

## Kaleghagh Dam in Jharkhand: Sad story of displacement without benefits

The 'Kaleghagh dam' (called Chinda dam in CWC directory, see the adjoining map) is at the most beautiful place on Chinda river in Simdega



district of Jharkhand, 4 km from the district headquarter. It is a very good tourist place in the district with lovely reservoir surrounded by multiple hills which attracts a lot of tourists. There is a plateau in the dam where there is a small and beautiful park. Besides, the district administration provides the facility of boating and a hotel is also constructed.

But how many really know that this beautiful place is made on the grave of Adivasis (indigenous people)? Their only livelihood resource that was land had been snatched away from them during the construction of the Dam. The promises made for providing jobs, adequate compensation and rehabilitation packages were not fulfilled. The owners of the lands were left to die in the name of 'development'.

The Kaleghagh dam was constructed in 1980 as a minor irrigation project of the irrigation department with the aim of irrigating land of the Simdega block, where three villages – Bernibera, Bara Barpani and Bhudhratoli were completely submerged for the dam. The three villages had population of approximately 3500. These villages were populated by Kharia, Munda and Oraon Adivasis.

Interestingly, the project failed to achieve its objective. Presently, the water reaches to only one village – Meromdega and the water supply to Tukupani, Jambahar and other areas has been stopped since a long time. Thus the irrigation project uprooted the Adivasis of three villages but only one village is being benefited. Secondly, the Simdega Notified Area Committee supplies the drinking water to Simdega town from the dam but the displaced people, those who have been living near by the Dam get supply water neither for drinking nor for irrigating their a few pieces of land.

The Bernibera village situated at a distance of 5 kilometers in the eastern part of Simdega lost its origin, meaning and identity, which had a historic origin made of two words – Berni and Bera. The 'Berni' is the name of an herbal plant, which is used as a medicine to cure fever, and the plant is also used to make a rope. Another word 'Bera' is a Kharia (language of Kharia Adivasis) word meaning a big piece of fertile land. Hence, there were big pieces of fertile lands and Berni herbal plants were also a plenty near the village therefore the village

was named Bernibera. The people of the village used to yield plenty of wheat, paddy and vegetables. But when the dam was constructed the big pieces of fertile lands submerged in the dam and the herbal plants also disappeared from the area.

70 years old Mangaldas Kharia is one of those unfortunate victims of Bernibera village faced displacement for the Kaleghagh Dam. His family was well-off as his father (Jakarias Kharia) had 20 acres of fertile land in the village and he was also working as a teacher in a government primary school. He had also purchased another 10 acres of land in a village called Lathakhamhan, where he used to teach in a school with a dream of making a good life for his sons (Mangaldash and Isaac). Since he had two sons therefore he was willing to settle them in two different places so that there would be no chances of any conflict between them. But his dream was washed away by the dam. His land of Bernibera village was submerged in the dam and he was given merely Rs 11,000 as compensation.

Finally, the family had no option than settling down in Lathakhamhan village, where the family had 10 acres of land. The land of Lathakhamhan village was divided between two brothers (Mangaldas and Isaac), which led to a division in the family. Though Mangaldas Kharia survived because he got the government job as teacher in the place of his father but his younger brother Isaac suffered the most. Later on Isaac and his wife were brutally murdered and their four kids left the village and are living elsewhere. They are still not able to settle down. Thus, a well-off family was destroyed in the name of a development project and Mangaldas Kharia is still fighting for the compensation for the land. He recalls that how the women who were protesting against the dam had been kept in the Hazaribagh Jail for 3 days in 1980.

The villagers had started protesting against the land acquisition by shouting a slogan 'No to Dam' but the protest was stopped when the police atrocity was inflicted on the people. In 2007, the displaced people again started a fight with the government for the jobs and compensation promised during the land acquisition for the dam. 70 Raiyats (land owners) including Mangaldash Kharia have filed a case in Gumla Civil Court claiming for the jobs and compensation for their lands. But will the justice be delivered to them? They have paid the heavy price in the name of development but get no opportunity to enjoy its taste of its fruits. Ironically, the government of Jharkhand has signed 102 MoUs (Memorandum of understanding) with the corporate houses for establishment of steel plants, mining industries and power plants without addressing the issues of more than 15 lakh displaced masses. Are we still advocating for this kind of unjust development processes in India?

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