

# Is There Anyone To Hear This Boy's Cry?

By Gladson Dungdung

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Anup Oraon is merely 10 months old Adivasi boy. He was born in mid of the summer in 2010. He started traveling in the winter. And now travelling has become part and parcel of his life. However, his travel is different from others. His travel is unique. He has been traveling with his mother Nirmala Kanti Oraon with the hope that one day someone will hear his cry. Of course, his travel is for demand of justice. He has already attended several public hearings, mass meetings, protests, seminars and conferences across the country, where he shared his agony with people and demand justice for his father, uncle and neighbours.

Last time, I met him in a national seminar held in Bhopal the capital city of Madhya Pradesh. It was the beginning of summer, when he had come to Bhopal with his mother to tell the concerned people about their pains, sufferings and sorrows. However, the climate of Bhopal added salt in his wound. He started suffering from cold, cough and fever. His mother was worried. She told me that they have traveled to many places but this time Anup fell sick. She said in anxiety, "I'm worried if something happen to my child, how I can explain to my husband when he comes out of the Jail." She was there to tell the people that how the Odissa police humiliated, tortured and put her innocent husband in jail after branding him as a member of the CPI-Maoist.

The worst thing is Anup Oraon has not even seen his father since his birth. When he was born his father Paulus Oraon was already behind the bars. Though he cannot express his pains, sufferings and sorrows in words but his endless cry, anguish and anxiety are enough for describing everything he has been undergoing in absence of his father. Perhaps, he wants to play in the lap of his father, he wishes to hear the voice of someone else than hearing her mother's voice every time he wakes up for the bed and of course, he wants to be loved by his father. But India's war (for minerals) has put this child's life in a stake. Both the mother and child have been running from pillar to post but no one is there to hear their plea. Can anyone hear their cry for justice?

According to Nirmala Kanti Oraon, she was living with her husband Paulus Oraon in a village called Silpunji, comes under Banki police station of Sundargarh the mineral rich district of Odissa. Since, they have fertile land; they used to harvest enough food grain, which of course, was ensuring them a good life. Meanwhile, Nirmala Kanti Oraon conceived. Consequently, the happiness and joy was about to be poured in their family. However, the destiny was something else for them. In the early morning on 29 August 2009, the security forces consisting of the CRPF personals and local police arrived to their village. The security forces started search operations in the village. The police entered into house and asked Nirmala Kanti Oraon about his husband. When they didn't find him in the house they started roaming in the vicinity and caught him nearby a river closed to his village, where he had gone for toilet in the morning. The police abused and severely beat him alleging him as a Maoist. Finally, he was arrested. However, the police did not inform Nirmala Kanti Oraon about the arrest of her husband.

The security forces did not stop here. They abused, assaulted and beaten the villagers, and also molested the women. They did not spare children too. The police entered into the house of 50 year-old Joseph Oraon, ransacked all the belongings and scattered the food grains. The police picked up 24 year-old teacher Sapal Oraon from his bed alleging him as a Maoist. He was assaulted and forcefully taken to the police camp. He is a good leader of the area and also a teacher under Sarva Sikhya Abhiyan in the village. After a few months, the police also arrested Sopal's wife Khudia who leads women SHG group in the village. Now their three kinds and mother are facing severe livelihood crisis. Similarly, 25 year-old daily wage labourer Budhram Oraon had gone for toilet and police arrested him from there. Now his wife is living with her 6 months old kid and suffering from need of food and care. In another case the police caught 19 year-old Ashim Oraon and tied him in a tree with rope and left him for 5 hours without food and water. Similarly, the police caught 22 year-old Raju Oraon from his house when he was sleeping. When he questioned the police, he was tied in a tree with rope near the bridge for 6 hours without food and water. They also severely beat 2

minor boys – Anil Oraon (13) and Elam Oraon (16). Finally, they arrested 30 innocent Adivasis from the village after coining them as the members of the CPI-Maoists.

All 30 innocent Adivasis were booked in serious charge of attempt to murder, killings and possession of illegal arms and so on. The case was filed against them in Banki Police Station with the case No. 31 Dt.17-07-2009 U /S 147/148/341 /353 / 364 / 395 /307 / 506 /121 /121 A/149 of Indian Penal Code (IPC), 25/ 27 of Arms Act, 9B of Indian Explosive Act and 17 CLA Act. Ironically, the case was booked in the police station on 17 July 2009 under serious charges but the police arrested them after more than a month, which generates a serious doubt about the police action. Though the Police claim of having evidence of their involvement in several crimes including the murder of a police officer in the region on July 16, 2009 but there is no such evidence to prove the allegation. "Most of the arrested people are daily wage earners and none of them were involved in any kind of Maoist activities," says a noted activist Prafulla Samantray, who was part of the protest in Rourkela for release of the innocent Adivasis.

The relevant question here is why are the police victimizing the innocent Adivasis? In fact, the police have been victimizing these Adivasis for two obvious reasons. One is to shield their failure in arresting the real killer of a police officer and second, they want to vacate the area for the corporate sharks as there is huge mineral resource lying beneath the lands. "We don't even know about the Maoists but our only crime is that we don't want to surrender our land for mining therefore we are victimized by the government," says Nirmala Kanti Oraon. The Local legislator George Tirkey who has been fighting against victimization of the Adivasis by the police says, "The police do not have the courage to arrest the real Maoists. They are victimizing the innocent villagers to save their own skin."

