

# NETARHAT

## *In the Line of Fire*

नेतरहाट पायलट प्रोजेक्ट  
रद्द करो ।

सेना का आदर  
करते हैं किंतु  
फायरिंग का नहीं

People's Union for Democratic Rights  
Delhi  
October 1994

अगर देश की सुरक्षा यही होती है  
कि बेज़मीरी जिन्दगी के लिए शर्त बन जाए  
आंख की पुतली में 'हां' के अलावा कोई भी शब्द  
अश्लील हो  
और मन बदकार फलों के सामने दंडवत झुका रहे  
तो हमें देश की सुरक्षा से खतरा है।

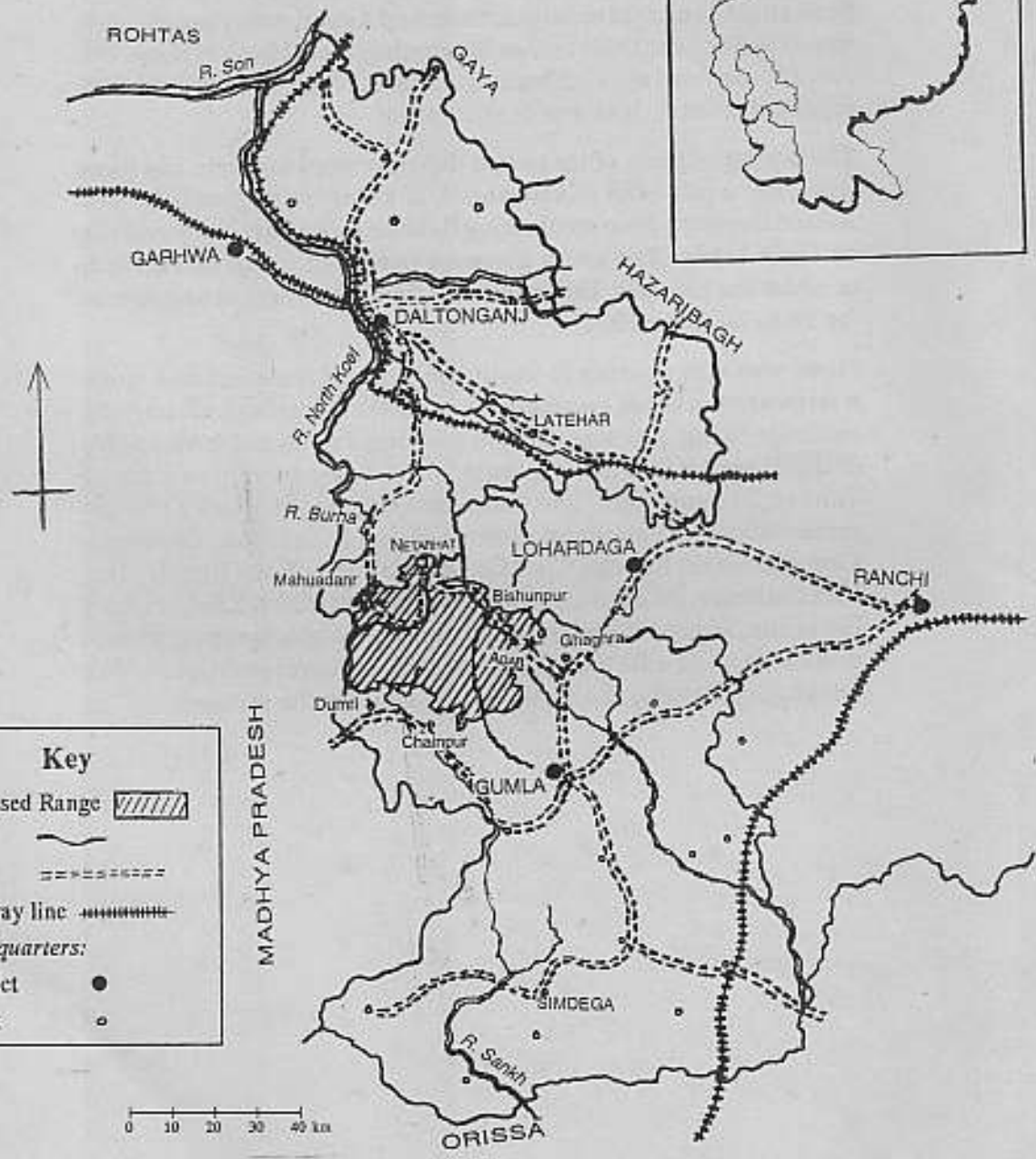
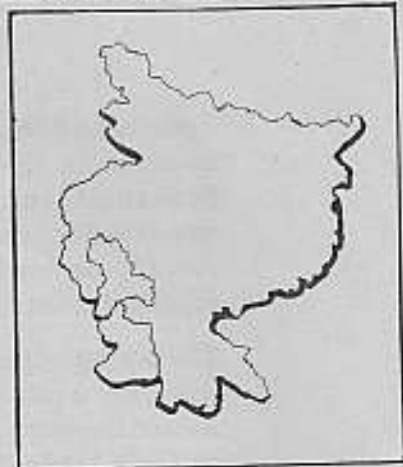
— अवतार सिंह 'पाश'

Palamu and Gumla districts of Bihar were in the news a year ago as areas in the grip of acute drought and famine conditions. Suffering the second consecutive drought year, many people were forced to flee from their homes in search of food. Many of those who stayed, survived on wild fruits and roots. Nearly a hundred were reported to have died due to starvation.

The border regions of these two districts were again in the news this year when tens of thousands of villagers successfully prevented the army from conducting field firing and artillery practice on their lands. The army however persisted in its attempts to conduct the practice. Dates for field firing were again announced for 28 to 30 June 1994.

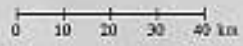
News was also pouring in about the plans of the army to acquire a large area in these two districts to create a permanent range for artillery firing practice. People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) sent a fact finding team which toured the area from 22 June to 26 June 1994. The team interviewed the Block Development Officer, Mahuadanr, Circle Officer, Bishunpur, Divisional Commissioner, Ranchi, Civil Compensation Officer, Ranchi, District Collector, Palamu and the spokesperson for the 23rd Artillery Battalion, Dipatoli, Ranchi. The team also met a large number of people from the affected villages as well as representatives of Jan Sangharsh Samiti, the organisation leading the struggle.

# PALAMU & GUMLA



**Key**

- Proposed Range
- River
- Road
- Railway line
- Headquarters:
- District
- Block



From the district headquarters at Daltonganj a road runs south for nearly 50 kilometres before it enters the hilly forested tracts within which is situated the Betla National Park. Another 40 kilometres and the meandering hill road enters a wide bowl shaped valley, with a high hill range around it. The rim of the bowl forms the watershed from which dozens of rivulets arise. These join together to form the Burha river, one of the major tributaries of the North Koel. The lands within this bowl comprise the areas of the former Chhechhari estate.

The block headquarters of Mahuadani is located in the valley, towards the south eastern end of the bowl. At the opposite end among the highest hills is situated the hill resort of Netarhat. Both these urban settlements fall within the proposed acquisition. Netarhat is the site for the cantonment.

Further south from Mahuadani the road climbs to the top of the bowl and runs along the edge for a distance of 30 kilometres to Netarhat. Towards the south of this road, tops of the hills spread out into wide undulating plateaus. A few kilometres before Netarhat one road branches off to Ranchi. At this crossing are situated the villages of Jokipokhar and Tutwapani, the place where tens of thousands of people gathered to prevent the army from conducting field firing practice.

