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BHEETA MAATI

our soil, our earth, our home

A report on
**Baliapal Missile Base
and People's Struggle**

PEOPLE'S UNION FOR DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

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Inside of a *paan baraja*

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PREFACE

For the last 4 years, the people of Baliapal and Bhograi blocks in Balasore district (Orissa) have been agitating against the proposed establishment of a missile range, the National Test Range (NTR), in the area. On 1st April 1986, barricades were set up to prevent the entry of government officials, especially the Collector and officials concerned with the NTR. Numerous demonstrations, public meetings and bandhs on the part of the agitationists have been met with increased police deployment and large scale arrests. Tension has also arisen because of several attempts at forced entry, by the Collector. The determination of the government to set up the NTR and the people's resolve to oppose it, has as yet resulted only in a continued stalemate.

It is in this context that the People's Union for Democratic Rights, Delhi (PUDR), sent a fact finding team to investigate into the issues arising from the agitation. The team consisted of Dr. Sujata Patel (Jawaharlal Nehru University), Ashok Prasad, Joseph Mathai and Krishnendu Ray (all Delhi University). They were joined by Pradyumna Bal, editor *Pragatiwadi* in Balasore. The following is their report.

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INTRODUCTION

The government of India proposes to establish a missile test base, called the National Test Range (NTR) for the research, production and launching of missiles. The selected site falls in two blocks of Balasore district of Orissa—Baliapal and Bhograi—covering 102 sq. km. (55 villages). The establishment of such a project is part of a programme to make India into a major military power.

Though the planning for the project was started more than a decade back, the decision to locate it in this region was, according to state government sources, taken during the Janata reign in Orissa in 1979, who, in principle, gave its acceptance to the project. (On the other hand, Biju Patnaik, the Janata leader, claims that they merely allowed the Central government to survey the land) The actual announcement of the selection of the proposed site for the NTR, was made by the present Chief Minister, J. B. Patnaik, in October 1984, who described it as a 'puja gift' to the people of Orissa.

Since this announcement, a militant movement has grown in the affected villages of these two blocks against the government's decision to take over their land and relocate them elsewhere. Their anger and militancy reached such heights that a visit by the then collector provoked the people to put barricades against his re-entry on the 1st of April 1986.

The protest of the people of this area against the NTR must not, however, be seen as simply a protest against displacement. Coming, as it does, after many years of experience of similar displacement and rehabilitation programmes faced by the Oriyan people, it must therefore be seen in the context of the growth of a consciousness against the strategy of development that has been practised in the state since independence.

ORISSA : DEVELOPMENT AND PEOPLE

The present-day Orissa is a geographical entity that was first constructed into a province by the British who grouped the coastal dis-

tricts of Balasore, Cuttack and Puri along with Sambalpur and parts of the Central provinces and Madras, to form one province in 1936. Later, the Indian government secured the merger of the Oriya speaking princely states with it.

It is possible to divide Orissa, historically, economically and socially into two parts—the coastal districts and the inland districts. The former are fertile, agriculturally rich and have a high proportion of the upper-caste population of Brahmins, Karans and the peasant castes of Khandayats. These groups have produced most of Orissa's leading politicians and statesmen. The inland districts are hilly and forested with a high proportion of tribals in the population, rich in resources but materially poor. This gives Orissa one of the highest proportion of scheduled tribes and scheduled caste population—more than 42%.

During colonial rule, the coastal districts were under the permanent and various kinds of semi-permanent settlements. These zamindari settlements only encouraged pauperisation of the peasantry and agricultural labourers and the consolidation of upper caste landlords. In the tribal areas, the colonial state accepted the *Gauntia* settlement that gave rights to the kings to collect revenue through intermediaries called *Gauntias*.

After independence, the large estates of the zamindars and the erstwhile rulers were abolished by the Abolition of Estates Act, 1951 which removed all intermediaries, gave rights over land to permanent and some types of occupancy tenants, but did not put a ceiling on ownership of land. The land ceiling was introduced by an amendment to the Act as late as 1973.

If the acts of the colonial authorities led ultimately to the pauperisation of the peasantry and the agricultural labourers, the interventions of the government of independent India have not, in any great measure, improved their lot. On the one hand, agriculture in Orissa is characterised by large landholdings, low productivity, little to no technological change and, among the peasantry, intense fragmentation of land. On the other hand, development, as it has been practised in the state, has meant establishment of multi-purpose, capital intensive projects that harnessed Orissa's rich natural resources but failed to provide its people with a decent standard of living. It will be thus no surprise to note that Orissa is the poorest and one of the most backward states in the country. At the start of the sixth plan, 66% of its population was below the poverty line. Only 16% of the cultivated

area is irrigated, as against 25% for the rest of India and 75% for Punjab. Fertiliser consumption at an average of 9 kgs per hectare is one-tenth the Punjab average. According to one study, in 10 out of the 13 districts of Orissa, the foodgrain productivity declined from 945 kg. per hectare to 847 kg between 1962-5 and 1970-3. The production of the staple foodgrain, rice, has remained stagnant for a decade.

