

## Sanjit Das

Documentary photographer represented by Panos Pictures, who lives in Kuala Lumpur and works throughout the world for editorial, development and corporate clients.

<http://www.sanjitdas.com>

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# The language of progress



**THE LANGUAGE OF PROGRESS AND ASSERTION OF SELF-DIGNITY : Of land and its people in the quagmire of National progress.**

## Orissa, India

These are complex times, when change is a mantra of development, progress and success derive skewed meaning; times where compatible and indispensable are a social dialectic; goals are material, aspiration and hope are apportioned in tangibles. Set in these changing times of liberalization and privatization, major players in mineral processing industries are coming forth to invest in the mineral rich state of Orissa, in the south east of India.

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One of the ramifications as a result is a large involuntary displacement of the resident population of marginalized sections, some of them tribals, who've lived in these forests for centuries. However, there is stiff resistance by some farmers against the proposed displacement. These movements have experienced severe restraining methods and the state's brutal suppression, as in the case of TATA at Kalinganagar, Vedanta at Lanjigarh and POSCO at Jagatsinghpur.

Both the industry and the farmers are at loggerheads with each over land. There is a resistance to this dispossession leading to agitation by 'already' and 'potential' displaced persons resulting in state's brutal suppression. Farmers simply distrust the government and feel they are being asked to sacrifice far more than the compensation and resettlements are able to provide. Subhash Mahapatra, one of the farmers fighting for his rights, posed a simple question to me "If I don't want to sell it, do I not have the right to say no?".

Inherent in the farmers' struggle for land against the state and industry is close social and emotional association with their land. Through the language of struggle against this dispossession of land the people are speaking a different version of development where values like self-dignity is one of the central themes. With my current project, I am trying to document this relationship of people with their land and language of their struggle against this dispossession.

I personally feel, the choice to do what they want to do with their lands should remain with the rightful owner i.e., the farmer. They aren't anti-industry, or anti-development. "You know, I always dreamed there would be electricity in my village one day," Mahapatra, a farmer opposing POSCO says, pointing to electricity poles with no wires leaning at a 60-degree angle in his village, planted by a zealous politician who vanished after elections five years ago. "Do I want my children to go to a school? To get jobs? Of course."

Their struggle is an example of such struggles all across India, over time. I feel my work is an important means to carry the message of their social and emotional association with land and the courage, determination and their right to dignity. "Over our dead bodies," a Kondh leader once told me with conviction and resolve, during one of my visits to the region.



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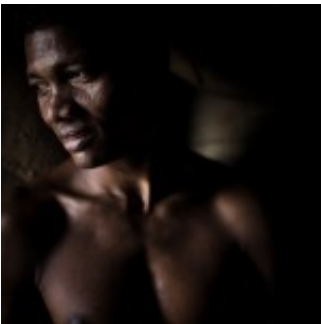


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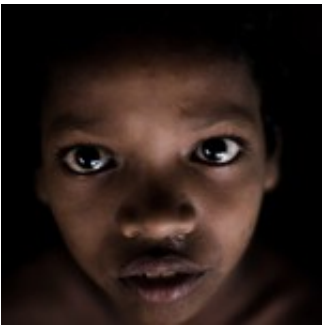


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[View the entire set of images on the archive](#)

Resources/Links :

>> The published [article](#) (Businessweek, October 8, 2009)

>> Take action [Amnesty International campaign](#)

>> [Actionaid Campaign in Orissa](#)

>> Book : Sacrificing People : [Invasions of a Tribal Landscape](#) by Felix Padel. Published by Orient Blackswan

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