The road towards Ranchi climbs down sharply to enter the valley of the Phuljhar river, another tributary of the North Koel. In this valley are situated the block headquarters of Bishunpur and a small settlement of Adar, a picturesque pass with higher hills on both sides marking the division between the catchment areas of the North Koel and the South Koel rivers. Adar is another site for a proposed cantonment.

The road then carries on till Ghaghra and 30 kilometres further to the district headquarters of Gumla. One road from Gumla takes a circuitous route around the hills and into the valley of the Sankh river to reach the block headquarters of Chainpur and Dumri. The area enclosed by this road route from Mahuadani to Dumri comprises the area of the former zamindaris of Barwe.

The regions of Chhechhari and Barwe together form the area facing acquisition under the Netarhat Pilot Project for the setting up of a field firing range of the Indian army.



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# Introduction

Going eastwards from the district headquarters of Gumla, the hill region presents itself as a giant wall running from north to south. A similar wall of hills, curved in this case, is encountered when one travels south from the district headquarters of Palamu at Daltonganj. Forming the south western tip of the state of Bihar, this hilly tract which is the highest part of the Chhotanagpur plateau extends some distance into the neighbouring Sarguja district of Madhya Pradesh. Administratively the area lies in Mahuadanr block of Palamu district, and Bishunpur, Ghaghra, Dumri, Gumla and Chainpur blocks of Gumla district, which was carved out of Ranchi district in 1981.

The tops of the hills and spurs here are flat, affording wide areas for agriculture, known as *pat* lands. On the widest and highest *pat* area is situated the town of Netarhat, famous both for the prestigious 'model' government school and as a hill resort. No other major urban centres are located here. Small urban centres serve as locations of weekly markets, administrative offices, and residence for traders, moneylenders, absentee landowners and government employees. The vast ru-

ral and forest areas surrounding these tiny urban centres are the home of a large mix of tribal communities — Oraon, Munda, Birjia, Birhor, Gond, Gorait, Kharwar, Korwa, Ho, Asur, Parhajays, and Nagesia.

Oraon and Munda are the dominant tribes, both numerically as well as politically. Practising settled agriculture for many centuries, the Oraon are among the first to have started the use of the plough. At the other end of the scale are minor tribal groups such as the Asur, Birjia and Birhor. Practicing shifting agriculture till as late as the 1960s, these communities are numerically the smallest. The Asur for instance stand at barely 5000 in number, all of whom live in this group of hills and plateaus.

Despite the geographic, economic and cultural similarities, the dividing boundary of the present day districts of Palamu and Gumla has existed for a long time in history. The northern portion falling in Palamu, mainly comprising the Chhechhari estate, was controlled by Kharwar tribal chiefs, moneylenders and traders. The southern region in Gumla district encompassing Barwe and its surrounding estates came under the Munda Raja of Chhotanagpur. The Mughal conquest in 1585 did not have much impact but for the exaction of a small annual tribute. The hilly terrain successfully limited the power of the Mughal empire.

However the political structure in Chhotanagpur was undergoing rapid changes. The Raja hitherto the first among equals among the Munda and Oraon *manki* and *parihar* (head of a group of villages) arrogated to himself the powers of a chieftain. Taxation, ceremonial contributions and other exactions from the tribal peasants were becoming a permanent feature. The *mankis* below the Raja too were becoming independent zamindars. Alliances and intermarriages with Rajput and Brahmin estate owners had begun

## Tribal Population

1. India	8.01
2. Bihar state	7.66
3. Palamu district	18.08
4. <i>Mahuadanr block</i>	79.35
5. Gumla district	70.80
6. <i>Gumla block</i>	57.54
7. <i>Ghaghra block</i>	76.73
8. <i>Dumri block</i>	82.05
9. <i>Chainpur block</i>	83.23
10. <i>Bishunpur block</i>	90.79

Source: Census of India, 1991

Note: All figures in percentages.

in the early 17th century. To consolidate his position the Raja had also settled outsiders.

In 1765 Chhotanagpur passed into the hands of the East India Company. But by then many of the zamindars had become independent of the Raja thus making it impossible for the Raja to pay the revenue fixed by the East India Company. Thus police system was introduced in 1809 and outsiders from different communities and castes - Sikhs, Muslims, and Sahus - were settled. Dealing both in commodities and credit, these outsiders were to leave their indelible mark on the history of Chhotanagpur.

The *patti* or a small group of villages was the smallest unit in the collection of revenue. The headman was responsible for the collection. But the terms of the transactions in commodities and credit ultimately passed the right to revenue collection into the hands of the outsiders. The self cultivators were overnight transformed into tenants. The culmination of this process was the Kol insurrection in 1831. It was the first such movement in which all the major tribal communities participated. All outsiders including the zamindars fled from the area. But after the movement was militarily suppressed a year later, the outsiders came back. Increases in rents and other collections followed. The latter half of the 19th century again witnessed large scale movements with peasants refusing to pay rents.

The colonial administration was thus forced to make certain guidelines to check the exorbitant rents and levies being collected by the zamindars and lesser intermediaries. In some areas long distances and inaccessible terrain made implementation of such guidelines difficult. For instance in the zamindari of Barwe near Gumla, alienation of lands, increases in rents and the concomitant unrest carried on. Hence in 1902 a separate subdivision with its headquarters at Gumla was created.

But in the absence of rights of tenants

over their holdings, lands were continuously passing into the hands of the moneylenders. This process from indebtedness to bondage constituted the basis for the outbreak of famine of 1908. The Chhotanagpur Tenancy Act was promulgated in the same year. Designed as a palliative, it did little nothing to ameliorate the suffering of the tribals. Anyway it was nearly half a century later in 1965 that the Act was amended to prevent alienation of tribal land. Some temporary arrangements however were made to provide credit to tribals on easy terms.

The zamindar, moneylender, trader and colonial rule in this predominantly tribal region effectively ruled out any developments in agriculture. Whereas in the plain areas the traditional systems of irrigation were undermined after the abolition of zamindari in the 1950s, the hill areas suffered a similar fate with the increasing exploitation of forests. Dense sal forests were auctioned out to contractors by the forest departments at Daltonganj and Ranchi. On the other hand large areas were carved out as sanctuaries — first the Betla National Park and later two others. The minor tribal communities practicing shifting cultivation were settled in permanent villages in the early seventies.

The sum total of these processes was a decrease in peoples' access to forests for daily needs. Apart from fuelwood, the tribal communities collect from the forest, kand, mool, piyar, sal seeds and chirangi seeds both for their own use and for sale. This has been limited by forest regulations. By the sixties lack of availability of bamboo and sal killed the basket weaving of the Birhor and the iron smelting of the Asur. The fall in traditional occupations forced an increased dependence on agriculture. Cultivable lands however had suffered through the commercial destruction of forests. Valuable top soil had been lost and ground water resources destroyed.

The hill region however is the source of innumerable streams and rivulets that feed



## Land and Its Use

	Forest	Cultivated	Irrigated
<i>Palamu District</i>			
Mahuadanr	64.07	23.30	7.62
<i>Gumla District</i>			
Gumla	11.43	70.29	3.79
Ghaghra	22.42	64.73	2.66
Dumri	28.26	52.50	1.08
Chainpur	36.20	52.23	6.57
Bishunpur	56.98	35.40	3.09

*Note:* Forest and cultivated land figures are percentages of total land. Irrigated lands are given as percentage of cultivated land.