Development in Orissa has become synonymous with establishment of large projects using Orissa's natural endowments—dams (Hirakud and Rengali among others), mine-based industries (Rourkela, NALCO and BALCO) and defence projects (HAL factory in Koraput, Air force base at Charbatia, Naval Training Academy at Chilka, and now the NTR).

These projects have led to massive displacements, uprooting the people from their land and disrupting their pattern of life. The record of economic rehabilitation and social and cultural relocation of the displaced people show that they have been driven out on the margins of society, de-skilled and even more oppressed. This has forced many to migrate out of the state in distress, giving Orissa one of the highest proportion of out-migrants in the country.

These projects have not led to any spin-offs in terms of industrial development. Orissa's share of industrial production is less than two per cent of the national level and its workforce in manufacture is only 7%—with only 3% employed in the non-household sector.

The paradox of Orissa's development is fully illustrated in the process of development that has taken place in the district of Balasore.

BALASORE : SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

Situated on the north-eastern tip of Orissa, bordering Midnapore (West Bengal) on the north and Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar districts of Orissa on the west, Balasore is the smallest district of the state. It is also the most thickly populated. In 1981 its population was 22.53 lakhs and it had a population density of 357 persons per sq. km., compared

to 169 for Orissa as a whole. Balasore has a long recorded history and was one of the earliest European settlements, starting with the Portuguese in 1541. It was ceded to the East India Company in 1803 and formed part of Cuttack district, becoming an independent district only in 1836. With Cuttack, Puri and parts of Ganjam, it forms part of the dominant coastal belt.

In a state characterised by extreme poverty, the green paddy fields of Balasore are an oasis of relative prosperity. Rice is the staple crop occupying 67% of the cultivated area. The district produces 10% of the total state's production of rice though it occupies only 4% of the area. The other major crops grown are oilseeds and pulses. A fairly large area is also occupied by spices and vegetables. Balasore grows a variety of cash crops—mainly groundnut, cashewnut, coconut and betel leaves. It produces a large amount of fish, mainly from the sea but also from the several rivers that pass through the district.

Despite these rivers—the Subarnarekha, the Baitarani the Budhabalanga and their tributaries—the facilities for irrigation are inadequate. In 1986-87 the total area under assured irrigation was only 19.7% of the cultivated area. The rabi harvest depends mainly on stored water. The major canal is the Coast Canal, built by the British in 1885. It carries saline water most of the year, and may be used for irrigation only from October to March. Development and welfare programmes are meagre. Rural electric supply is extremely irregular (though 70% of the villages are electrified). There are hardly any all-weather roads in the rural areas and most interior villages become inaccessible during the rains. There were only 66 medical institutions (including primary health centres and dispensaries) in the district in 1981, each catering to an average population of 34,000. There is very little industrial development. The district had only 61 registered factories in 1978-9, employing 2023 people and produced merely Rs. 96 lakhs as total value added. In fact, whatever prosperity exists in Balasore has little to do with post-independence projects of the state, though recent introduction of high yielding varieties of seeds have had an impact.

Within this district, Baliapal and Bhograi blocks occupy a special position. They are the most thickly populated blocks. Baliapal has a population density of 441 persons per sq. km. and Bhograi has 538 persons per sq. km. Out of a population of 1.12 lakh people in Baliapal about 17% are scheduled castes and about 4.7% are

scheduled tribes. Bhograi has a population of 1.74 lakhs of which 12.6% were scheduled castes and only 2.1% scheduled tribes. Literacy rates are very high—45.3% for Bhograi and 40.5% for Baliapal, compared to 34% for the state as a whole.

The staple crop in this region is paddy. Productivity levels are quite high and HYV seeds are widely used (covering 39% of paddy area in the two blocks), but the crop is vulnerable to natural calamities. There are also a large number of fisherfolk, especially in the coastal villages. Many of them are also cultivators and agricultural labourers. In the 102 sq. km. that is earmarked for the NTR, the agrarian economy hinges around the production of cash crops—groundnut, cashewnut, coconut and the betel leaf. The most important cash crop here is undoubtedly the betel vine. Due to its importance we are devoting a separate section to its cultivation.

According to a survey done by the government before the agitation started, the total population in the 55 villages (42 inhabited and 13 uninhabited) to be affected is 44,575. Of them 19.7% are scheduled castes and 4.4% are scheduled tribes. Only 1.7% of the 7098 families are landless. The majority of the families are small landholders with holdings of less than 5 acres. Most of the fisherfolk and agricultural labourers in this area also own and operate land. Thus, while under 2% of the families are landless, only 62% reported cultivation as their primary occupation. 15.7% were fisherfolk and 13.4% were agricultural labourers. Services and business accounted for the rest. A relatively large proportion of scheduled castes, most of whom are agricultural labour and fisherfolk, also cultivate.

Due to these subsidiary occupations, exact classification is not possible. According to the 1971 census, 23% of the workers in these 42 inhabited villages were agricultural labour, while less than 3% were fisherfolk. Local labour is supplemented by labour from the nearby villages, especially in peak seasons. On most of the holdings however, the labour demand is met by the household of the cultivator. Wages are normally Rs. 10 per day with meals, rising in peak seasons to Rs. 15 per day with meals. We were told that there have been no wage disputes in this region.

