

Children's voice on Protest in proposed POSCO area

P Sainath, Rural Affairs, Rural Affairs Editor of 'The Hindu', after visiting the propped POSCO area quoted a 10 year old child Rakesh Bardhan in Gobindpur village in his article "Never let schools interfere in your education" (July 19, 2011) saying "They teach us the story of Baji Rout, the 13 year old boatman and legendary Oriya hero shot dead by British when he refused to ferry them across the river in pursuit of freedom fighters. They say us that we should emulate him and the way he stood up his homeland. But when we stand for ours, they react badly"

In the stand off between the police and people in Gobindpur village under Dhinkia Panchayat of Jagatsingpur district where POSCO project is proposed, the children were seen prostrating in first half of June 2011 when administration attempted to enter Gobindpur after completing acquisition work in Gadkujang and Nuagaon Gram Panchayats to and over to POSCO company. The participation by the children continues even now (along with elders), which literally has prevented the mighty police force to enter to the area and acquire land. This sparked controversy and debate on whether children should take part in such Dharanas. On one hand the villagers and anti-POSCO outfit POSCO Pratirodha Sangram Samiti (PPSS) asserted that it's perfectly alright for the children to protest as their future will be crushed with POSCO project and the children take part voluntarily, the state government cried foul of child rights violation. It even went to the extent of seeking a report from the district administration on the issue.

While the crocodile tears of the state government toward protecting child rights is well understood, more so thousands of Odia migrant children sweat out in the brick kilns Hyderabad and Chennai, hundreds young Odia girls are working in unsafe environment as domestic workers in Delhi, Gudgaon and other cities and when lakhs of children are found working in hotels, Dhabas, commercial establishments, in private houses as domestic servants, as social activists, we attempted to find out what the children have on say on the issue. To know if the children understood the issue and went to the protest or are simply persuaded to be there.

We spoke to the children individually and in groups to ascertain to the issue. The list of the children we spoke to and their photograph is given. Here is what the children have to say.

What Children have to say :



Jagannath Das says "I dream to be an engineer. My family currently has sufficient income and we are able to save money for my future requirement of study. Once POSCO project is built here, our livelihood will be destabilized. And none knows what will happen to my study. Why should I end up becoming a labourer for POSCO Company?"

Jaganatha Das, S/O- Bangale Das and Ms Nehane Das
Male- 11, 6th class , Maa Fulakhai U.P school,
Vill-Patana, Dhinkia GP, Jagatsingpur district, Odisha

Jitendra Dalai says "We will lose our schools and play ground surrounded by natural forest once POSCO company work starts"

Jitendra Dalai, S/O-Jogendra Dalai and Ms Tukune Dalai, Male-12, 7th class, Maa Fulakhai U.P. school,
Vill-Patana, Dhinkia GP, Jagatsingpur district, Odisha



Jharana Rout says "Due to possible environmental pollution, we will face severe health related problems .We will loose the beautiful natural surroundings like rivers, forest if POSCO project comes up"



Jharana Rout, D/O-Sisir Rout and Ms Charulata Rout
Female-10, Gobindpur U.P. school, Vill-Gobindpur,
Dhikia GP, Jagatsingpur district, Odisha

The children sitting in the group were responding to my queries and said:

“We don’t want to lose the traditional livelihood based on betel, fish and paddy (Pana, Mina, Dhaana), rich cultural practices and most importantly our homeland.

In first week of June 2011, police has severely beaten the families members of Basudav Behera of Noliasahi village under Gada Kujang Panchayat including 5 children. They were arrested and detained for one day in the police station. Last year also in Balitutha, the police beat our parents and burnt houses in the area. We have been seeing this inhuman attack by police on our people. As the young soldiers we are determined not to give up our resources and fight till the POSCO withdraw from our area. This is our motherland. How can government take this from us with force? Why government is showing so much favour to a foreign company? This government is behaving like a British government to us.

Why the government allots nearby schools to the policemen to give shelter for last six years? This seriously hampers our education and creates a fearful atmosphere among us. We strongly demand to immediately vacate the police from our school buildings.”

To keep their determination alive and keep they zeal sustained in their fight to protect their homeland, the children sing the chorus “Jami Chhadiba nahi re bhai, Gaan Chhadiba nahin...Bidesi Company Asichi madi Gaan ku neba pain...” (We will not leave our land and village...the foreign company has come to take our land and village)

List of other children in the group who responded:

	
Laky Palai, D/O-Kalu Palai, and Ms Rinu Palai , Female-8, 4th class, Patanahata primary school , Vill-Patana, Dhikia GP, Jagatsingpur district, Odisha	Dhananjaya Mohanty, S/O-Balaram Mohanty and Ms Anjana Mohanty, Male-11, 6 th class, Maa Fulakhai U.P. school, Vill-Patana, Dhinkia GP, Jagatsingpur district, Odisha



Hemanta Dash, S/O-Ajaya Das and Baidhahi Das; Male -11, 6th class, Maa Fulakhai U.P. school, Vill-Patana, Dhinkia GP, Jagatsingpur district, Odisha



Satyabrata Dash, S/O- Sarbaswara Dash and Arati Dash . Male-9, 4th class, Patanahata primary school , Vill-Patana, Dhikia GP, Jagatsingpur district, Odisha



Swanaprabha Das, D/O-Kangali Das and Nehate Das, Female-9, Patanahata primary school , Vill-Patana, Dhikia GP, Jagatsingpur district, Odisha



Sandhyarani Das, D/O-Krusna Das and Anupama Das , Female-14, 7th class Gobindpur primary school, Vill- Gobindpur, Dhinkia GP, Jagatsingpur district, Odisha



Gyanandra Dash, D/O- Subhash Dash and Ms Sujata Dash, Male-10, Patanahata primary school , Vill-Patana, Dhikia GP, Jagatsingpur district, Odisha



Santosh Dalai, S/O- Prabhat Dalai and Male-7, 2nd class Patanahata primary school , Vill-Patana, Dhikia GP, Jagatsingpur district, Odisha



Somanatha Dalai, S/O- Kalu Dalai and Rinu Dalai , Male-6, 2nd class, Patanahata primary school , Vill-Patana, Dhikia GP, Jagatsingpur district, Odisha



Pabitra Das , S/O- Rabindra Das and Sandhyaran Das, Female-11, 6th class, Maa Fulakhai U.P. school, Vill-Patana, Dhinkia GP, Jagatsingpur district, Odisha

Our observation:

While very small children are coming to the spot with their mothers who are participating in the Dharanas, the elder children even from class 2 onward have developed the understanding of what they are going to lose in case the company comes. They have been witnessing the struggle by their parents and the torture by the police. There is no denying of the fact that it has ignited the young minds with vengeance and determination. When they feel that any time their parents may be beaten up and house may be burnt, their love to their parents and homeland has taken a shape of a determined struggle. They have been grown up in the environment where they have seen and learnt the struggle knowing well that that's their life –If they do not struggle, they will be thrown out of their land. That's been part of their socialization process. They are left with the options of "DO or Die" of which the children have preferred to "Fight and Live" than Die!

Document prepared by Sandeep Patnaik, Researcher and Social Activist, and Jyotiprakash Das , Social Activist. July, 2011