*Source:* Census of India, 1981

the North Koel, South Koel and Sankh rivers. These are the major source of water for the districts of Palamu, Gumla, and parts of northern Orissa. Yet water is scarce in the uplands and streams run dry in the summer months. For the villages along the *pat* areas potable water has to be fetched from a distance of a few kilometres. Lower down in the valley areas drinking water is more easily available but crops in both the areas are more or less dependent on the rain. Between two to six percent of the cultivated land is irrigated. Wells account for nearly half of this irrigation and other 'traditional' sources for another one third. This is despite the fact that large sums of money flow into this region in the name of drought relief. Check dams constructed at some places are largely ineffective. The Divisional Commissioner at Ranchi informed the team that plans are afoot regarding an integrated watershed management scheme.

Agriculture thus remains wholly dependent on the rains. Maize is the principal crop which is sown during the monsoon. Though rice is also grown, its cultivation is limited to river valley areas. More important are coarse cereals such as madua and gundli. Lack of irrigation facilities and underdeveloped techniques have meant that agricultural

productivity is low and has remained stagnant. Thus each peasant family requires large areas even for bare subsistence needs. However output has declined over the decades. A pointer towards a possible fall in the cultivated area.

An average holding for a peasant family is around ten acres in the *pat* lands. This is also the size of most holdings. Few families hold upto 40 acres of land. A small section who are landless or have small holdings work on the land of others. Adh batai is the most common system where the lessee provides the seed, plough and all other inputs and shares half the produce with the owner. Bonded labour which was in use till a decade ago on lands of outsiders has been steadily declining. Agricultural labour however accounts for only 7.5 percent of the total working population. An overwhelming 84 percent are cultivators.

A single crop is what the land provides. Barely 0.2 percent of the land supports a second crop. Rearing pigs, chickens, and goats, and collection of minor forest produce are other activities taken up by the family. The earnings from such activities can be gauged from the prices paid to the tribals in tendu leaf collection which are presently Rs. 8 per hundred bundles. (The same fetches upto Rs. 75 in

Telengana and Vidarbha regions due to struggles led by Marxist-Leninist groups.) However tendu leaf collection is not a major activity. Bauxite mines along the *pat* areas provide some employment. While the government fixed minimum daily wage presently stands at Rs. 30 the wages in the mines are Rs. 22 for men and Rs. 17 for women. But this is for the regular workers. Others seeking temporary work are paid on piece rate basis where earnings are highly unpredictable (See Box: *Bauxite Mining*). Though wages in governmental work are presently Rs. 24.50 such work is scarce.

Thus given the subsistence nature of single cropping agriculture, the choice of crops, unirrigated lands and lack of other productive employment, a small shortfall in rainfall plays havoc with the lives of the people. Involvement with the market is minimal and cash is scarce. The Sahu moneylender has for long been the dependable source of credit. The interest per season on a loan of Rs. 100 works out to Rs. 50. Loans taken at such rates grow with every passing season. Continued indebtedness leads to alienation of lands and eventually to debt bondage. This has been the story now for the past century, not only for this hill

### Bauxite Mining

Spread over 4000 square kilometres in the hill areas of Gumla and South Palamu are the most important deposits of bauxite in India. Mining was first conducted here in 1933. But commercial exploitation of bauxite started only after 1962 when the Hindustan Aluminium Company Ltd. (HINDALCO) was set up by the Birlas at Renukoot in Sonbhadra district of Uttar Pradesh close to the border with Palamu.

Supplying ore for HINDALCO are numerous mines throughout the *pat* areas operated by small contractors. Each of these mines employ less than 20 regular workers. Workers are called regular only in comparison to others who neither have work on a regular basis nor a fixed daily wage. The services are not regular in any other sense. Workers injured in accidents at the mines are simply laid off without any compensation.

Birlas also directly operate bauxite mines at Hazaribagh in Bihar and at Amarkantak in Madhya Pradesh. In 1985-86 Birlas obtained two leases for mining bauxite at the villages of Orsa (400 acres) and Chiro (700 acres) in Mahuadanr block of Palamu. This region bordering Sarguja district of Madhya Pradesh is inhabited by the Nagesia tribe. The story of these leases is a telling comment on the process of land acquisition and compensation.

Immediately after obtaining the leases Birlas started the work on digging. A substantial portion of the land was *gair mazarua* which was being cultivated by the people for a long time. Still the people had received no prior notice of such a lease. Digging work had been in progress for a few days when the residents forcibly drove the workers away from the lands. The villagers then met the Birla representatives, District Collector of Palamu and the Divisional Commissioner of Ranchi.

Somewhere in this process the villagers discovered a document that bore thumb impressions and signatures of people from the two villages and stated that the undersigned have no objection to mining being carried out on their lands. The undersigned however included many residents of the village who had died a long time ago. The administration conducted an inquiry. Forgery was confirmed.

region but also for the entire Chhotanagpur and Palamu.

Through the 19th and early 20th centuries, these pressing agrarian issues had led to the bloody struggles and uprisings. Lessons had also been learnt. The Mission Churches played a significant role in creating rural credit facilities. Chhotanagpur Christian Co-operative Bank was set up by the Lutheran Church before 1872 which remained operative till the 1950s. Registered in 1909, the Roman Catholic Co-operative Credit Society continues to the present. In fact it was this exemplary role of the Christian missions that gave them a new lease of life after the Sardar movement had broken away from the missions and attempted to set up its own church. Church apart, most villages today attempt to raise loans within the village itself. Governmental provisions for credit are however totally absent.

The Sahus have not limited their activities to trade and usury. For instance, Sahu

families residing in Mahusdanr town have large landholdings in Chiro village. Bonded labour worked these lands till a decade ago. The village mukhia was a Sahu who cornered all the developmental funds. In 1989 mobilisation of people took place against takeover of village lands for mining. This movement also challenged the power of the Sahus. In response the Sahus organised attacks by hooligans and had false cases foisted on the activists. But the movement did succeed in removing the mukhia. Development funds are now in the control of a village committee.

It is through these unknown and un-sung struggles that the people are slowly and resolutely creating the conditions for a life with dignity. State policies have done little in this regard. The plans of the government to create a field firing range over 1471 square kilometres of this hilly terrain today threatens to snatch away the very basis of their existence.

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## Firing Practice and the Present Impasse

The Netarhat group of hills were first used as an artillery practice range in 1956. For this purpose the area was notified under the Manoeuvres, Field Firing and Artillery Practice Act, 1938. This notification has been continuously renewed now for the last 37 years. On an average firing practice has been conducted thrice a year.

This artillery firing practice entails movement of the army from its cantonment at Namkun near Ranchi in large numbers along with field guns and ammunition. Once close to the area from which firing is to be conducted, the trucks leave the road and travel over the *pat* lands and set up a camp there. Meanwhile targets are fixed at another site many kilometres away barely visible along the horizon. This site again comprising of *pat* lands is called the impact area. After setting up the

camp, firing is conducted for two to three days. Since the ammunition fired consists of shells containing explosives, villages close to the impact area as well as those between the firing and impact sites are required to shift temporarily for the period of the firing.

This process of firing practice went on smoothly for many years. The tribal communities residing on the lands are among the most socially marginalised. Large scale movement of the army was sufficiently intimidating to force people to leave the villages. The older people remember the time when firing practice had just begun: massive trucks moving across the lands, then firing and shells hitting the ground creating large pits and sending reverberations through the hills. The people would flee from the nearby villages.