According to the government, about 40% of the land in this region is government land—10,000 of the 25,000 acres to be acquired. This land, we were told, is of two types. One is the large stretches of land reclaimed by the receding of the sea. The other is the land

on which, during colonial rule, permanent tenancy rights were not granted to the actual cultivators by the zamindars. According to the local people they had been granted rights over harvest of such land (called *amal nama patta*) by the erstwhile zamindars, but this was not recognised as tenancy by the Orissa land laws. The state has been accepting land revenue from them and on that basis the people claim their right over the land. It is also argued that under Orissa's land laws, legal possession of government land is granted if it has been occupied for at least thirty years.

Only 1.2% of the cultivated area in Baliapal and 0.8% of the cultivated area of Bhograi is irrigated. Most of this is provided by the Coast Canal. The NTR area is almost completely rainfed since it lies in the saline belt and has brackish underground water. Despite this the area produces two, and in some places three crops in a year.

Fishing is highly profitable. The team met several fisherfolk who said that they had a daily catch of Rs. 40 to Rs. 70. On good days they could earn upto Rs. 150. Fish is sold locally and is also exported—mainly to Bengal. The storage and marketing are entirely private.

Thus, within this rich district the NTR region is relatively prosperous. Crucial to the understanding of this prosperity and hence to the Baliapal agitation is the cultivation of the betel vine.

The Paan Economy

The betel vine is grown only in some parts of the country. It requires sandy soil to sandy loam, special climatic conditions and a great deal of care. The coastal parts of Baliapal and Bhograi produce some of the finest *paan* leaves in the country—including what is famous as the *Banarasi patta*. The betel vines are grown in a bamboo enclosure covered on the top, known as a *paan baraja*. A *paan baraja* may range from 3 decimals to 16 decimals (1 decimal is .01 acre or 40.47 sq. metres) in area and are about 6-7 feet high.

Vines are planted in rows about two feet away from each other. The smallest *paan baraja* of 3 decimals would have between 700 to

1300 betel vines, while a large one would have well over 5000. The *paan baraja* is situated on higher ground, or sand is dumped to raise its level to ensure good drainage. Since betel vines require regular watering, a deep pond is also dug by the side to store rain water. Generally traditional fertilisers—cowdung and mustard cakes—are used.

Three times in a year the vine is buried in the ground. New shoots emerge and the vine grows again. Plucking usually starts when the vine is a few feet tall and continues till it reaches about 6 feet height. Plucking is done every 15 days except in the winter months when the vine is plucked after two months. Each plucking yields about 5-6 leaves per vine. A small *baraja* can produce 6000 leaves or $1\frac{1}{2}$ *panas* (1 *pana* is 4000 leaves) and a large *baraja* can produce over 6 *panas* in each plucking. In winter a higher number of leaves are plucked, and twenty to seventy *panas* may be collected, depending on the size of the *barajc*.

The *paan* leaves are sold to the local traders, many of whom are also cultivators of betel vine. They are transported by cycle and rickshaw to the block headquarters Basta and Jaleshwar. They then travel by train to Madras, Bombay, Delhi, Varanasi and are even exported to the Middle East.

Prices paid to the producers are lowest—about Rs. 500 per *pana* this year—in the monsoon months and are highest—Rs. 1000 to Rs. 1200 per *paan* in the winter months when the leaf is considered finest. Payment is normally in cash at delivery.

While big *paan* cultivators do hire some labour for their *paan barajas*, most of the smaller cultivators depend almost exclusively on family labour. The great amount of personal care the betel vine requires, leads to an intensive application of family labour with participation of the women, children and old persons of the family. Perhaps this is the reason why the women and children are so active in the agitation.

Setting up of a *paan baraja* requires an initial investment of a large order, ranging from about Rs. 20,000 for a 16 decimal *baraja* to Rs. 3,500 for a 3 decimal *baraja*. A large part of this investment is spent on wood, wire, bamboo and labour as well as the initial fertiliser application. Most of these do not have to be repeated. But running costs in terms of labour, fertiliser etc. add up to about 20 to 25% of the total returns. On this basis, with 1987-88 prices, a small

paan baraja would yield an average income of Rs. 17,000 per annum. A large *paan baraja* would similarly yield about Rs. 90,000 per annum. Since there are several households who own more than one *baraja*, the levels of income accruing to the *paan* cultivators can be imagined.

It is important to note that while the cultivation of betel vine in this area is quite old, its spread to most sections of the people and the high returns generated seem to be a relatively recent phenomenon. Families who were traditionally agricultural labourers or fisherfolk have now taken to the cultivation of betel vine—sometimes taking loans from the State Bank and UCO Bank branches (at Pratappur and Baliapal respectively).

Unfortunately, no reliable figures on the extent of *paan* cultivation are available. The only figures the team could obtain were obtained in the course of a government survey on betel vine disease in 1987-88. According to this, in 8 out of the 10 gram panchayats to be affected by the NTR, the total number of *paan barajas* was 11,536. According to the Khepanastra Ghati Pratirodh Committee, there were 30,000 *paan barajas* in the original 160 sq. km. of the NTR project, and about 20,000 in the revised area. On the basis of available information it is difficult to choose between these estimates. But even the conservative government figure indicates that the annual flow of income due to *paan* to the cultivators in this region ranges from about Rs. 22 crore (if the average *baraja* was only 3 decimal in size) to Rs. 59 crore (taking the average of a 3 decimal and a 16 decimal *baraja*). These estimates were confirmed by SBI officials who told us that about Rs. 40 lakhs worth of drafts are disbursed every month by their branch in this area alone.

