

Chapter 19 - The Exasperating Anarchist Catch 22

Yossarian in Joseph Heller's black satire *Catch 22* is caught in an unpleasant situation during World War II that he cannot get out of try as he might. The only way to discharge himself from the perils of war duty and so escape the ever present danger of getting killed is for him to declare himself as being mad. But the moment he applies saying that he is mad his application is rejected by the authorities who argue that a person who is mad cannot possibly have the sense to make an application saying that he is so (Heller, 1996). The problem of political marginalisation facing mass environmental movements in India today too is a manifestation of a similar *Catch 22* that has bedevilled anarchists of all shades from the time they began thinking queerly! The only viable way in which the centralised forces of the state apparatus can be fought and overthrown, whether violently or non-violently, is through the formation of a massive centralised organisation of the masses prepared to adopt underhand means to counter the illegality of the state. But by definition anarchists are against all forms of centralisation and stress on the maintenance of the purity of means to achieve desired ends. So they cannot posit a viable mass challenge to the state that they would so much like to get rid of. Faced with this seemingly impossible situation some individual armchair anarchists like Thoreau have contented themselves with holding forth from their isolated ivory towers against the iniquities of the state (Thoreau, 2000) while others of a more practical bent like our own Shaheed Bhagat Singh, before he gave up on anarchism and became a Marxist during his incarceration prior to execution, have laid their faith in individual acts of violence against the state. Both these strategies have naturally proved ineffective.

There have been many ways in which anarchists, who have actually tried to change the world on a mass scale, have tried to get around this dilemma. One common way has been to form a skeletal anarchist organisation and then latch it on to a larger centralised mass organisation that is working against the state. Gandhi followed this course during the freedom struggle. The problem with this is that the purity of anarchist theory and action has then to be compromised to a greater or lesser extent. Additionally there is always the danger that when power is eventually won from the oppressors then the centralised organisation tends to shrug off the anarchists and pursue a course directly in opposition to all that the latter hold dear. As we have seen this is what happened in the case of the Gandhians with the Congress party after independence was won from the British and, as we shall see later, this is also what happened to the Russian anarchists in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia. Thus Gandhi postponed his anarchist programme of village self rule for the more statist one of parliamentary self-rule during the freedom struggle in the naive hope that the former could be achieved after the latter was in place contradicting his own pet dictum of not divorcing means from ends. The Congress led by Nehru cashed in on this ideological confusion and rode piggyback on the tremendous charismatic influence of Gandhi to attain state power. They then thought nothing of flushing his ideas down the holy River Ganges along with his funeral ashes.

The charisma of Gandhi is itself the result of another aspect of his compromise with the liberating tenets of anarchism in order to retain control of the freedom struggle. Gandhi, following the evangelical tradition of Ruskin and Tolstoy, decided to use the power of religious imagery to mobilise the masses. The concept of nationhood had spread earlier in the western world with the rapid and intensive propagation of a common culture through the print media and had taken a few centuries to crystallise (Anderson, 1983). Thus it was a shrewd move on Gandhi's part to use the Hindu religion, which was the strongest uniting force

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between the illiterate and disparate masses in this country, for the spread of nationalistic fervour in a short period of time without labouring with the more time consuming process of formation of a more solid national consciousness through mass education. While this made him a charismatic "Mahatma" or saint in the eyes of the Hindu majority it simultaneously made the Muslims suspicious and prompted them to formulate their own separate nationalism based on Islam. Conflict between these spurious nationalisms, fanned even more for their own benefit by the British, gave rise to a "false decolonisation" (Fanon, 1982) at the time of independence, leading not only to the partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan but also the transfer of power by the British to a collaborative elitist minority of landed and moneyed classes with the vast majority of the poor still left shackled by feudal and social oppression. This false antagonism has continued to plague the relationship between the two countries in the post-independence era with several wasteful wars between them, ongoing Muslim terrorism in India and virulent Hindu - Muslim riots sometimes amounting to genocides of Muslims, as in Gujarat in 2002.

The most vexing problem arising from Gandhi's back pedalling regarding attempting to set up village self rule is that his lack of serious engagement with the reality of social and economic oppression within the average Indian village has left a romantic and populist legacy of the village being an ideal anarchist community which it actually is not except to some extent in adivasi areas. Ambedkar took issue with him on this on quite a few occasions and eventually said in disgust during the debates of the Constituent Assembly formed to draft the Constitution - "I hold these village republics have been the ruination of India What is the village but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow mindedness and communalism?" (Ambedkar, 1994: 62). Gandhi did nothing to allay Ambedkar's fears of upper caste oppression, which he thought would prevent the dalits from voting. This made Ambedkar use his influence as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution to prevent the inclusion of Panchayati Raj or village self rule as a mandatory justiciable part of the Constitution. It was instead listed only as a desirable but non-justiciable goal of state policy. This was a retrogressive development following directly from Gandhi's inability to come up with a practical programme for the emancipation of the dalits. The success of Panchayati Raj after its having been made a mandatory part of the Constitution in the early nineteen nineties has proved that despite a lot of problems with its implementation it has on the whole deepened and widened the reach of democracy for hitherto dis-franchised sections such as the dalits, backward castes, adivasis and women.