## Village Sakhuapani

75/24 mm howitzers, 105 mm field guns and 120 mm mortars are set up at the firing sites near Banstoli or Jokipokhar, both villages situated close to the highway joining Netarhat with Mahuadanr. The guns rain shell after shell for most of the day and sometimes even through the night. The shells go up to a height of 23,000 feet, the height of the lofty Himalayan peaks. These shells then fall on the impact sites 12 to 15 kilometres away close to the villages of Sakhuapani, Khalripat or Polpolpat in Bishunpur block.

This takes place while the villages have been cleared and the residents along with their livestock spend a day or even a night in the forest in the valley, and return after the firing has ended. The inhabitants of the pat lands are mainly Asur.

Sakhuapani has 45 Asur and three Oraon families. All live in kuccha houses. The Tribal Welfare Department (TWD) runs a co-educational high school situated in the village. There is also a boys hostel. Under the Tribal Sub Plan, funds are allocated for setting up such hostels (Ashram Chattravas) in which tribal students are given free food and lodging as educational incentives. At Chorpat, the TWD also runs a girls residential school which will become a high school from next year. But these educational facilities have no meaning for the female children of the village. For few girls ever get sent to school. Boys fare somewhat better. But even so, only 50% manage to get to 7th or 8th class. As to adults very few are literate. They negotiate the world of contractors, traders, government and army officials with thumb impressions. As will most of the next generation from this village.

Though the Gurdari river flows close to the village, there is acute water shortage both for household and for cultivation needs. For this small river runs dry in summer. Once a lone government official did come to bore a well. The attempt failed as no water came out. The villagers were told further attempts would be made. But no one came again.

Given the lack of water, attempts to raise wheat have failed. The principal crop is maize, sown in June-July. Those who have uneconomical landholdings lease in land for share cropping (adh-bata). Some get seasonal work as agriculture labour for which the daily wage is 3 kg of grain. Agriculture, their principal means of livelihood, involves arduous labour and uncertain yields. For many, it hardly yields enough for their own needs. So they have to buy foodgrains. During drought years the hardship gets intensified. The villagers have to resort to loans from the local Sahu trader-moneylenders at exorbitant interest rates. The villagers have a few limited rights to the Sumarpat forest. They can collect minor forest produce as well as firewood. They sell the firewood at the Dumerpat haaf (market) to Sahu traders. There is not much tendu leaf. But what is collected has to be sold to contractors at miserable rates. Only a few get work at the nearby bauxite mines. Government projects provide some casual work. The seasonal occupations of field and forest, the irregular casual labour, the grossly unequal exchanges in the market, all these structure and inform the everyday lives of the people.

In such lives and living the army has made its far from benign presence felt. Shells and bombs sometimes fall in the fields. Whenever firing is scheduled, the SHO from Bishunpur police station, under which the village falls, comes to tell the villagers to evacuate. They move to Dumerpat and the forest. The last firing took place in October 1993. Even the paltry compensation of two rupees per adult was not paid till several months later, in June 1994. Small wonder that the last two times when firing notices were served, villagers of Sakhuapani fully participated in the dharnas to prevent the firing from taking place.

A footnote. Bishunpur block has the distinction of being the sole residing area of the Asur tribal community. The 1981 census indicates that the Asur is one of the tribes threatened by extinction. Obviously, under the Tribal Welfare Department they are to be protected from this fate. But under the Defence plans they are to be evicted from their very lands. A cruel but familiar irony.



The Manoeuvres, Field Firing and Artillery Practice Act empowers the state government to allow the army to use a certain area for such purpose. But the Act also provides a set of guidelines to be followed whenever field firing is to be conducted. Under this Act an area is made available for a definite time span through a notification in the official gazette [S.9(1)]. Other notifications are required from time to time to authorise the carrying out of field firing and artillery practice in the entire or part of the area already notified [S.9(2)]. At least two months prior to such authorisation, notice of such an intention is required. Apart from publication in the local gazette, it must be published in a local language newspaper, announced through beating of drums and notices must be pasted at prominent places in the locality [S.9(3)]. The same is to be repeated a week before the authorisation period. That such provisions have in fact been carried out need verification by one headman and two other literate members of the area [S.9(4)]. The Officer Commanding the forces engaged in firing practice can declare any area as danger zone and the District Collector is to prohibit entry and secure removal of all persons and domestic animals from such area [S.10(2)].

Expenses incurred to ensure protection of life, property, rights and privileges and compensation for damages to life and property as well as interference with rights and privileges are to be paid from the defence estimates [S.5]. The District Collector is to depute Revenue Officers to accompany the forces to determine the amount of compensation [S.6(1)]. The Revenue Officer is to consider all claims, determine the compensation and disburse it on the spot [S.6(2)]. A dissatisfied claimant can appeal within 15 days after giving notice to the Revenue Officer [S.6(4)]. A commission headed by the District Collector is to decide such appeals and its decision is final without any further legal recourse. In addition compensation is to be paid for exclusion or removal of people and domestic animals be-

fore such exclusion/removal is affected. This includes loss of employment and deterioration of crops resulting from such exclusion. [S.11]

The implementation of the Act, however, is a different story. Take for example the recent notification in the Bihar Gazette (S.O. 761) issued on 25 November 1991. 66 villages of Gumla and 23 of Palamu were notified for 10 years commencing on 12 May 1992. The same day the notification of intent to authorise firing was issued for a period of five years in one go, thus denying the right to people to be given a two month notice before each firing. This notification of intent however was not even known to the villagers till the gazette was discovered late in 1993. Before commencement of firing the army commanding officer sends a notice to the concerned District Collectors regarding removal of all people from certain specified villages, confining inhabitants of other villages to their houses, and restraining villagers from entering the areas specified above. Such a notification for a firing practice from 28 to 30 June 1994 had just been obtained by the Jan Sangharsh Samiti activists when the PUDR team met them. The Collectors concerned passed this notice to the Block level officers. The people to be affected by the firing however had no intimation of it when the team met them on 24-25 June. This the villagers consider normal. In this way the entire procedure prescribed by law is collapsed into a single notice given a day or two before the firing.

What happens next? This the team learnt from people at Sakhupani village. On getting news of field firing, the entire village starts making arrangements to leave. This includes shifting newborn children, pregnant women, the aged and ill people. No help ever comes from the district authorities. Moreover shifting all the domestic animals and fowl is an impossible task. Thus during the firing many animals run away and are lost. The army trucks destroy all that comes in their way when they move across the fields. And

## Looking Back: The Itarsi Proof Range

In 1972 one of the largest of the 93 testing ranges in the country was set up in Kesla block, Hoshangabad (M.P.). Compared to the projected Netarhat firing range, it would now appear very modest in size and the population affected. That is, only 117 sq. km. area and 23 evacuated villages. The affected 1,000 Kurku tribal families were resettled in 36 villages along the perimeter of the range. All seemed fine. Till a decade later, when newspaper reports drew public attention to the ghastly deaths taking place. Deaths in pursuit of a dangerous occupation. Namely, collection of high grade metal scrap from the explosives fired for testing which is sold to traders and transported to Moradabad, Aligarh, Indore and Nagpur. A Public Interest Litigation (PIL) was filed based on the media reports (Sudip Mazumdar vs State of Madhya Pradesh, W.P.C.R. No. 1420 of 1982). Of which more later.

In 1992 a PUDR team visited Raja Marihar, one of the resettled villages on the outskirts of the range. The village consisted of a row of dwellings along a short kuccha road leading to the fields. The road gets washed away during the rains. There is no electricity. A hand pump had been recently installed in the courtyard of the two room primary school. But the village faces acute scarcity of water for cultivation. This despite the fact that the Tawa dam reservoir is located close by. The area suffers from recurrent droughts and numerous agitations for water have taken place. The authorities routinely make promises and plans. But nothing happens.