It is quite clear to the people that whatever compensation they get, there is no investment where they would get the kind of returns they are enjoying at present. This is quite true of even those cultivators, agricultural labourers and fishermen who do not cultivate *paan*. For them the natural endowments of the region give enough of a livelihood to make them prefer staying here, rather than working as contract labour here, or in any other part of the country as so many of their fellow Oriyans have been forced to do.

THE NATIONAL TEST RANGE

From a reading of available sources, it is possible to state that the NTR project is crucial to a plan to launch India as a major military power. This project is to develop a technology necessary for launching and targetting missiles.

One of the major pre-requisites of this project, the development of technology for rocket launching, has already been done by the Department of Space and the defence research laboratories. Recently, the government used this technology to launch a medium range missile, Prithvi. In all probability, the NTR site will be used not only to further the technology and production of medium range missiles, like Prithvi, but also intermediate range missiles (IRBMs) and perhaps ultimately inter continental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). Apart from these, this range may also be used for testing short range missiles such as surface to air missiles. At present these are to be tested at the Interim Test Range at Chandipur. There is a strong possibility that this project will ultimately help in developing the carrier component of a nuclear weapons programme, since India already has a stock pile of plutonium and has also exploded a nuclear device. It should also be noted that with the present level of software technology for targetting and guidance in India, it is inefficient to use long range missiles with conventional warheads.

The government has stated that it has strong technical and strategic reasons for choosing Baliapal over other sites, for this project. The Balasore coast is shaped like a crescent with Baliapal located on its tip. Since missiles require intensive monitoring immediately after launch, the crescent shape is ideal for monitoring from land. In addition, Balasore has excellent infrastructural facilities in terms of railways and road arteries, needed for constant flow of supplies. It also has a firm soil conducive for supporting heavy structures, needed for a launching pad. Though Balasore is cyclone prone, this part of the district remains free from disturbances. Also, as a result of silting of ports, in the east coast, there is not much of sea traffic in this region. Additionally, the Bay of Bengal unlike the Arabian Sea does not have any populated islands, which makes it safer for testing.

According to the Defence Ministry, other possible sites in the west coast, suffer from major strategic problems. The Arabian Sea

is "bristling with super power presence". The USA has a permanent base at Diego Garcia. Sea traffic both local and international, is quite substantial on the west coast. In addition Maldives, an independent country, falls just south of Lakshwadweep. The Ministry of Defence had also surveyed a site near Dwarka, in Gujarat. However, this site had further problems, than those enumerated above. Its closeness to Pakistan was said to make telemetric observation easy, and the site vulnerable to air attacks. The threat posed by the site, to the economic gains of Bombay High were also considered. The team was told that similar strategic considerations were held against NTR's location near Bindur, in south Karnataka, and the desert area of Rajasthan.

The opposition parties in Orissa do not accept the government's claim that Baliapal-Bhograi is the only suitable site for the NTR. Janata leader, Biju Patnaik has suggested another site just south of Balasore, in Cuttack district. The area Satbhaia, falls into his electoral constituency, Kendrapara. Biju Patnaik claimed that the area was thinly populated and there would be little problem of displacement. The team was however told by State government officials that as the area was marshy and had a rich flora and fauna (it was suitable for a wildlife sanctuary) it was not possible to site the project there. On the basis of the correspondence of Biju Patnaik and Nilmani Rautray (former Janata CM), with the Prime Minister and then Defence Minister, Arun Singh it seems that the central government has not seriously considered the proposal.

Dr. Radhanath Rath, editor *Samaja*, who has been campaigning strongly against the project has suggested another site—the Great Nicobar island. According to the Defence Ministry the site has been studied and found unsuitable because of weather conditions, proximity to Indonesian territorial waters and the high costs of transporting supplies. Dr Rath disputes this contention.

According to state officials, the government intends to invest more than Rs. 2,800 crores in this project by way of construction and other costs. Apart from these, there will be a significant investment in running costs. Costs of this magnitude indicate that while at one level it is possible to see the project in terms of sites, at another level, more fundamental questions can be raised.

When critical socio-economic problems persist in India, the government is making investment in areas which

are unproductive and which do not contribute to the improvement of the quality of human life. Investments like this also have political costs. It will extend the already expanding influence of the armed forces in the political life of the country and may lead to a process similar to that taking place in other countries of the region. This would further jeopardise the democratic character of the Indian polity.

THE PEOPLE'S AGITATION

The people of Baliapal and Bhograi blocks are agitating for the last four years on a one point charter—that of opposing the siting of the NTR, in this region. The movement has not lost its militancy, expressed in non-violent form, or its desire to protect the people's *bheeta-maati* (the soil, the earth and the home).

