ment and the corporate houses:

• About 30 years ago, in Piparwar, Hazaribagh, around 20,000 people were displaced during the acquisition of 16,000 acres by Central Coalfields Ltd. The villagers were resettled in another area with 0.05 acres per household — although villagers allege about 30 percent of the displaced did not get even this — and jobs were provided to 950 of them. The CCL considered its duty done with this, while the people whose livelihood had centred on agro-forestry now became part of the “developed economy” as daily wagers living in slums.

• Last year, an all-India fact-finding team comprising six democratic rights organisations cited the instance of those displaced by the Chandil dam. They visited Ganguah colony, a rehabilitation centre of the Chandil dam, one of 12 such centres for the 116 submerged villages. The project started in the 1970s. The resistance was brutally suppressed by police firing in 1978. Though the dam was completed in 1984, the canals are yet to be fully dug. The first rehabilitation promise was made in 1990 when the displaced families were offered Rs 20,000 for construction of house and Rs 50,000 for purchase of alternative land. In 2003, this was modified to Rs 50,000 for construction of a house and Rs 75,000 for purchase of alternative land. Till 2008, less than half the displaced families had received the rehabilitation package.

• According to the Annual Report 2004-2005 of the Union Ministry of Rural Development, Jharkhand topped the list of Adivasi land alienation in India with 86,291 cases involving a whopping 10,489.3 acres.

• According to the Planning Commission, less than 50 percent of the entire displaced population has been rehabilitated. Walter Fernandes, former Director of the Indian Social Institute, Delhi, says less than 20 percent of them have been rehabilitated. Tribals, just 8 percent of population, comprise 40 percent of the six crore displaced persons in the country;

Clearly, provisions of the Forest Rights Act are just empty promises here.

THE DALIT MOVEMENT IS THE DEFENCE OF THE HUMANITY

SURAISHARMA

WE’RE REALLY GOING PLACES NOW

I WAS AT THE third edition of the International Documentary and Short Film Festival of Kerala last week. A crowd trooping into a cinema hall at 8.30 on a rainy morning for an independent film does not fall into the realm of the impossible, especially in a state like Kerala. The festival is run by professionals who love film and are backed by a state academy though that alone cannot guarantee an interested audi-

ence. Decades of work done by individuals and collectives in the state has created an audience for world cinema as well as contemporary independent films.

A motley bunch tying the ends of a white sheet onto palm trees while a village waits for flickering images to spill out of the projector does not belong to a dreamy, idealistic time in the past. There are films being screened in cafés and college classrooms, in libraries, in living rooms, in old cinema halls, in multiplexes. Film festivals in Gorakhpur, Madurai, Thrissur are hosting films and their makers from around the country. Activists and cinephiles in small towns and big cities have stretched the magical white sheet across all kinds of spaces.

As an independent filmmaker I am often asked, rather aggressively, “Who watches your films? My existence is under attack unless my work is squeezed between ads on prime time TV or carpet bombed onto thousands of screens across the country. A timid recounting of a story, my favourite, is met at times with plain boredom. I received a call from a trade union activist from Indore who had got a video copy of my first film, Kari Mari: Of Cloth and Other Stories from a friend in Delhi. Along with his friends, he para-dubbed the film into Hindi and screened it many times at meetings and functions that they conducted. He had called to ask if I could send more copies because the one they had was worn out from overuse.

Every filmmaker I know has a film circulating extensively outside the realm of big film festivals and niche, exclusive screenings. But when a fellow passenger on the train turns to me and asks: “What do you do?” I lie frantically. That is easier than having to explain why the fellow passenger has never heard of me or my films. But maybe on a train to Gorakhpur I will not need to be so diligent.