On their small plots of land villagers grow *kodun* and *kutki*, coarse grains which form their staple food. Only a single crop is possible. And this is often destroyed by marauding wild pigs which are protected by the Wild Life (Protection) Act 1972. The Act makes it illegal to kill pigs. The adivasis are thus doubly deprived of important food resources, pig meat and crops. If they kill a pig whether for meat or crop protection, they face 2 years imprisonment and/or Rs. 2000 fine. This makes them crucially dependent on the public distribution system. During the droughts, in particular, they wait in anxious crowds for long hours at the ration shop in the small Kesla bazaar. The shop opens briefly, a few get rations (no sugar is ever available). The rest leave to crowd again the next day.

The villagers have no regular occupation. Seasonal collection and selling of minor forest produce, work as casual labour in road construction. A small income from illicit brewing and sale of liquor. The last brings arrests and raids by the *bhatti daroga* (excise sub inspector) who is often accompanied by hoodlums of the Itarsi based liquor contractors. During such raids the hoodlums assault and terrorise the adivasis. And then some income from the new occupation brought by the firing range. Collection of metal scrap from explosives done at risk of life and limb. All this, twenty years after relocation and expenditure, according to government claims, of Rs. 84.83 lakhs on resettlement and over one crore on development programmes. [counter affidavit, District Rural Development Agency, DRDA, Hoshangabad, dated 25/10/1983, PIL petition].

As to the petition filed in the apex court. Over the decade, 9 counter affidavits by the state, 10 counsels representing it, 11 judges of the Supreme Court and 19 adjournments, were part of judicial scrutiny of the issue of prevention of death and injury. On Supreme court orders given in 1988 a protection wall was to be built around the 4 most frequently used target areas. But that, along with a road along the boundary, would mean clearing of 118 acres of forest land and felling of 40,000 trees. Clearing which would further adversely affect the lives of the people. Response from Ministry on Environment is awaited.

Some idea of what is involved in building a wall around the whole area can be gleaned from the objections raised by the Ministry of Defence. At 1987 prices, it would involve a capital investment of 20.7 crores and Rs. 2.4 crores in recurring costs. Further, it would set up a precedent for the other ranges in the country which would cost Rs. 939 crores in capital investment and a recurring annual expense of Rs. 94.2 crores. Clearly prohibitive costs.

This abysmal record of 20 years in the wake of the Itarsi Proof range, involving state and central governments, ministries and development agencies, judiciary and legal processes, affected villagers and public concern, raises troubling questions concerning the Netarhat Project. Questions that are being dodged, evaded, obfuscated.

the shells create huge craters on the agricultural lands. Such damages however are never considered in assessing compensation. After the firing, apart from broken pieces of metal, some unexploded or partly exploded shells also lie scattered in the fields. Brass and copper metal obtained from such shells can fetch upto Rs. 100 per kilogram in the local market. The shells and the shrapnel are therefore keenly sought after. But not without the accompanying dangers. Many shells have exploded killing and maiming people nearby. In Sakhuapani village too a shell exploded when it was being cleaned to separate the metal. But neither are such accidents reported nor are they eligible for compensation (See Box: *Looking Back: Itarsi Proof Range*). Moreover no attempt whatsoever has been made by the district administration or the army authorities to ensure that such dangerous material is removed from the site after the firing.

But then the existing administrative mechanisms are not geared to provide compensation anyway. No civil authority is present when firing is underway. Block authorities put up the excuse that the army does not allow civilians at the site. But the Revenue Officers required to assess the damage are never appointed. A copy of the firing notice is however sent to the civil compensation officer of Palamu and Ranchi. In Palamu the collector too was unaware of the existence of such a post. In Ranchi though the post exists, the civil compensation officer was unaware of the modalities or his duties. Anyway he had never visited the affected villages.

Immediately after the firing army personnel themselves dole out a measly compensation varying from Rs. 1.50 to Rs. 2.50 per day per adult. Only those families who manage to return by that time receive this benefit. The villagers confined to their houses or restrained from entering the area are not compensated. In this process categories for compensation such as loss of employment, damage to crops and land, or interference with

rights and privileges are rendered meaningless. The non existence of Revenue Officers forecloses the possibility of any claim whatsoever.

There appears to have been no apparent opposition despite the fact that lands have been used for 37 years and that every provision to provide sufficient notice or help in shifting is flouted. Yet opposition had been brewing over the years. Hardships in shifting have increased due to state promotion of settled forms of agriculture. On the other hand compensation rates remained pegged at a level that today seem ridiculous. But the crucial factor in the present struggle were reports that the army was planning to permanently acquire a substantial part of the Netarhat plateau region.

Much earlier in 1986, the army had worked out its requirement which entailed the acquisition of 30 field firing ranges (See Table: *Firing Ranges Awaiting Acquisition*). But this plan seemed unworkable due to the difficulties foreseen in the acquisition of such large areas of land as well as the expenditure that would have to be incurred. A minimum requirement was thus worked out by 1991 a total of 70 ranges of which 12 would be fully acquired.

In this attempt too difficulties arose from different quarters. Land acquisition involves state governments since land is a state subject. Others concerned are the central and state forest authorities, irrigation departments, National Airports Authority, and the National Highways Authority. Given the failure encountered in the acquisition plans, a task force was constituted to settle the problems of field ranges. As a specific task in October 1992 four ranges, Netarhat (Bihar), Rewa (M.P.), Shamirpet (A.P.) and Kolayat (Rajasthan), were chosen to study the modalities of land acquisition and to crystallize the policy in this regard. Once the pilot projects were successful, other ranges were to be acquired using similar procedure. However pro-



## Firing Ranges Awaiting Acquisition

The following is a list of existing ranges that army planned to acquire in 1986. The expansion plans for presently acquired ranges is also given under the column 'Additional Area'. All areas are in acres.

Name	State	Area	Status	Additional Area
1. Deolali	Maharashtra	25,642	Acquired	26,782
2. K.K. Ranges	Maharashtra	25,984	Acquired	44,437
3. Pokaran	Rajasthan	3,96,630	Acquired	79,040
4. TippiChaku	Arunachal/Assam	1,11,150	Notified	--
5. Mahajan	Rajasthan	2,20,000	Acquired	--
6. Babina	U.P./M.P.	82,382	Acquired	18,285
7. Belrcha	Madhya Pradesh	8,732	Acquired	17,240
8. Kunjalwan	Jammu & Kashmir	N.A.	Notified	--
9. Tikkar	Gujarat	1,00,436	Notified	--
10. Shamirpet	Andhra Pradesh	29,346	Notified	--
11. Tista	West Bengal	29,393	Notified	--
12. Buxaduar	West Bengal	21,242	Not-Notified	--
13. Garubasar	Arunachal Pradesh	54,340	Notified	--
14. Miao	Arunachal Pradesh	1,17,325	N.A.	--
15. Leimakhong	Manipur	32,110	Notified	--
16. Deotamura	Tripura	99,047	Notified	--
17. Birgugiana	Punjab	22,470	Notified	--
18. Hoshiarpur	Punjab	21,242	Notified	--
19. Naralgarh	Himachal/Haryana	72,124	Notified	--
20. Nal	Rajasthan	9,386	Notified	--
21. Tughalakabad	Haryana	38,779	N.A.	--
22. Hema	Madhya Pradesh	2,115	Notified	2,116
23. Asan	Uttar Pradesh	1,04,790	Not-Notified	--
24. Deuri-Dumri	Bihar	1,13,651	Notified	--
25. Singpur	Madhya Pradesh	1,33,750	Notified	--
26. Rewa	Madhya Pradesh	54,800	Notified	--
27. Gopalpur-on-Sea	Orissa	2,800	Acquired	--
28. Kalith	Jammu & Kashmir	3,676	Notified	--
29. Rajouri	Jammu & Kashmir	42,180	Notified	--
30. Ismailpur	Jammu & Kashmir	14,767	Not-Notified	--

posals with respect to two ranges, Netarhat and Rewa were forwarded for further processing to the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Environment and Forests. In the case of

Rewa range it was felt that an alternative was needed since the land was of a 'developed nature'. By September 1993 the cost of acquiring the Netarhat project was worked out to



approximately Rs. 80 crore. For the entire plan of acquisition the cost was estimated to be over Rs. 4,000 crore.