Even before the formal announcement for land acquisition was made by the Collector, the news about the project and the intention of the government to acquire their land for it had filtered into the two blocks. Local level meetings had started taking place against the proposed site. The movement was soon mobilised by Godhagar Giri, a long respected leader of the area, associated with the erstwhile Praja Socialist party, which had fought for the rights of the peasantry in this area. In the initial months, Dr. Radhanath Rath, editor *Samaja* was also involved in the campaign. This issue was a major point of reference in the election meetings held for the March 1985 elections. Our team was informed that the Congress party and the Chief Minister J.B. Patnaik, also campaigned against the siting of the project in these two blocks. The Congress won the election defeating Godhagar Giri.

After the official gazette notification, the movement, which was largely spontaneous in nature, acquired a formal shape, under the leadership of Godhagar Giri. The Uttara Balasore Kshepanastra Ghati Pratirodh Committee (KGPC) was formed in December 1985, and thereon led the agitation.

A major confrontation between the then Collector Ishwar Chandra Das and the people of Chaumukh village on 1st April 1986, pushed the movement on to a new phase. The collector had arrived to inspect the land acquisition work, when about fifteen thousand people surrounded him. They forced him off his jeep and finally

made him walk eight kilometres back to Kalipada. At Kalipada, the outside limit of the project area, they put up barricades preventing his re-entry. Later three more barricades were set up on the three other approach roads to the area; at Panchapali, Kachna and Jamkunda. Since then, despite repeated attempts, neither the collector nor the district revenue officials have been allowed entry into the area. However bank officials, health workers and other non-revenue governmental officials have been allowed entry. A police force has been stationed in Baliapal town, a few kilometres from the barricade, and the police presence in the district has been increased.

After the putting up of the barricades, the movement launched an offensive to seek district and state level support. A district level coordination committee was set up with Brajanath Rath, a noted progressive poet, as its convenor. A public meeting was held in Balasore in which all opposition parties and groups participated. These include the Janata party, Communist Party of India, Communist Party of India (Marxist), Socialist Unity Centre of India and Unity Centre of Communist Revolutionaries of India (Marxist-Leninist). In 1987, another district coordination committee was set up, the convenor of which was Arun De (ex-MLA, CPI).

The team in its interviews with members of all these groups discovered that though all view the issue differently, they were united in the opinion that this project should not be sited in Baliapal-Bhograi. While the CPI and CPI(M) stated that they were not convinced of the government's claim that Baliapal was the only suitable site, they were not in principle, against the construction of a missile base. Though the Janata party leader Biju Patnaik, told the team that India did not require such a military programme, his party's official position is similar to that of the CPI and CPI(M). Activists of the SUCI saw the NTR as a step up in India's militarisation and aggression in the sub-continent and the UCCRI (ML) opposed the project on the grounds that not only would it lead to socio-economic dislocation of the people but also to India's militarisation.

Though these groups are supporting the agitation, the agitation itself seems to be beyond the direct influence of these groups. The KGPC consists of a council of 229 members, nominated by the affected villages. Decisions regarding the agitation's programme, strategy and tactics is taken by a thirteen member steering committee. The council meets at least twice a month and serves both as a means of mobilisation and ratification of steering committee decisions, as well as a

forum where disputes between individuals are sorted out without having to take recourse to the law. Members of various political parties, including the Congress-I, Janata and the UCCRI-ML have been on the steering committee.

Below the council are various fronts. These are the women's front, the children's front, student's front and a front for the fisherfolk. These are critical for mobilising the people, especially for mass meetings. When government authorities have tried to enter the region, people have been mobilised by the gatekeepers who blow conch shells. Villagers from all over the area collect at the gate, lie down on the road and prevent the entry. The team found that the local people were quite alert to potential attempts to break the agitation. Wherever the team went, it had to always establish its bonafides before the people would speak to them. The people we interviewed, irrespective of age, gender, caste or class divisions were clear about their demand and their struggle. For example, a fifteen year old boy, Arun Jena told the team that although he did not know the collector, he knew his jeep, and if he saw his jeep entering the area, he would stop it. Such militancy has led to the formation of suicide squads, composed of youth who are willing to die rather than let the Collector come in.

The team learnt from various sources that the government is cautious about using force to enter the area because of a belief that there would be large scale bloodshed. Government officials also seem aware that there are difficulties in locating sensitive defence projects in the neighbourhood of a hostile population. Despite this the Collector has made three attempts to enter the area in recent months. On 3 February 1988, the Collector announced his intention to enter the area, but was prevented by about 20,000 people. On 6 May 1988, he again announced his intention to enter the area and break the barricade. On 8 May, Operation Baliapal was put in effect. Magistrates were asked to accompany the Collector and a 5000 to 8000 strong force of Orissa Armed Police was moved about 5 km away. The Collector was however dissuaded by senior officials from entering the area due to fears of extensive loss of life. Despite this he again tried to enter on 28 May, but was prevented by about 10,000 people, many of whom were women and children. 20,000 December

In an attempt to pressurise the people, from May 1986, the government imposed an economic blockade, stopping supplies of kerosene. electricity, wheat and sugar. The Committee refused

to get cowed down and resorted to alternative means of supply, and the blockade had to be lifted within a year. The government has even air-dropped leaflets in the area, but to no consequence.