After arrest of the main earning members, women and children are facing huge livelihood crisis. Consequently, their food intake has gone down. Nirmala Kanti Oraon says, "We used to have food three times everyday but after arrest of the main earning persons of our families, we are bound to eat only once or twice in a day." "We are neither able to cultivate our lands nor able to collect minor forest produces as we have to take care our small kids. How will we survive if our people do not come out of Jail?" she adds. Presently, there are 45 children (below the age of 8 years) in the village and some of them were born in absence of their fathers consequently, they suffered like anything. For example, Ainche Oraon delivered her first baby on the roadside at 7 O'clock in the morning on 9 September 2009, when she had gone for toilet and could not come back home as her husband Ramo Oraon was in Jail and nobody was there to take care of her. All the lactated mothers need nutritious food, medical attention and care. There are also 5 old women who have crossed the age of 70 but no one is there for looking after them. However, the police had also assaulted some of these old women.

The most stunning fact is that the police also victimized those people who raise questions against injustice meted out on Adivasis, demand for rights to be protected and unite the people to fight against state suppression. When a Human Rights Advocate Nicholas Barla intervened on the case, he was abused, threatened and harassed by the top cops. The Superintendent of Police of Sundargarh district asked him to keep quiet or face the police action. Nicholas says, "When the police came to know about my intervention on the case, they started searching for me therefore I have had to hide myself for a few months." "There is constant phone enquiry where about, what I am doing, etc? This is I feel nuisance", he adds. The most important question is where is our right to freedom of thought and expression gone?

The state of Odissa is known as emerging industrialized state, which has signed 90 MoUs with the corporate houses including POSCO, Vedanta and Tata Steel. However, the so-called economic growth is leading to rampant human rights violation in the state. The National Human Rights Commission also accepts it. Its chairperson K.G. Balakrishnan says, "As Odissa is emerging as an industrialized state, we apprehend more cases of human rights violation." Is this a new face of growth and development, where people's rights do not make much sense and especially when it is related to the Adivasis? Now the districts like Sundargarh, Keojhar, Mayurbhanj, Jharsuguda, Anugul are in chaotic situation. The people are facing water crisis, health hazard and livelihood crisis. There is a sharp decrease in the agriculture production, migration has increased due to displacement and harassment by the police and district administration. People also facing air, soil and sound pollution. The climate change can be experienced with extreme cold, hot summer and lack of heavy rain. There is clear violation of the constitutional provisions and PESA Act. There is constant unrest among

the villagers, government authorities and the corporate houses. There are numbers of death cases, accidents, industrial violations and killings in the factory and mining areas. But no one is punished for committing such heinous crimes. Why?

In fact, the state of Odissa is heaven for the investors as the state government can do anything to ensure them lands and protection. Instead of taking action against the corporate houses, the state government has been fighting with the people on behalf of the corporate houses. For instance, when the villagers of Kuwarmunda of Sundargarh protested against the Adhunik Metallic, the company filed case against them and over 132 villagers were kept in the jail for 3 to 6 months. Similarly, in Kalunga close to Vedvyas in Sundargarh district in the case of Ms.Maa Tarini Sponge iron Plant, 86 women were put in the jail for a month, who were demanding to implement the laws. In the case of Lanziberna Stone query of OCL, Rajgangpur, the innocent youth (Bijay) was shot by the security guard of the company and when the villagers filed the FIR, police didn't take any action, where many innocent villagers were taken to jail.

In the case of Korean company POSCO, which is the biggest Foreign Direct Investment in the country with proposed investment of Rs. 54,000 crore, the Odissa government even did not hesitate to declare the Adivasis as none existing in the proposed area. Similarly, 14 Adivasis were killed in police firing at Kalinga Nagar in 2006, who were protesting against the Tata Steel's land acquisition but no action was taken against the Tata Steel. In the case of British mining company 'Vedanta' who has not only violated the laws of the land but also took illegal action against the Adivasis and also prepared a false Gram Sabha report but the Odissa government has been attempting to shield the Vedanta.

The National Human Rights Commission found that the local administration and the top cops' involvement in intimidating to the Adivasis for filing false cases against them and also to deny them due compensation for the land they were forced to give up for the Vedanta. The commission found that false police cases like dacoity, loot and illegal possession of arms were registered against the Adivasis who protested against the company. In one such case, 32 Adivasis were thrown into jail in May, 2006 on a variety of charges. The Superintendent of Police and company officials forced them to sign land transfer agreements with Vedanta inside Bhawanipatna jail with the jailer attesting the signatures. The NHRC also accepts that a number of complaints have been filed in the commission regarding the human rights violation during the establishment of industries by Vedanta, POSCO and Tata. The irony is no any action has been taken against these corporate giants for violating and laws and terrorising the Adivasis but the innocent villages were victimised by the state instead.

Indeed, the so-called anti-Naxal Operation has put question mark in the future of innocent Adivasis and their children. The villagers are living with fear, anxiety and uncertainty. Children have stopped going to school. The major questions need to be answered are what kind of future these children will have? Why the state is not concerned about their future? Are they not children of this country? Do they have the same rights like what our city dweller children enjoy? And why those so-called civilized people have no concerns for these children? In the present era of growth and development, the police forces are deployed to protect the corporate interest not the people. These days, they also teach the development theory. And those who oppose their development theories will have to pay the price. And of course, it is not unexpected, as the Indian State has become the corporate state, where the programmes, policies and even the cabinet Ministers are decided by the corporate houses. However, does it mean the boy Anup' cry for justice is nonsense? Is there anyone who can hear the cry of these helpless women and children whom the state has put in a stake in the name of cleansing the Maoists?

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