To some extent the problem relating to costs was sought to be eased through bartering some of the surplus lands in the possession of the army. Interestingly, the army had never conceded earlier that it was in the possession of surplus lands. According to the established practice, once the lands are not required for the purpose they had been meant for, they should be immediately returned to the state government. Yet, even where state governments had requested the release of surplus land (Lok Sabha, answer to starred question No. 31, 18.2.81) the Defence Ministry held that such transfer could only be made at market value. Interesting speculation in land!

The only other problem envisaged in the process was the question of forests. Forest land is subject to certain rules and regulations which prevent the use of forest land for non forest purposes. Even notification of such land for use by the army becomes difficult. In fact of the 30 ranges earlier selected for acquisition, in six cases the Ministry of Environment and Forests refused to issue a no objection certificate. In another case the state forest authorities were reluctant. In yet another case, pressure from the Bombay Natural History Society had been effective in preventing

renotification of Khodala field firing range. The attempt was to identify land which could be compensatorily afforested. This led to a dead end since no state government is in a position to give land for such purpose. The immediate way out of this dilemma was followed by notifying all ranges for a period of one year.

In the meantime, the army officers were to hold discussions at higher levels in the state bureaucracy to ensure that proposals for long term notification, i.e. for 30 years, were made ready. The Ministry of Environment and Forests however had no objections to the use of forest land in the case of Netarhat range.

In the entire process of discussions that took place between army officers, and representatives of the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Environment and Forests and the National Airports Authority, the issue of rehabilitation and compensation for the people to be displaced was never discussed. The villagers were not even informed about the plans afoot. But official secrecy notwithstanding, people did get to know of the plans afoot. Hence, the first real opposition to the setting up of the field firing range at Netarhat came from the people facing displacement when tens of thousands blocked the roads leading to the firing site in the last week of March 1994.

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## The State and People's Struggle

More than 50,000 people assembled at the road junction connecting Netarhat with Mahuadanr and Ranchi on 21 March 1994. Many came on foot, walking from their villages for two days carrying their food provisions with them. Overnight the land between the villages of Jokipokhar and Tutwapani was transformed into a massive settlement. Temporary sheds were constructed by the people with tree branches and foliage. Hectic activity was on getting water from a source two kilometres downhill. There was a feeling of

expectancy in the air. The people were waiting for the army to come. The Officer Commanding the forces of the 23rd Artillery Battalion had sent notice to the District Collectors to vacate villages temporarily for artillery firing practice between 23 and 25 March 1994.

Periodic firing practice and its attendant problems for the local people have existed in the Netarhat hill region for over 35 years. But a new phase began from September 1992 when rumours about impending land

acquisition started to emerge . By July 1993 frequent army movement and aerial survey gave strength to the rumours. These acquired further credence from the extensive land surveys carried out in 29 villages of Mahuadanr block by the local administration from 21-25 September.

As mentioned earlier the Church has made its presence felt in Chhotanagpur for over a century now. Its role in setting up schools, rural credit institutions and cooperative societies intimately wove it into the lives of the people. The effects are clearly visible both in the fall in usury, and in the relative higher literacy rates. As a prominent social institution in the area the Church has helped in the genesis and growth of the movement. So have the tribal panchayats and social organisations.

The movement had its beginning in Mahuadanr where in one of the trimonthly meetings of the Christian Society, it was decided that the project should be opposed. For this purpose a Chhaoni Visthapan Sangharsh Samiti was constituted having five representatives from each village of the block. Two days later on 28 September 1993, a huge demonstration was organised in the Mahuadanr block headquarters. The circle officer was gheraoed and was given memoranda for the Prime Minister, President, Chief Minister and the Governor. About 10,000 people participated. Meanwhile the movement spread to Gumla district. In order to mobilise more and more people and coordinate the opposition, samitis were constituted at various levels from the village samiti, to the regional, block and central samiti.

Whether agriculturists or forest dwellers, all people who work and live off the land are emotionally attached to it. But here people feel a special attachment because of the intensive work of years needed to make the difficult hilly terrain fit for cultivation. Fear of being deprived of land and forest, fear of an uncertain future, knowledge that compensation in

land has never been awarded in any acquisition in the Chhotanagpur area, are reasons enough for the people to be mobilized so quickly and on such a scale. The organization leading the struggle was renamed as the Netarhat Field Firing Range Pilot Project Jan Sangharsh Samiti. The Samiti gave a call for a campaign at the state and central level for repeal of the Manoeuvres Field Firing and Artillery Practice Act, 1938.

But the movement still lacked any concrete evidence regarding the plans of the state. A hunt was on for gathering information. In November 1993 the Jan Sangharsh Samiti got hold of two Special Gazette notifications of November 1991 and March 1992 through which the state government had notified 245 villages of Palamu and Gumla districts for field firing for a period of 10 years. Covering a village area of over 1,07,766 hectares this would directly affect over one lakh people. (See Table: *For Whom the Bells Toll* ) Soon after they managed to lay their hands on some letters exchanged between the army and the civil administration which indicated that the process of acquisition of land had already started. These documents substantiated all suspicions and the movement gained further momentum.

Students have played a significant role in furthering the movement. They organised themselves under the banner of Palamu Students Union and Hira Barwe Students Union. These organizations undertook mass contact programmes, disseminating information, and coordinating with other organizations. They promptly dispersed into different corners of the affected area with copies of the two gazette notifications. A series of rallies, demonstrations and public meetings were organised at the affected blocks and district headquarters within a period of a few weeks. By mid December 1993 a newly formed Banari-Bishunpur Student Union also stepped in. The public response to these protests was enormous. The Bharat Naujawan Sangh from Daltonganj in Palamu also conducted a protest campaign

### For Whom the Bells Toll

Block	Revenue Villages	Area (ha)	House-holds	Population	ST (%)	SC (%)	Cultivators (%)	Agri Labour (%)
Mahuadanr	42	20015	3468	19860	78.3	4.4	76.9	9.1
Bishunpur	39	27811	4658	26486	91.9	1.5	82.2	8.1
Ghaghra	44	22617	4236	22824	80.8	3.1	90.9	3.5
Dumri	30	22,034	3,700	20,652	86.1	3.8	82.4	10.9
Chalnpur	24	17348	2,063	12,651	92.0	0.9	90.8	3.9
Gumla	5	2,462	398	2,144	63.1	5.3	77.2	12.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>112287</b>	<b>18523</b>	<b>104617</b>	<b>85.2</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>84.1</b>	<b>7.4</b>

*Sources:* 1. Bihar Gazette Notifications Nos. 763 & 764 dated 25.11.1991 and Nos. 84 and 85 dated 28.3.1992.

