

tee). However, its decisions are rejected at the sub-divisional or divisional level by the state. During the claim verification process, meant to be done by representatives from the forest department, the revenue department and the village committee, the forest department functionary coerces villagers into agreeing to his assessment. In Kantartoli panchayat, though 368 applications were filed, only nine were approved, according to Nawal Sai, chairman of the VAS. No community land rights have been given. The land was measured by a forest department representative.

The most blatant violation is of the legal obligation that the government may not start the process for acquiring land till the process of settling claims under FRA is over. This has been given a complete go-by. In Salka village near Kantartoli, the

People who resist the State are branded Maoists

villagers filed applications under FRA over a year ago. Though there has been no word about their applications, the village land has been acquired for a power plant and Rs 1.5 lakh in compensation distributed to a majority, says Ram Dayal, the husband of sarpanch Madhu Shukla. The power plant has been stalled thanks to resistance in other villages in the area.

There is resistance and opposition, but the villagers are wary of becoming "too active"—after all, it is easy to be branded a Naxalite. People are on the backfoot after what happened to Binayak Sen and Himanshu Kumar. Sen was jailed and freed only after the Supreme Court intervened. Himanshu Kumar's office was destroyed and he finally had to flee.

It is easy to be branded a Naxalite and people are scared. This is an achievement the Chhattisgarh government is proud of. This approach of suppressing democratic protest helps the Maoists. ●

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IN THE DOC
A WEEKLY COLUMN ON DOCUMENTARIES

TALKING AGAINST THE REVOLUTION

IN POPULAR IMAGINATION, Punjab is the land of agrarian abundance, picked for its fertile promise by the harbingers of the Green Revolution. And to date, it provides for the bulk of India's food needs. But within a decade of the revolution, seeds of agrarian crisis had begun to sprout in the land of promise. Anwar Jamal brings forth the yield from the darker side of Punjab's paradox in his *Harvest Of Grief*.

And there cannot be feedback more critical than 40 to 80 suicides per village in certain areas. Jamal's camera takes us into the living spaces of the dead, baring the catastrophic consequences for the families of the deceased through artful frames, that portray their testimony as well as their silence. His eye is intrusive but never vulgar, like the tool of an artist chipping only to carve meaning. He distills the grief of his subjects, letting us in on their helpless plight, humanising what is otherwise mere numbers on a broadsheet.

The choice of the accompanying folk music etches the plea of the forsaken as only their own songs can. The film focusses on the emotional core of the outcome, contextualising it with the essential theory of the problem, but steering clear of the pitfalls of didactics. The central force of Jamal's visual document is directed towards the state machinery, that is rigging figures to deny the suicides and their cause, depriving Punjab of the little relief the Centre provides.

In a moment of entrenched irony, as relatives of one of the hundreds of farmers who have leaped into an irrigation canal, wait to recover his body, this central force is overwhelming. The State might remain fortress, but there is hope in one filmmaker's impassioned attempt to move us enough to want to make a difference to our own people.



A STILL FROM HARVEST OF GRIEF

Like the film explains, the Indian farmer has always been struggling with debt. What differentiates this climate of death is the cumulative nature of this debt, coupled with receding opportunities for him to pay up. At the heart of shrinking opportunities are the policies of the Revolution that are challenging the existence of small farmers, in the absence of laws to protect them against utter desolation. But the State is committed to these policies in a way that makes it impossible for critical feedback to be integrated into their rigid implementation.

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