Outside the barricade, the government has shown no such restraint. Large scale arrests have been made during the various bandhs and demonstrations organised in Balasore. On 4th November 1986 about 70 to 75 people were arrested and there were physical clashes with the police to prevent them from picking up the Baliapal leaders from a demonstration. About 250 to 300 people were arrested in another bandh on 5th December 1986. Preventive arrests were made in April 1987 since the Chief Minister was to visit the area. The visit was put off due to 'heavy rains', though the bandh call given on that day was successful. On 28th May 1987 an entire procession of about 500 persons was cordoned off by the police and put under arrest, while in July about 300 were arrested in yet another bandh call.

This repression has not affected the growth of the ideas behind the agitation. In neighbouring Chandipur a World War II army test range has been converted into an interim test range (ITR) for testing short and medium range missiles. For purposes of testing, 10,923 people from 13 villages had been asked to vacate their homes for 48 hours. Fearing that their land would be taken over, the people refused. An agitation has already started in this region over this issue. This reflects on the credibility of the government, at least as far as displacement is concerned, since the people are not willing to believe that the government will return their land and look after their property. The people's fears seem to be well founded. In a statement on the 12th of July, Wing Commander Mohanty of the ITR said that the ITR would merge into the NTR at a later date.

In the context of the people's continued resolve to oppose the NTR site, either the government will have to relocate the project or the agitation will have to face increased repression.

REHABILITATION PROGRAMME

The agitation of the people in Baliapal and Bhograi has caused the government to lay out detailed plans for rehabilitation. It has led

to a reduced land acquisition schedule and a more comprehensive resettlement programme. However, problems at the level of conception and the previous record of the State Government's implementation of such programmes make the agitationists continue to view the programme with suspicion.

The proposed NTR has a land acquisition programme consisting of 3 zones. The first zonal division involves the land earmarked for the range itself, the second relates to the safety zone and the third consists of 700 acres for residential and administrative complexes. The test range site falls in the area south of the Subarnarekha river i.e. Baliapal block. In this area land acquisition is to be total, no cultivation is to be allowed. The safety zone falls in the area north of the Subarnarekha river. Here, though displacement will occur, cultivation on lease basis, on land rented from the Defence Ministry is planned to be allowed.

Initially, the central government announced a land acquisition programme involving 115 sq. km. for the range and 45 sq. km. for the safety zone. The total 169 sq. km. area was claimed to affect a total population of 70,102 or 11,609 families. However, early this year, the area to be acquired was reduced. Rehabilitation officials told the team that this was done by reducing the scale of the proposed test range and shifting some of the proposed facilities to other sites.

The revised proposal now involves a total of 102 sq. km, 68 sq. km. for the range and 34 sq. km. for the safety zone. This is claimed to effect only 55 villages (42 for the range and 13 for the safety zone) 6484 families and a population of 40,793. The land to be acquired for residential and administrative complexes is claimed to involve no population displacement.

The movement leaders however viewed the revised schedule with suspicion, as they felt that once the NTR is set up, further land acquisition could be accomplished easily. They also saw the government's claim of the extent of population affected as a gross underestimate.

It is interesting to note that the survey sponsored by the government, on which the revised proposal is based, gives the number of affected people as 44,570 (7098 families). The population affected by the NTR, but not featuring in the rehabilitation programme, would thus number 3,777 (614 families).

Along with the revised land acquisition programme, the govern-

ment has also announced a programme "to rehabilitate displaced persons in well planned model villages with all facilities for comfortable living."

Each displaced family is to get ten decimals of homestead land with a built up house costing about Rs. 15,000 in "model Indira Villages" having 400 families each. The villages are to be equipped with all necessary socio-economic infrastructure ranging from all weather roads and street light to schools, banks, dispensaries and community centres.

The agricultural land to be acquired however will only be on the basis of cash compensation, fixed at the rate of about Rs. 50,000/- per acre. The Rehabilitation Officer, ADM Benudhar Misra at Balasore claimed that this amount had been fixed on the basis of an average of land prices of previous years, plus a percentage extra as "solation" or attachment fee. He said that shortage of agricultural land made it impossible to rehabilitate families economically by giving cultivable land on the principle of land for land.

Rehabilitation officials like Benudhar Misra in Balasore and Home Secretary Vinod Jha in Bhubaneswar admitted that the rehabilitation scheme could in no way compensate for the loss in economic opportunities of the displaced families. This is especially true in the case of betel vine cultivation. Though homestead land would be enough to set up an average sized paan *baraja*, the sandy soil type to be found in the area of the proposed NTR site, is not available in the areas where the villages are to be set up. It is only recently that rehabilitation officials are undertaking studies into betel vine cultivation and attempting to evaluate whether it can be integrated into the rehabilitation scheme.

A further complication on the question of land acquisition is the amount of government land in the area. Benudhar Misra claimed that 40% of the site area is government land. He argued that the agitation drew its militancy mainly from the desire of those whom he called "landlords" to protect their illegal encroachments on government land. When the team told him about the problem of the *amal nama patta* he expressed his ignorance. Home Secretary, Vinod Jha, dismissed the *amal nama pattas* as fake. However, the Additional Secretary, Rehabilitation and Land Acquisition, Bhubaneswar told the team that on the basis of revenue records even the people recorded as encroachers would be given a reduced

amount of compensation. This facility was however to be extended only to people with holding below 3 acres of rain-fed land. However, none of the officials concerned with land acquisition and rehabilitation could tell the team of the legal status of the *amal nama patta*. Therefore, a vast number of actual cultivators in the area are uncertain about their legal right to compensation.