2. Census of India 1991

*Notes:* 1. The first notification mentions 89 villages and the second mentions 156 villages.  
 2. The figures presented above relate to revenue villages. Some of the villages mentioned in the notifications fall within the same revenue village.  
 3. Second gazette notification mentions two villages whose locations are specified in the wrong block.  
 4. The total area figure does not include forest lands. Hence it is an underestimate.

through the affected villages. The agitation had already become a mass movement.

Support also came from several other quarters. Vikas Bharti, an RSS organization passed a resolution to oppose the Pilot Project. Political parties including the Congress, Bhartiya Janata Party, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha gave support to the ongoing struggle. Dharti Raksha Vahini was constituted from the Teen Simani Sarkar (a traditional internal panchayat of the tribals) for taking up the issue. Nearly 10,000 people from Palamu, Gumla and Lohardaga participated in the meet. Adivasi Yuva Sangh (AYS), a Delhi based organization, organised a rally and dharna in Delhi and memoranda were given to the President and the Prime Minister. A motorcycle rally was organised by AYS on the two days of satyagraha at Jokipokhar and Tutwapani. Tribal social and cultural Sanghs

in Chhotanagpur and Santhal Pargana areas organised a dharna at Dak Bungalow at Patna and sent a memorandum to the President.

In response to the movement different and often conflicting reports kept pouring in from the state government, army officials and politicians as well as from the media. But nothing was officially communicated to the people. This created an atmosphere of wild speculation, confusion and anxiety.

Brig. I.J. Kumar of 23 Infantry Division in a press release in December 1993 stated that about 1200 sq. km. area is proposed for acquisition and that this area is six times that demanded by the army. The area includes two camping sites of 9 sq. km. each to be set up at Netarhat and Adar. In January 1994 Lt. Col. Anil Bhatt stated that the proposed area is 1471 sq. km. which includes the camping and



target areas. Col. N.S. Gurung, officiating commander, 23 Artillery Brigade gave a list of the villages to be evacuated for the firing range. The list included 38 villages of Gumla and 5 of Palamu district covering an area of 72,000 acres. Army officials while visiting the area in October 1993, told people that they should stop cultivating their land.

The Circle Officer, Mahuadanr block, in his first confrontation with the students said in October 1993 that 29 villages of Mahuadanr block and 27 of Gumla district will be affected. However, the revenue authorities of Palamu conveyed that only 7 villages from Palamu district will be affected. The Divisional Commissioner, Chhotanagpur, in December 1993 told a delegation of students that no notifications had been received let alone any officially written information regarding the firing range. The Gazette notifications were incapable of giving an idea of the size of the proposed range since they were meant to deal with temporary firing practice only.

The press had its own statistics to reveal. A press report of October 1993 states that 2.35 lakh hectares of land in 120 villages will be acquired and 1.7 lakh people displaced. A compensation of Rs. 36,000 per acre will be paid by the army and rehabilitation will be done by the state government (*The Telegraph*, 16.10.93). A press release of December 1993 stated that the process of evacuation of 157 villages has started and the villages would be handed over to the central government by the second week of January 1994 (*Prabhat Khabar*, Ranchi, 7.12.93). A report about a meeting of District Collector, Gumla and army officials appeared in May 1994 according to which, 308 sq. km. area was notified in 1956 and 140 sq. km. was designated as target area. This notification was to lapse in 1994, hence in 1991-92 an area of 1,471 sq. km. was to be acquired displacing 27,858 people. Press re-

ports also indicated that the proposed project would include areas of Betla Tiger Project, the national highway, water resource at Netarhat, block headquarters of Gumla and Palamu districts and the hotel property of Betla and Netarhat forest bungalow. However, Brig. I.G. Kumar refuted the claim that Betla Tiger project or the National highway would be affected.

A Congress MLA, Shiv Kumar Sahu, in public meetings at Bishunpur and Adar in October 1993 announced that the government had no proposal to set up an army camp in Gumla. He displayed a letter from the Joint Secretary, Central Defence Ministry as proof.

In June 1994 a poster was published by the army and put up at various places. It asked people not to obstruct the temporary firing, gave assurance that the army had no plans to acquire the lands and added that army presence is good for the development of the area.

One can imagine the extent of confusion these contradictory reports and statements have raised. No official ever visited the area to clear these doubts. Under these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the people decided to oppose the even periodic firing practice which they had been tolerating for the last three decades. The continuation of temporary firing is seen as an indication of permanent acquisition in the long run. Hence, when a notice was obtained for firing practice to be held between 23 and 25 March 1994 the people decided to prevent it at any cost. Again, when notice was issued for 25 April to 3 May 1994, thousands of people reached the site and blocked the highway for five days from 22 to 27 April. Another notice was issued for field firing commencing 28 June. When the PUDR team visited the area, people were determined to thwart the attempt for the third time.



## Of Guns And Butter

There is this by now ancient conundrum that all classical economics textbooks begin by posing - the vexed guns and butter option. Somehow our times seem to have resolved this choice fairly unproblematically. Because when the seemingly overwhelming needs of defence and national security stand opposed to the survival struggles of some communities and peoples, the choice appears inevitable. And in the unquestioning acceptance of this choice what gets obscured is the fact that the 'opportunity costs' are the urgent matter of life and living of those whose interests are sacrificed in this 'trade off'.

Over the past decades, defence expenditures are one item of the national budget that has never been subject to austerity measures. No rise in debt or in deficit is large enough to warrant some voluntary restriction on defence spending. Far from any such curtailment, the military establishment has the largest expenditure by any single establishment in the country. And it is virtually exempt from any public scrutiny and debate. Thus the difference in the army's requirement of 30 acquired ranges in 1986 and 12 acquired ranges today becomes inconsequential in this realm of official secrecy. For strategic reasons, no doubt certain areas of secrecy and relative autonomy of the military establishment are necessary. But this secrecy and autonomy carried at all levels and in all situations becomes counterproductive and anti-people.

Indeed maintenance of an effective defence establishment necessitates development of new weapons as well as regular training and practice. Larger weapons require larger areas for such testing. This goes without saying. What is in question are the political considerations as well as the economic and social costs that determine the location of such testing ranges. These crucially affect issues of compensation.

Land acquisition in the Netarhat region entails loss of forest cover, land, employment and food. Presently the army has worked out compensation costs at Rs. 80 crore. If evenly distributed, this works out to a mere Rs. 8000 for every man, woman and child (See Table: *For Whom the Bell Tolls*).

Compensation is likely to translate into a payment for landholders dispossessed. But 7.5 percent of the total existing workers are agricultural labour either owning small patches of land or none at all. Another 8.5 percent are in non agricultural occupations in the rural areas. These sections who have a higher dependence on common lands and forests would be the worst hit. Control over common resources in the village is decided through unwritten codes and customary law. A long time landless resident would, according to customary practice, have more rights over the village commons than a newcomer possessing land. A compensation policy that does not appreciate these norms, generates social tensions in its implementation.

Further, in the case of forest dwellers in particular, land records do not provide a good idea of the control and ownership of land. This furthers the decline in compensation. Only *raiya* lands have to be compensated for. Other lands such as *gair mazarua* and forest are anyway state lands. Even the extent of *raiya* land is contested. For example block officials in Mahuadanr state that in five villages, 5137 acres out of a total of 9138 acres is *raiya*, while the army officials claim that only 2146 is *raiya*. If the army claim is upheld, then in five villages alone nearly 3000 acres will not be compensated at all.

