



A DEEP-ROOTED CONSPIRACY



BY SR. MARY SCARIA

A fact-finding team that visited Jharkhand seeks CBI probe into Sr. Valsa John's murder >>>

A fact-finding team that visited Pachwara village in Jharkhand and the coal mines in the area leased by the Punjab State Electricity Board has demanded a judicial inquiry or a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation into the murder of Catholic Nun Sr. Valsa John on 15th November 2011. It has also sought probe into three violent deaths in the area in recent months in police firing and deep-rooted unrest among the Santhal Tribals.

The fact-finding group was shocked at the apathy of the authorities and the control that the management of the mines has gained in the region where human rights groups have tried to assert issues of identity and the Tribals' ownership of the land which has been taken away from them.

The team was informed by the villagers that prior to Sr. Valsa's killing, several villagers namely Vijay Hembrom, Joseph Soren and Raghuvir Ray were killed as they were with the people protesting against the mines. Later their deaths were shown as mere accidents.

As Sr. Valsa was killed apparently in the context of her mobilizing the Tribals in opposition to the mining in the area and then for ensuring that they got their rights by way of rehabilitation, the fact-finding team has also demanded judicial inquiry or CBI probe into the entire circumstances in which the mine was leased to the PSEB and its private partner, and the role, if any, of the coal mafia.

Posthumously, Sr. Valsa is being vilified by vested interests

who need to be identified and their role investigated. There has been a concerted effort in the local Hindi media to cast aspersions on her integrity and even her character. It is important that investigations are carried out not just into her murder, but the grassroots situation and events since the mine was leased out by the government.

While commending the Church for its grassroots identification with the plight of the people in remote areas, the fact-finding team has also called on the State authorities to give proper appreciation to the work of Nuns, religious brothers and Fathers who are working among tribals and rural areas to ensure their safety and security.

The team was perturbed to learn from many local people that after the murder of Sr. Valsa, PANEM company personnel had been the first ones to be on the scene of the crime even before the police arrived. Someone from among them had taken away the registers which Sr. Valsa used to maintain with meticulous details of the recipients/villagers receiving compensation for the

acquisition of their land.

It is intriguing why the police and the mine company want the general public to believe that the Maoists are behind the murder. When there were around 50 people reportedly involved in the brutal murder, the police have so far able to arrest only seven persons.

The team was also told that the pamphlets showing Maoists owning responsibility for killing Sr. Valsa was also brought to the police reportedly by the PANEM officials.

Several important questions

Why did the PANEM officials rush to the place of murder and why did they take away the register immediately after she was done away? What could have been the reason – whether there would have been evidences that would go against them?

Why did the Panem officials take the “Maoist” placard to the police? It is to be presumed that no one will pick up anything from the scene of crime till the panchanama/police report is made. Where does/ who has hidden the weapons used for killing Sr. Valsa? Who may have used the locals to kill Valsa? Why the fact-finding team was not allowed to meet the rape victim, who may have given the team some first-hand information?

Why did the police refuse to take down the rape victim’s compliant which forced Sr. Valsa to seek an appointment with the SP on the 16th November? Was there a nexus among the police, the administration and the PANEM officials? Why the probe is not moving? Is the local administration attempting to suppress the truth by intimidating the villagers and anti-displacement activists?

Sr. Valsa made two phone calls from her mobile to a journalist

friend at 10.30 p.m. and told him that she was in danger. He told her to escape at any cost. This is the friend’s evidence in the court.

The fact-finding team consisted of: Dr. John Dayal, Member, National I n t e g r a t i o n Council; Sr. Mary Scaria, SCJM, Advocate, Supreme Court; Sr. Helen Saldhana, SSP; and Mr. John Mathew, photographer and journalist. After listening to various people, the Church personals, the nuns, company officials, the villagers, the administration, and seeing the places for themselves the team has reached the following findings/conclusion:

Sr. Valsa had become an eyesore to the coal mafia and the administration as they were able to win over the innocent people by gratifying them with dumpers/money, etc.

Sr. Valsa was a hindrance to their furtherance in the mining as they are planning to acquire more land of the tribals. Sr. Valsa may have come down on them heavily with the terms and conditions of the MoU that they have signed with the leaders of the movement.

The company realized that as long as Sr. Valsa is there the people cannot be displaced easily and cannot be cheated.

The administration, the police machinery and the local MLA seem to be hand in glove with the company in all things.

The nun could not be bought by the PANEM company who provided her with a concrete house and facilities but the nun refused to accept such for herself as she chose to live with the people.

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The fact-finding team demands:

- Justice to Sr. Valsa by the immediate arrest of the real culprits and posthumous restoring of her dignity and reputation.
- Initiate criminal proceedings against the police officers who failed in their duty to save Sr. Valsa despite knowing that her life was in danger.
- A judicial inquiry or a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation into the circumstances surrounding the entire case.
- Abide by the terms and conditions enlisted in the MoU signed between the PANEM Company and the Rajmahal Pahar Bachao Andolan (RMPBA).
- A white paper on the allocation of tribal land to mining companies.

(The writer is a Supreme Court advocate) ■■