

COMMENTARY

# **Koodankulam Resistance And Kalam's Propaganda**

Monday 2 January 2012, by [KRISHNAN Kavita](#) (Date first published: 1 December 2011).

The Koodankulam struggle, which has gained tremendous momentum and support in the past few months, reflects the new awareness and questioning among people - in India and globally - regarding nuclear energy, following the Fukushima disaster. The struggle, if successful, will not just prevent the installation of the Koodankulam Nuclear Plant. The UPA Government well knows that the movement's success will challenge the entire nuclear expansion programme planned by the UPA Government in the wake of the Indo-US Nuke Deal.

A mass indefinite hunger strike by villagers of coastal districts of Tamilnadu (Thoothukudi, Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari) had forced Tamilnadu CM Jayalalitha to distance herself from the plant. Jayalalitha, during the NDA regime at the Centre had herself supported the project. Now, she has sensed that such support might take a large political toll - and has chosen to let the UPA Government at the Centre bear the political burden alone.

The UPA Government, prevented by the villagers from proceeding with the installation which was scheduled to take place in October, set up an expert panel to look into the safety concerns being raised by the protestors. But this exercise appears to be one of empty placation, which has failed to answer any of the serious issues being raised by local villagers. The 'expert' scientists' assurances having little effect, the NPCIL (Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd) Chairman S K Jain fell back on the absurd and communal accusations of a 'foreign/missionary hand' backing the protests! These crude attempts to divide the movement on communal lines and alienate Hindu villagers from the Christian ones has failed entirely, however.

In a desperate attempt to discredit the movement and erode the wider appeal and sympathy it commands across Tamilnadu and the rest of the country, the nuclear establishment and the UPA Government have roped in former President, APJ Abdul Kalam with his image as a technocrat in India's nuclear establishment. In 2008, too, Kalam had been deployed by the UPA Government in a bid to lend some credibility to the Indo-US Nuke Deal.

Kalam's plank has been, mainly, an emotive appeal on nationalistic-chauvinistic lines, with a thin veneer of 'science, technology and development' rhetoric. He has rubbished the safety concerns raised by protestors in the familiar terms of the sacred goal of 'development.' Saying that 'fear is a disease that kills development,' he asks if we will allow a tsunami at the Fukushima Daichi plant in Japan to blight India's future?

In an insult to people's intelligence, he has chosen to play down the Fukushima disaster that has shaken the world, citing it as an instance of efficient containment of a potential disaster rather than the biggest nuclear disaster in history! His plank is that no lives were lost at Fukushima. What Kalam deliberately plays down is the real significance of Fukushima.

Fukushima shook people's confidence in the safety claims of nuclear plants, worldwide. Kalam tries

to tell us the Fukushima plant was based on outdated technology; but it is well known that the people of Japan had been assured several times by the Kalam of their own country, that the Fukushima reactors had the best safety and backup mechanisms capable of dealing with any quake or tsunami. When the tsunami actually hit one of the reactors, the safety and cooling mechanisms broke down and a meltdown was imminent. In desperation the Japanese experts were reduced to using huge amounts of sea water to try and cool the reactor down.

Months later, the leakages continue, and it is absurd to claim that Fukushima is out of danger when the worst is yet to unfold. The problem of safe disposal of the contaminated cooling water and radioactive waste is still an unsolved problem; and it is still not known if the reactor fuel has penetrated the ground. The people of the affected areas are yet to be able to return home.

Kalam even belittles the effects of the Hiroshima-Nagasaki bombing - wanting us to accept research sponsored by the US (responsible for the bombing!) as 'impartial' and 'scientific' evidence that the effects of a nuclear disaster remain confined only to one generation!

In the wake of the lessons of Fukushima, countries like Germany and Belgium have already had to announce a phase-out of nuclear energy. All over the world, countries are having to bow to the growing popular opinion against nuclear energy, which has proved to have huge hidden costs and unsurpassed potential for massive human tragedy. Kalam undermines his own credibility by asking Indians to ignore and laugh away the lessons of Fukushima.

Kalam is being projected by the nuclear establishment and captive sections of the media as a voice of 'science and sanity', who has branded the protesting villagers were 'ill-informed and misguided' and beset with irrational fears. When we see Kalam invoking 'Tamil pride,' and belittling nuclear disasters by comparing nuclear plants with historical monuments and nuclear disasters with dam bursts, one wonders who is ill-informed! Amusingly, the 'scientist' Kalam has chosen to invoke the bogey of the 'foreign hand,' saying he suspects "geo-political and market forces" to be behind the stir! To the naked eye, the only 'foreign' and 'market' forces in Koodankulam are representatives of the Russian nuclear industry!

As a last resort, Kalam has mooted a 200 crore proposal for local development. It is a tragic irony that hospitals, schools and colleges, and development of agriculture and fisheries, that ought to be a right of the local people, is being proffered only as a bribe in exchange for exposing their lives and livelihood to the dangers of a nuclear disaster!

Far from being 'ill-informed,' the Koodankulam protestors know that Russian state agencies have, in a recent report, admitted that the Russian industry's nuclear plants are especially vulnerable to natural and man-made disasters. They know, that raising the height of the reactors to put them out of the probable reach of a tsunami (as Kalam assures) will only make them more vulnerable in case of a quake. They are unwilling to gamble their lives in a game of chance, being forced to live on the edge of a potential Fukushima. They know that while Kalam moots India's unique Thorium reserves as a potential source of energy, the prestigious and well-funded nuclear research in independent India is yet to come up with a viable way of harnessing thorium reserves to produce anywhere near the levels of energy that had been projected and promised.

The Koodankulam movement has remained undaunted by the heightened government propaganda against it. A national march to Koodankulam is planned in the coming week. The Indo-US Nuke Deal - ushered in by a dubious and corrupt vote in Parliament - paved the way for nuclear expansion efforts whereby the NPCIL plans to set up 32 imported reactors all over India by 2032. The Nuke Liability Bill protects the nuclear suppliers from bearing the burden of compensation and clean-up in case of a disaster. Now, a success of the people's movement at Koodankulam offers a ray of hope for

the country whose rulers are hell-bent on putting its citizens at the mercy of the global nuclear industry and its huge attendant dangers to humanity itself.

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\* From Liberation, December 2011:

[http://www.cpiml.org/liberation/year\\_2011/dec\\_11/commentary.html](http://www.cpiml.org/liberation/year_2011/dec_11/commentary.html)