Relative densities of population and land use of a prospective acquisition site are important determinants in its selection. The reasons however are far from what elementary logic would have us believe. They have no

relation with minimising social costs and human suffering that any displacement entails. Their only concern is that such a selection minimises the compensation to be paid.

In any case, the fact that means of subsistence are compensated in terms of property inherently acts against those to be displaced. In underdeveloped regions the means of production of the community amount to a worthless sum when assessed in terms of property. Thus a policy which prefers location of firing ranges in such regions insidiously enhances misery and suffering.

Location however is not solely a technical decision based on comparative costs and benefits, or army specifications. Nor is it a statistical exercise based on population densities and crop yields, though these may be contributing factors. For example, Rewa in Madhya Pradesh was another site chosen for the Pilot Project along with Netarhat. According to the army developed nature of the lands in Rewa prevented the plans from taking off. Government statistics however reveal that agricultural productivity in Rewa is as low as in the Netarhat hills.

More important are political considerations. A few hundred kilometres north of Netarhat, the army is in possession of lands in Deori-Dumri area of south Gaya district. Earlier plans were to use these lands for a permanent range. The plans were shelved because of historical monuments in the vicinity, according to army claims. What is more to the

point is that the landowners of this region play a dominant role in Bihar politics. Following protests in Netarhat, reportedly there are plans to shift the location to Chatra and adjacent Manatu block of Palamu district. The reason? The peasant movement led by Marxist-Leninist groups has become a problem for the government. Establishment of the range here would curb the movement.

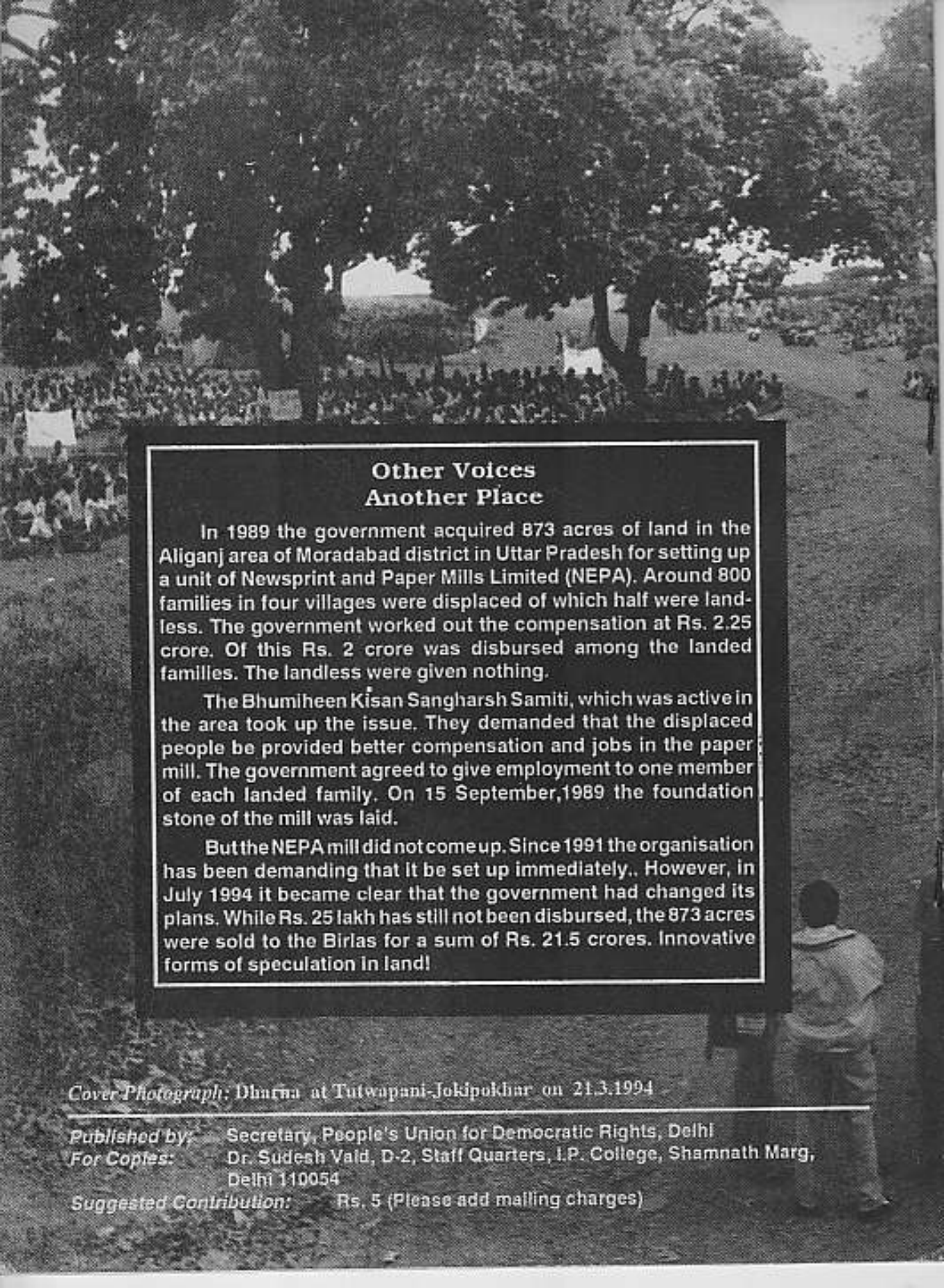
Netarhat was an ideal site from the state and army point of view. An underdeveloped region and marginalised communities. Low population density and low agricultural productivity. Predominantly tribal and politically insignificant. The peoples mass resistance there has brought in a new and unexpected factor. The people never did have butter. But they had somehow managed to subsist. But the 'guns' have put this subsistence under threat as their land is to be taken away and a meagre compensation is all they are going to get. They have every reason to be apprehensive of the future given the experience of people displaced by other projects. Contradictory official statements and gross abuse of the privilege of secrecy given to the defence establishment can only fuel their apprehensions. Forcible eviction will result in further alienation and intensified resistance. The government will have to provide alternative land, better compensation, and employment — a better future — to those it seeks to evict whether at Netarhat or any other site chosen for a field firing range.

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### Other Voices Another Place

In 1989 the government acquired 873 acres of land in the Aliganj area of Moradabad district in Uttar Pradesh for setting up a unit of Newsprint and Paper Mills Limited (NEPA). Around 800 families in four villages were displaced of which half were landless. The government worked out the compensation at Rs. 2.25 crore. Of this Rs. 2 crore was disbursed among the landed families. The landless were given nothing.

The Bhumiheen Kisan Sangharsh Samiti, which was active in the area took up the issue. They demanded that the displaced people be provided better compensation and jobs in the paper mill. The government agreed to give employment to one member of each landed family. On 15 September, 1989 the foundation stone of the mill was laid.

But the NEPA mill did not come up. Since 1991 the organisation has been demanding that it be set up immediately. However, in July 1994 it became clear that the government had changed its plans. While Rs. 25 lakh has still not been disbursed, the 873 acres were sold to the Birlas for a sum of Rs. 21.5 crores. Innovative forms of speculation in land!

*Cover Photograph: Dharna at Tutwapani-Jokipukhar on 21.3.1994*

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*Published by:* Secretary, People's Union for Democratic Rights, Delhi  
*For Copies:* Dr. Sudesh Vald, D-2, Staff Quarters, I.P. College, Shamnath Marg,  
Delhi 110054  
*Suggested Contribution:* Rs. 5 (Please add mailing charges)