aim of informing politicians, government officials, landowners, and other concerned citizens to be aware and raise voice against this radioactive rays. Activist-filmmaker *Shriprakash's* honest, powerful documentaries attempt to capture the struggles and aspirations of local communities in Bihar and Jharkhand. With his films he has attempted to capture the struggles and aspirations of indigenous local communities in Bihar and Jharkhand, and to give them a voice. He explains, "I do not impose my views, I am only the instrument that takes the camera to the place of struggle. It's the people participating in the struggle who actually make the film. They live out their lives and voice their concerns in their own words. I only record".

7. CONCLUSION:

The development projects benefited mainly those belonging to the formal economy but deprived tribal communities, especially those belonging to informal economy and dependent on the natural resources for a livelihood. About three million people were displaced and affected by development projects like dams, industries, mines, wildlife sanctuaries, defense establishments, airstrips, housing colonies and infrastructural development like roads and railways. About 90% of the displaced were part of tribal communities.

With the passage of time, and with growing awareness of the developmental issue, the scene has changed somewhat. The special provisions for scheduled tribes, including reservation in jobs and representation in assemblies and parliament, were put into effect. A number of development schemes and programmes were conceived and implemented in various aspects of their life. These have altered the social structure of tribal Jharkhand to some extent. Further, without authentic tribal life, Jharkhand would be reduced to another industrial state in the making, in a newly resurgent India.

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