

When Robert Flaherty's 1922 masterpiece *Nanook of the North* hit the international silver-landscape (mind you, there was no digital media those days), it created as much a revolution in documentary filmmaking as it attracted criticism for 'creating' reality. Documenting the harsh life Eskimos lived in adverse geo-climatic situations, Flaherty had actually made the Eskimos 'act' at times to get his point across to the audience. Though the debate over filmmakers' manipulation of their subjects still goes on, here comes another masterpiece where the filmmakers surrender themselves to their subjects to let them

The narrative weaves through myriad successful, not-so-successful, and ongoing stories from different areas where the tribals have fought or are fighting for their traditional share of the earth. Old Raydhar Lohar, a Dalit leader who was part of the successful opposition to the setting up of a bauxite mine in the resource-rich Gandhamardan mountains, says, 'History is difficult to explain!' It indeed is! As young Bhagaban Majhi from Kucheipadar, whose village along with dozens more is under threat from mining operation, wonders, 'There is 195 billion tonnes of bauxite on Baplamali (the Bat Mountain),



Where earth worms struggle for a piece of soil

Wira Pdika
Earth Worms, Company Man
Directed by
Samarendra Das and Amarendra Das

narrate their own stories in their own languages to serve their own purpose. With the most minimum background narration, *Wira Pdika* – directed by Samarendra Das and Amarendra Das – achieves a milestone in terms of authenticity in documentary filmmaking.

Wira Pdika, titled in *Kui* (the language spoken by the endangered *Dongria Kondhs* of Orissa), means 'worms of the earth, people of the company'. At a time when mining and metal companies around the world are finding their new addresses in the mineral-rich hills and forests of Orissa to boost India's neo-liberal economic statistics, we hardly hear what the affected aborigines have to say or how they react, unless there is a Nandigram-like situation. *Wira Pdika* tries to bridge a colossal gap between the serene voice of the earth and the distorted noise of the mainstream media. Sans any rhetoric, all that the filmmakers do is place the camera in front of the *adivasis* (tribals) whenever they want to be heard by those who have forgotten them, by those who have manipulated them, by those who love and respect them.

Earth Worm, Company Man – as the film has been titled in English – is an incisive document on resistance movements in Orissa against the corporatization of natural resources and eventually against the displacement of the natives who have survived on and nurtured these resources for millennia. The camera serves as a 'bohemian rhapsody', capturing tales of the past from the elderly and of the present from the youth, covering the history of intrusion into people's traditional economic systems and cultural life between 1993 and 2005. Even though the filmmakers do not make any political statement, the very absence of it in the film stirs the 'sense of reasoning' for the capital-centric developmental process we have adopted of late and leaves the audience with more questions than answers. The central motif of the film is the traditional, cultural life of the *adivasis*, replete with songs, dances, folk tales, and interviews of the tribals that – in point of fact – capture the importance of their 'sense of being'.

and it will be exhausted in 22/23 years. The government will make some 13 billion rupees out of this madness while the company will walk away with 2490 billion rupees... So, how does the country get benefited from this? Do you still call it national development? On the one hand, you are throwing away the country's resources so cheaply and, on the other, you are happily displacing and devastating millions of natives for such narrow, short-term gains!

The filmmakers also take the camera to places where mining companies have already been established decades ago, and shock the viewers with what they see: unbridled pollution, acidic water bodies being used by the displaced and 'rehabilitated' tribals, diminishing vegetation covers, unfulfilled promises of basic facilities to those who gave away their land to the companies, diseases, and hopelessness.

The film shakes us back to a reality that is rooted in nature... The *adivasis* of Orissa have a lot to teach us; though they live in a harsh and adverse time and are fighting for survival, they represent tremendous hope and possibility. These tribals worship Mother Earth, each in different form, and have a strong belief that if they betrayed her they would perish. As they repeatedly break into a folk song, throughout the film, they display a kind of resolve that the urban gentry probably will never understand!

Dangar jangal paban chhadile ame banchiba kain?

Matir manisha matir poka, mati chhadiba nain!

Ei mati chhadiba nain!

[If we leave these hills, these forests, this air, we will not be alive!

We are made of this earth, we are earthworms; we can't live away from this soil!

We will not leave this soil!]

- Subrat Kumar Sahu