The rehabilitation programme has also run into rough weather in the process of acquiring land for resettling displaced persons. A news report last year revealed that 1500 families in and around Baliapal block (15 kms. from the NTR site) would lose agricultural land if the government implemented its rehabilitation scheme to set up 'Model Indira Villages'. The question of legal ownership of this land to be acquired for rehabilitation has also emerged and on 5th April 1987 a rally of affected families was held under the leadership of the KGPC.

The government has promised job opportunities for a single member of each displaced family under direct as well as self-employment schemes. For this purpose industries are sought to be set up in and around Baliapal and Bhograi area to offer employment for semi-skilled and unskilled workers. The plans include setting up of a spinning mill, a Vanaspati factory, an oil mill, a leather unit, an agricultural implements factory and 4 other projects, all of which would be set up by IPICOL. These nine units are supposed to provide employment for 4000 displaced persons on a permanent basis. This is part of an overall strategy to construct industrial estates in Baliapal-Bhograi area so that "young entrepreneurs can set up small scale industries on their own," and also to attract outside investment. The NTR itself is to provide employment to 470 persons on a permanent basis in the first phase. However, both ensure only 4470 jobs against a promised total of 6484 jobs. There has been as yet no arrangement made to accommodate the rest, beyond empty promises. Besides, a semi-skilled, unskilled, Class III or class IV job per family of 6 (according to the brochure brought out by the rehabilitation office) is no compensation for the economic opportunities they will lose in Baliapal and Bhograi.

In fact, the projects would most likely put a seal to their destitution by creating an economic situation where their agricultural skills will be obsolete. Thus, both outside investment and labour will replace them economically, much as the NTR would physically.

The special scheme for 800 fisherfolk families only entails their resettlement in a model village at Khasafal. Again it is important to

note that the government sponsored survey puts the number of affected fisherfolk families at 1,116. The landless families are to be provided with two heads of milch cattle each, with the idea of setting up further dairy infrastructure.

The rehabilitation scheme is estimated to cost only Rs. 25 crores, involving construction works of about Rs. 10 crores and materials of Rs. 8 crores. A study undertaken by the movement states that the amount of loss in terms of value of land, crop, buildings, government property, village and small industries, labour loss and transport costs would be a staggering Rs. 412 crores.

When talking of rehabilitation programmes, the team discovered that the unrehabilitated and displaced persons from the Rourkela Steel Plant Project, the Hirakud and Rengali dam projects were very much in the agitationists' minds. In Orissa especially, rehabilitation is viewed with suspicion because of the tragic living history of such programmes both by the state and the central governments. It should be noted that subsistence farmers and agricultural labour are the hardest hit in the process of displacement, as not only do they not get adequate compensation in terms of economic opportunities, they are often totally ignored.

The agitationists have refused point blank to negotiate with the government on this aspect—not only because they think it a farce but also because it would mean that they had accepted the proposal for siting the NTR in Baliapal.

CONCLUSION

In Orissa, with the exception of the proposed NTR site, most of the development and military projects have been located in the inland districts. These districts, as we have noted above, are backward, having high poverty levels and a large proportion of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe population. The costs of these projects, till recently have largely been borne, by these people. The NTR, on the other hand is being located in the fertile coastal tract having a large proportion of upper caste population; an area which has produced most of Orissa's important political leaders. Baliapal, as we have seen,

is thickly populated, richly endowed, in addition to being a highly prosperous area with a thriving cash crop economy, in the form of *paan* cultivation. Perhaps, if the state's response to the movement is influenced by these factors, the foundation of much of the unity and militancy of the people's agitation also lies in these.

The uprooting and displacement of thousands before them, their history and experiences, are part of the consciousness of the people of these two blocks. Almost all the villagers who met the team, quoted without fail, the experience of those ousted by the Rengali dam, where, even today, more than eleven years later, 11,000 of the 22,000 are homeless.

In spite of the announced 'unprecedented rehabilitation programme,' officials admitted to the team, that the scheme cannot provide the kind of incomes accruing to the people in this area. It should be noted that the government is not compensating land for land. The agitationists are aware that there exists no avenue of alternative investments, that can ensure to them comparable incomes and are therefore not willing to negotiate on their demand that the government does not locate the project in these two blocks.

For agricultural labourers, both migrant and local, as well as fisherfolk and subsistence farmers, who do not cultivate *paan*, the NTR spells disaster. The rehabilitation programme specially does not acknowledge the existence of migrant agricultural labour and thus cannot compensate them for the loss of their earnings. The history of such programmes indicates that bereft of both home and employment most of them join the steady stream of people leaving Orissa, for other parts of the country. Like the process of development, rehabilitation, also benefits the rich and the powerful.

The government has been publicising the spin-off benefits of this project in the form of construction and employment opportunities. Construction jobs, for an hitherto agrarian population, usually means employment as unskilled contract workers with earnings below the minimum wages. Most of the other employment, emanating from the project need high skills and an education level, not found among the local population. The establishment of industrial estates does not in any way change the implications of this design, significantly. Thus, the process, can generate not only de-skilling of the population which gets alienated from the land, but also its economic marginalisation.

