

Towards a 'Corporate Corridor'

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In the spring season; trees, plants and herbs turn into greenery with new lovely leaves. It looks like a resurrection of the forest after the autumn. It is one of the most beautiful seasons for birds, animals and insects, and of course, for the Adivasis, which is the beginning of their marriage with the nature. The Adivasis begin to collect flowers, fruits and other forest produces for sustaining their community, which is completely based on the natural resources with the unique features of community living, caring-sharing, equality for all, justice and the need based economic system. The most interesting thing is, it is the spring season when the Adivasis offer their thanks to their super natural God, celebrate together and begin their new journey with the nature.

According to the Santal tradition, the first flower of the season is offered to the super natural God then only the community members are allowed to collect any kind of new forest produces. They jointly offer the first flower to their God in 'Baha Parap' (the festival of flower). Similarly, the Oraon celebrate 'Khadi' also known as 'Sarhul'. The thanks giving tradition is found among all the Adivasi groups. Unfortunately, it was out of imagination for many of them this time. India's Home Minister P Chidambaram's gunmen (security forces) involved in the so-called 'operation green hunt' did not allow them to celebrate their auspicious festivals (Baha and Sarhul) in those villages, where the operation is being carried out. They were prevented from offering their thanks to the super natural God, they were stopped dancing together and they were also forbidden from having the community feast. What kind of operation is this?

Can one imagine what would have happened if the security forces would not have allowed the Hindus to celebrate the Ramnaumi, prevented the Muslims from organizing a procession in the Muharam and stopped the Christians to conduct the Easter Mass? Perhaps, there would have been some kind of communal riot, communal tension or at least the issue would have been made the national one. But no one knows about how the Adivasis were denied to practise their age-old tradition and culture by the security forces as the so-called fourth realm (Media) of the democracy does not bother to report about it. The Adivasis were deprived of their cultural rights in their own country in the name of cleansing the Maoists, which state sees as the biggest threat to the investment climate in the country.

The story does not end here. The villagers' freedom is seized; they are questioned, inquired and prevented from access to necessary commodities. They are being watched everywhere by the security forces. Those Adivasis living in the top of the hill (the Indian state loves to call them as 'primitive' and maintains the status-quo) are mostly affected in the process. They have stopped collecting the forest produces, the only livelihood resources left for them in the forests. They are not going out of their houses in fear of the security forces and some of them have even migrated to the secured places. This kind of painful stories can be heard across the state of Jharkhand, where the operations are going on since March 10.

In the changing circumstances, the security forces have captured some of the rural markets after capturing schools, water sources and forests. For instance, the villagers of Rania block in Khunti district, where the Arcelor Mittal has proposed a 12 MT steel Plant, are not allowed to buy things according to their will. The security forces are preventing them from buying more eatables assuming that the extra food would be given to the Maoists. The operation green hunt has badly hit the rural markets in Jharkhand. The forest based communities have stopped the collection of forest produces. As a result, the only few people can be seen in the rural markets. Indeed, it is very clear that the villagers have nothing to sell and buy in the markets therefore; there is a rapid fall in villagers' turnout to the rural markets, which directly means the severe attack on the rural economy, when the villagers are already in an economic crisis due to the price rise of the necessary commodities.

Consequently, there is a huge livelihood crisis in those areas where the operation green hunt is being carried out. The crisis will rapidly grow as the forest based communities are losing the prime economic season as they are not being allowed to collect the forest produces (Mahua flower, Chiranjhi and Tendu leaf), which sustain them at least for six months. The interesting question is why the security forces are creating livelihood crisis in the so-called red corridor instead of going for an assault against the Maoists as it is told to people by the state?

One should go to the state of Chhatisgarh to understand the core objective of it. The Adivasis of 644 villages have migrated to other places and now the corporate sharks—Tata, Jindal and Bhushan steel are attempting to establish their projects in those villages. Since, Jharkhand is known as a glorious state of Adivasi resistance, where even the Britishers lost the game therefore the Indian state is very much cautious about it and using the strategy of creating fear, insecurity and uncertainty instead of bombing those areas so that the Adivasis would leave their villages and migrate to the other states similar to what has been happening in Chhatisgarh. The Indian state envisages for creating the similar situation in Jharkhand so that there would be no one left to oppose the proposed mega steel plants, power projects and mining industries in the so-called red corridor.

Though the Adivasis are the original settler of the land but the globalization has entirely changed the meaning of 'Adivasi'. Now, the word 'Adivasi' is being used as a synonym of 'Naxalite' and 'Maoist'. Therefore, anyone who opposes the so-called development project, collects firewood in the forest and roams with the traditional weapon is suspected as Maoist or at least their supporter or sympathizer. There was a similar situation created for the Muslims, when each and every Muslim wearing the traditional dress was assumed as a terrorist. Amidst, there is also an attempt made by the state and the media for manufacturing the consent that the every mass resistance against displacement is Maoists supported, which directly means the Adivasis cannot fight for themselves. Of course, it is ridiculous because there is a glorious history of the Adivasis' resistance against the injustice in Jharkhand.

The questions arise in one's mind is, does the constitution of India allow the state to deny the rights of its own people in the name of the national security?

Who has empowered the security forces to continue their inhuman practices with the people? Will the security forces do the same thing with the corporate sharks? Why does the state not take any action against those corporate sharks, which have violated the laws of the land, denied rights to the people and indulged in the criminal activities? And how long should toilers tolerate it?

However, the only aim of the so-called operation green hunt is to convert the so-called 'red corridor' into the 'corporate corridor'. The Indian state's hue and cry on Maoism or Naxalism is just a strategy to make sure the backdoor entry of the corporate houses in the mineral corridor. Though people are not yet told about how many Maoists have been killed in the operation green hunt but the CEO of the Operation Green Hunt, P Chidambaram is confident enough of cleansing the Maoists by 2013. Therefore, when the corporate sharks could be able to enter into the mineral corridor, the issue of Maoism or Naxalism would be marginalized that day itself from the agenda of the state. Isn't it? However, the question yet to be answered is how long the Adivasis have to pay the price for the national interest, the national security and the national development? □□□

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