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## Tribals protest against Vedanta project

Staff Reporter

*The rally marks the culmination of a padayatra organised by the 'Niyamgiri Surakhya Samity*

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*Rally led by a tribal cultural troupe from Bandhugaon block*

*112 tribal and dalit villages to be affected by the mining project most neglected, says an activist*

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BERHAMPUR: Despite rain more than 3,000 tribals took part in a rally at Muniguda in Rayagada district on Monday to protest against the mining project of Vedanta Alumina Limited (VAL) in Niyamgiri hills of south Orissa.

This rally also marked the culmination of a 'Padayatra' organised by the 'Niyamgiri Surakhya Samity (NSS)' which had started from Idrupa village of Lanjigarh block in Kalahandi district on September 29. It was aimed at creating public awareness against the mining project VAL.

Representatives from villages to be affected by the bauxite mining of VAL in Niyamgiri hill range in Kalahandi and Rayagada districts attended this demonstration.

The tribal activists took out a rally with their traditional arms in hand at Muniguda. This rally was led by a tribal cultural troupe from Bandhugaon block of Koraput district. This troupe had come to show up its solidarity to the anti-mining movement in Niyamgiri area. The demonstrators held a public meeting near the Muniguda block office. Leaders of tribal organisation Lok Sangram Manch (LSM), CPI-ML (New Democracy), members of anti-alumina project agitation in Kashipur block of Rayagada district also attended the rally.

### 'Propaganda deplored'

Leader of Kashipur anti-alumina agitation, Bhagaban Majhi, State president of the LSM, Buddha Gamang, CPI-ML (New Democracy) leader, Bhalu Chandra Sarangi and leader of NSS, Dadhi Pusika addressed the public meeting. The NSS leader deplored the propaganda against their agitation through a pamphlet distributed in the area. As per the pamphlet their agitation was being financed by some NGOs. Irked by this allegation, the tribals attending the rally chased away some activists of an NGO who had come over to the place of public meeting.

Mr Pusika said the 112 tribal and dalit villages to be affected by the mining project were most neglected. They did not have basic amenities like medical facility, drinking water and properly functioning schools. "The mining project will now take away even the sources of livelihood from them," he alleged.

The demonstrators demanded that the State Government use the numerous streams in Niyamgiri hills for irrigation purpose through minor irrigation projects. They also demanded immediate renovation of the Rayagada-Bhawanipatna road, which according to them had been totally damaged by the heavy vehicles of the VAL.

It may be noted that the VAL completed construction of an alumina refinery in Lanjigarh area of Kalahandi district in Orissa. Although the refinery unit is complete, the project has suffered stumbling block in the form of protest against the mining for the ore needed for the project. The project is to depend on ores mined from Niyamgiri region. But the mining has been delayed due to court cases and protests delaying the Rs. 4000-crore project of the company.

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