Plachimada - Still waiting for justice and compensation Beena Govind

Palakkad : Plachimada is silent now. The protesters are still around, the fire is still alive but the protest pandal in front of the closed-down closed-down company gates of Coca Cola is empty.

Palakkad has crossed 40 degrees and the air fumes with the heat and poison left behind by the company that closed down years ago after a protracted protest by the locals and environmentalists. The people who led the protests from the front are still around, Kanniyamma, Santhi, Panchamy, Rameshan, Vilayodi Venugopal and many many others—all of them if you meet them today will tell one thing in common—"We haven’t yet got clean drinking water, nor justice we sought."

The company closed down 13 years ago. To date, there has been no compensation for the ecological, social, and environmental losses suffered by the villagers. The well waters, even after these many years, stay unusable. The thick black fluid that fills them, with oil floating on top, glares them in their face even as justice eludes.

The Perumaattil and Pattanchenrry panchayats used to receive their drinking water in tankers till a year back. After that, water started getting supplied from the Kunnangattupathy drinking water project. Santhi, who lives in Vijaya Nagar, says this project has made no tangible results since the water, which comes once in two days, is always muddy. The locals' demand to make a filtering tank at Nellimedu went unheeded. The company effluents irreversibly polluted the Perumatty Grama Panchayat.

The company effluents irreversibly polluted the Perumatty Grama Panchayat well, which was a lifeline of the village. The water in this hasn’t turned usable even after cleaning efforts stretching across years.

The seven or eight wells next to the factory in the Vijaya Nagar colony have also been abandoned since the last ten years or so.

**DEMOCRATIC RESISTANCE**

The democratic resistance against the resource exploitation by the multinational corporate started on April 22, 2002. Two years later, Mathrubhumi Managing Director, MP Veerendrakumar, led the World Water Conference in this village from January 21 to 24, 2004. The demands raised by the protesters, namely to evict the company from the land of Plachimada and make them compensate for the extreme ecological damage done to the village and its natural resources, prosecute the company for polluting the land, water, and air of the village, decentralize decision-making on resource exploitation to the Panchayats with legal validity and options of penal recourse, and amendments in the Panchayati Raj and Pollution Control Rules, have stayed largely unfulfilled.

**Plachimada Tribunal Bill returned**

The company shut down in 2003 but not a penny has been paid in compensation to the village or its people.

**Plachimada Tribunal Bill returned**

The company shut down in 2003, but not a penny has been paid in compensation to the people who suffered the damage at the hands of the corporate. The state legislature passed the Plachimada Coco Cola Victims Relief and Compensation Claims Special Tribunal Bill on February 24, 2011, which was then sent to the Centre. The Centre, in turn, returned the bill seeking an explanation for the bill, citing legal grounds that the state does not have the rights to legislate over the matter.

The most recent setback was in February 2016, when the President's office sent the bill back, refusing assent on unspecified reasons. The protesters are now left in a lurch, wondering who their real opponent is—the company or their own elected governments.