

A day to remember - Coal Satyagraha

2nd October has a great significance in the history of India and World, because it is the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. The very same day people of *Gare* Village witnessed historic event where people from 18 villages came together to showcase their protest against proposed Coal mining in Gare IV/6 (Gare IV/6 is one of the 11 coal blocks in the Gare Palma area, the blocks have a consolidated area of 72 Km² and reserves estimated are to the tune of 2600 MT).

Participants from different parts of Coal mining region from 14 states came forward to join the '*Koyla Raila*' (Coal Rally) protest. More than 1600 of men, women and Children came forward in solidarity to fight against the Coal mining in their respective states to break the '*Coal Law*' (*KoylaKanoon*) on the eve of Mahatma's anniversary. Event was supported by mm&P (mines, minerals &PEOPLE) to bring the struggle groups, communities and affected families at one platform.

Koyla Raila is the outburst of the people resistance who are tirelessly fighting for their rights over the land from crony capitalism. *Gare Village* which comes under the *Tamnar tehsil* (sub-district) is the focal point of several companies for extracting Coal.



According to Rajesh Tripathi, member of non-profit Jan Chetna “First of all we don’t want to do mining and give our land for mining, we are happy with forest produce and agriculture but if government is not keen to adhere our demands then villagers first right to extract coal cannot be denied. The land owners have absolute rights over the land and in return we will pay the royalties to the government”.

Koyla Raila was historic for the energy shown by villagers to protect their ‘Water, Forest and Land’. People were filled with joy and eternal satisfaction on their face was noticeable when they got the first glimpse of Mr. Ramesh Agarwal who came to *Gare Village* after fourteen months. Mr. Agarwal is still recovering from the deadly attack, he can’t walk without support but his presence gave a strong inspiration to all and he was enthused to see so many people even after the Public hearing held on 25th September was stage managed by the company. People were very emotional; several eyes were full of tears when they got the opportunity to see him after long time. “I am thankful to everyone for their support towards me and I am willing to take another bullet without fearing for life to save our land” said Agarwal.



In the meeting, affected people revealed some shocking experiences. Participants from Jharkhand Shri Raju Rana revealed how public sector entities are making the mockery of system in Chatra district, where NTPC (National Thermal Power Corporation) destroyed all the land documents of the farmers with the help of government officers to avoid protest and make it difficult for the villagers to claim their rights over the land. They are also forcing people not to

oppose the project and threatening them with dire consequences. Shri Manoj Kundu from Jharkhand also shared the same anguish where he lost his land and now he is running pillar to post to get the compensation of his land from Jindal's. Mr. Kundu compared the atrocities of Jindal's similar to the colonial era. Everyone got shocked when Milan Fidan from Chhattisgarh stated that his brother got killed to protect his land being grabbed by the companies, unfortunately he lost his brother and land both in this struggle. Affected people from mining echoed the same scenario about vigorous land grabbing, deforestation and displacement without adequate R&R (Rehabilitation and Resettlement) policy.

One thing was very evident in this Koyla Raila that the situation in all over the country in coal mining areas is alarming, where thousands of people are displaced in the name of 'development'. Human rights abuses, ecological degradation, imbalance in biodiversity are common trends seen. People's experience in Raila not left an iota of doubt that coal mining industry is very gory for the nature.

In the meeting, everyone unanimously vowed to oppose new coal mines in their region. People showcased the potential that they are happy with agricultural and forest produce. Because coal mining has ruined thousands of families in the past and present condition of coal mining areas doesn't look convincing. Meenakshi from Angul, Orissa said "we have full rights over our land and we will not give single inch of land to companies. Indigenous tribes living in 5th schedule have its own culture and we will keep fighting to safeguard our rights, culture and forest." Affected communities also raised their concern that situation is very volatile in the ground and constant threat from companies cannot be ignored. A detailed Social and Environmental assessment of the impact due to coal mining in Tamnar and other coal areas in different states will be very useful to ensure the safety of people fighting on the grass root level.

There were various suggestions made, Shri. Ashok Chowdhary from Gujarat suggested mobilizing the tribal and deprived communities of the country and submitting memorandum to The Honorable President and The Governor to safeguard their rights and land. Shri K. V. Pratap who also came from mining areas of Andhra Pradesh took the example of Brazil where they are focusing more on alternatives like solar energy in compare to coal whereas in India, large proportion of coal production is meant for power generation. Situation of the people on the ground is pathetic and after huge investment in power plant, still more than half of Indian population is forced to live in darkness.

According to Dr. R Sreedhar, Chairperson, mm&P "We have to bring youth together to strengthen our struggles against the companies (violators), because they are being easily lured by the company's. Meanwhile we have to keep fighting and active in our approach to protect

our land. He further made reference to landmark judgment of Supreme Court, which says that “Ownerships of Land beneath the soil vest with the land owner”.

mm&P urges the government to bring a moratorium on Greenfield mining without any further delay. mm&P’s mining charter provides for a path to clean up mining, restitute environment and compensation for losses. Institutions like Ministry of Coal, Ministry of Environment and Forest terribly failed to implement mining policy in the country. Coal Scam, CAG reports indicate the complete failure of the system to enforce the law into reality. Coal Satyagraha will act as Panacea to mobilize people and make them stand united against Coal mining.



Coal Companies whether public or private share the same ruthless approach to degrade the social fabrics of the country for “Black Diamond”.

In 1930, Gandhi’s *Salt Satyagraha* (Salt March) in Colonial India had shaken the entire structure of British authority. It was remarkable achievement before Independence with an idea to bring people together and make them united with the help of non-violence. Similarly, ‘*Janta*’ (People) at Coal Raila in Garegaon pledged to follow footsteps of the “Mahatma” to campaign against coal mining and struggle against *Jal* (water), *Jungle* (forest) and *Jameen* (land) in other parts of country to end the age of coal.

Certainly, Coal Satyagraha will boost the morale of people's resistance and belief that local economy is best managed by the traditional practices with diversification of resource utilization and using appropriate technologies for enhancing livelihoods.

Finally, slogan from the Koyla Raila will be the best way to summarize the message of People *"Koyla Nahi Anaaj Chaiye, Raakh Nahi Roti Chaiye"* (We need Grains not Coal, We need bread not ash)