This scheme of planned rehabilitation of the population in pre-constructed concrete houses, in 'model' villages of 400 families

each, complete with all facilities for a 'comfortable life' shows scant regard for the social and cultural disruptions caused by displacement. Executive flats cannot create a society and a culture.

What makes the NTR different from other projects, is its military character. As already pointed out, the missile programme is an important element of India's long term defence plans, involving 'higher levels of technology'. A project of this nature, involves high expenditures and a diversion of scarce resources which the country can ill afford. It also increases, thereby, the political stake of the armed forces in the continuation of such fundings and such projects. In a context, where this country has seen increasing interventions by the army in civilian and administrative lives of its people, as in the North East and Punjab through the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, or in other parts of the country the establishment of such projects, as well as, diversion of scarce funds for it at the cost of the people has political implications for the democratic nature of India's polity and the aspirations of its people. It should also be remembered that the record of the countries in the sub-continent, and in fact the entire third world has not been particularly encouraging in this regard.

Democracy in India hangs on a tenuous thread. Of late, there has been a steady erosion of democratic institutions in the country. As the state become more authoritarian and less accountable, the threat looming in the shape of the proposed NTR, goes beyond the immediate area of its location. The issues involve the democratic rights of the people of the country.

APPENDIX

TABLE 1

	Caste-wise break-up of households			
	SC	ST	Others	Total
Baliapal	1130	273	4573	5976
Bhograi	269	42	811	1122
Total	1399	315	5384	7098

TABLE 2

Break up of households by size of land holding (in acres)

	Landless	0-1	1.01-2	2.01-5	Over 5	Total
Baliapal	104	2156	1104	1724	879	5967 ¹
Bhogral	17	405	206	315	179	1122
Total	121	2561	1310	2039	1058	7089

1. Total should be 5976, but a totalling of gram panchayat figures gives the above total

Note : There is no clue as to whether the above break-up is by land operated or land owned.

TABLE 3

Occupation-wise break-up of population by gram panchayat

	Agriculture	Labour	Business	Service	Fishing	Leather Cutting/ Begging
Nuagan	2986	699	338	169	775	48
Panchupalli	4763	1030	317	130	1016	7
Pratappur	745	73	155	254	...	1
Jagatipur	728	89	128	44	26	...
Ballikuti	402	254	216	97	27	1
Bolong	2204	478	...	54	448	...
Betagadia	7353	759	323	308	778	39
Dagara	6275	1003	450	203	1385	1
Baliapal	25456	4385	1927	1259	4455	97
	(67.7%)	(11.7%)	(5.1%)	(3.4%)	(11.9%)	0.3
Tukrihazira	3172	279	243	124	1967	1
Paralpur	1034	83	33	20	40	...
Bhogral	4206	362	276	144	2007	1
	(60.1%)	(5.2%)	(4.0%)	(2.1%)	(28.7%)	(...)

Source : all the above tables are based on the revised survey of Baliapal region carried out by the government

TABLE 4

Details of the site selected***Original and Revised proposals

	Original proposal			Revised proposal		
	Baliapal	Bhograi	Total	Baliapal	Bhograi	Total
No. of Villages	99	31	130	42	13	55
No. of Families	9902	1707	11609	5588	896	6484
Total Population	59566	10536	70102	34822	5971	40793
Total area (sq. kms.)	115	45	160	68	34	102
(in acres)	28750	11250	40000	17000	8500	25500

Source : Pamhlet issued by Information and Public Relations Department, Government of Orissa.

TABLE 5

Number of *paan barajas* by gram panchayats in the affected area

Gram panchayat	No of barajas
Nuagan	2000
Panchupatti	1500
Pratappur	200
Jagatipur	1500
Ballikuti	60
Bolong	N. A.
Betagadia	2500
Dagara	3200
Baliapal	10960
Tukrihazira	576
Paralpur	N. A.
Bhograi	576

Source : Survey on betel vine disease : 1987-88, District Agricultural office, Balasore District.

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People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR), known as the People's Union for Civil Liberties and Democratic Rights till 1980, is a Delhi based organisation. It has investigated violations of democratic rights of people all over the country. In recent years, PUDR has taken up issues of peasant movement in Bihar, encounter killing in Bastar, trade unions in Madhya Pradesh, tribals in Andhra Pradesh, Nagas in Manipur, communal riots in Delhi, police atrocities in Delhi and several others. It has fought several cases in the Supreme Court: on Asiatic labour in Delhi, encounter killings and police camps in Andhra Pradesh, police firing in Bihar, army atrocities in the north-east, and the 1986 carnage in Delhi. Among other cases it is presently fighting a case on the massacre by the PAC in Hashimpura in Meerut.

PUDR has also produced reports on black laws in Punjab and in the country as a whole, democratic rights of women, the forest policy, contract labour and other issues.

On Orissa it has earlier produced a report on the BALCO mines in Gandhamardhan.

In the context of the growing violation of rights of our people, PUDR's work can only be described as miniscule. PUDR appeals to the democratic sections of society to support its activities by participation, donations, and popularisation of its literature.

