

Document of a struggle

Living on mineral rich lands, is not only a gift if you happen to be a tribal subsistence farmer in India. And if you happen to be a documentary journalist, prepare for trouble when covering their struggle.

By Tarjei Leer-Salvesen

Vinod Raja, a documentary film maker from Grassroots Media in India, spent four years making a film about adivasi groups in India and their resistance against international mining projects. He was beaten up by police and tracked down by company hired goons before he finally finished his project. Mahua Memoirs has now won four media awards in India.

“I am surprised by the good reception. I was beginning to doubt whether anyone would like to see this”, says Vinod Raja.

Not a homogenous group

He has travelled along the mountain range called Eastern Ghats and visited tribal communities affected by mining projects in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Jharkand.

Along the road he meets steel-companies and aluminum companies such as Vedanta, Nalco, Hindalco and Utkal Alumina, all of whom have caused severe land conflict with the tribal's who in this area are called adivasi people. The adivasis are not a homogenous group, but a number of different tribes with different ways of life and different languages.

Kue, Kondadvran, Telugu, Oriya and Chatisgarhi are therefore among the spoken languages he had to include in his work. Many foreigners believe you can work easily in India with English and Hindi. Well, that's not the case in all parts of this huge nation.

India's poorest communities

A struggle that has had a high media profile is the one where an international mining consortium in Orissa, Utkal Alumina, displaced three villages and has started building a huge and complex infrastructure to provide raw material for the aluminum industry. Around Kashipur in southwestern Orissa are some of the world most concentrated and highest quality bauxite deposits. And some of India's poorest communities, if one uses purely financial measures.

When Vinod covered a protest march by the adivasis around a small town called Tikiri, he



This is Vinod Raja at work in the Maikal Hills. PHOTO: GRASSROOTS MEDIA

was attacked and beaten up by the local police, who closely collaborate with the mining company. This was in 2005, and caught the attention from, amongst others, the press freedom NGO Reporters Without Borders.

“And yet, you continued for two more years, before the film was finished?”

“Well, I did not meet such problems all the time. There was an episode where we had to flee from company hired goons. But mainly, I have positive experiences from making this film,” Vinod Raja says.

He will show parts of his film and talk about the process around it at a seminar at GIJC.

The film

Vinod Raja is a film producer associated with Grassroots Media in Bangalore, India. Mahua Memoirs is available in DVD format with English text. It is 83 minutes long.