Consequently Gandhi and the Congress generally went along with the British policy of introducing rudimentary self rule for the Indians with the constitution of provincial assemblies and central councils constituted through election on a limited franchise restricted to the propertied classes and nomination by the princes. The Government of India Acts of 1919 and 1935 ushered in such minimal participation for the elitist politicians of the national movement. After initially blowing hot, Nehru even calling the latter a "charter of bondage" (Nehru, 1975, Vol VII pp 605), the Congress instead of rejecting these half measures and fighting unswervingly for complete independence participated in these half-baked governance opportunities. Thus the prospects of decentralised grassroots democracy and people centred development in this country were buried during British rule itself and not after Gandhi's assassination in 1948, as is made out by the Gandhians. This history of compromise with anarchist principles finally resulted in the constitution of the Constituent Assembly for the framing of the Constitution of Independent India in May 1946. The members of the assembly, the "founding fathers" of the independent Indian Republic, were not elected

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through the principle of one adult person one vote. Instead the members of the provincial assemblies of that part of India directly ruled by the British who had been elected by an electorate consisting of the propertied classes which was just ten percent of the whole adult population and the Princes nominated the members to the Constituent Assembly. The British had constituted this Constituent Assembly and so Nehru declared in the Meerut session of the Congress in October 1946 that after independence a new and more representative Constituent Assembly would be elected through universal adult franchise (Nehru, 1983, Vol I pp 19). Once again this promise like many others was never kept.

Ideally the Indian electoral system should have been based on proportional representation to accommodate the vast diversity in the socio-economic characteristics of the population. In this system political parties are allotted seats in the legislature in proportion to the votes that they get and so even small local parties who can get votes higher than a specified threshold can find representation in the legislature. There would thus have been scope for a thousand schools of thought to contend and bring to fruition a much more vibrant and diverse democratic culture than had obtained in British India. Instead the first past the post system was adopted in which the candidate getting the most number of the valid votes cast in a constituency is declared elected. This latter system was to the advantage of the Congress party which could get to rule unhampered on its own without the pulls and pressures of coalition governance that a system of proportional representation usually gives rise to and would certainly have in the diverse Indian context. So the first past the post electoral system of the British and American democracies, which the British had introduced to suit their own agenda of keeping the unruly masses at bay, was retained after independence giving the Congress an undue monopoly of power in the crucial first decade and a half of governance under the leadership of Nehru.

The first elections to the Lok Sabha held in 1951 saw the Congress winning just forty five percent of the total valid votes but as much as seventy five percent of the seats. Similarly in the second elections in 1957 the Congress won forty eight percent of the total valid votes and seventy five percent of the seats. In the third general elections of 1962 the Congress won forty five percent of the total valid votes and got seventy three percent of the seats (ECI, 2005). The second largest party by way of votes won in all these three elections was the Socialist Party but due to the fact that their support base was spread much thinner than the Congress' they could not win seats in proportion to their votes. In 1951 the Socialists got ten and a half percent of the total valid votes but only two and a half percent of the seats. This is to be contrasted with the Communist Party of India, which won only three and a half percent of the votes and a similar percentage of the seats because their mass base was of a concentrated nature. Interestingly Ambedkar's political party, The All India Scheduled Castes Federation, also failed to do well at the hustings in the first elections in 1951 with the great man himself losing from the Bombay City North constituency despite having done so much for the dalits. Similarly in 1957 the Socialists once again got ten and a half percent of the votes but only three and a half percent of the seats while the Communists got nearly nine percent of the votes and five and a half percent of the seats. In the 1962 elections the two separate Socialist Parties together got nine and a half percent of the votes and only three and a half percent of the seats while the Communists got almost ten percent of the votes and five and a half percent of the seats.

Thus a clever and unnatural choice of electoral system gave the Congress party thumping majorities to do as it pleased with little effective parliamentary opposition to its policies. The significance of this disproportion between votes and seats becomes crystal clear

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if we compare it with the relation between the percentage of votes and seats won for the same three groups above in the general elections of 2004 by which time fractured mandates and coalition politics had become the order of the day. The Congress, the Nationalist Congress Party and the Trinamool Congress Party, which have their roots in the old Congress, together won thirty percent of the votes and twenty nine percent of the seats. The various splinter groups of the Socialists together won eleven and a half percent of the votes and sixteen percent of the seats. The Communists and their allies won eight percent of the votes and eleven percent of the seats (ECI, op cit). The tables have now been turned. The Congress is continually being spread thin while the smaller parties, concentrated as they are in localised niches are garnering more seats in proportion to the votes won. The BJP, which too, after the general elections of 1999 catapulted it into power at the centre, began harbouring grandiose visions of emulating the erstwhile golden performances of the Congress, has been made to bite the dust by the earthy Indian masses. Politics has thus become much more localised and the kaleidoscopic socio-economic diversity of its population has finally begun to exert a political influence that is large enough to pose a puzzle that defies both the scholars and practitioners of electoral politics in India (Yadav, 2004).

Once Gandhi had compromised in letting the establishment of first past the post parliamentary democracy become the goal of the Congress it was only a short step thereafter to letting the influence of money power and unethical political practice dominate the electoral strategies of the party and thus comprehensively failing his own purity of means and ends test. The conservative elements who formed the majority within the Congress had a free hand in the preparations for the elections to the provincial assemblies in 1936 and they generally selected candidates from local businessmen, contractors and landlords who were able to donate funds to the party and also spend lavishly on their own campaigns. Defections were also engineered from non-Congress parties in areas where the party was not strong with the dangling of the usual sops (Das, 2001). This strategy was immensely successful and helped the Congress to come to power everywhere it contested. Nehru made a few deprecating noises within the party forums regarding the infiltration of unscrupulous elements but went along with this wholesale subversion of democratic and ethical norms by the conservative leadership of the party so as to gain support from them for his overall leadership.

Nehru in fact was busy cleverly "burning the candle at both ends" to the appreciative delight of the Conservatives in the Congress led by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel after whom the Sardar Sarovar dam is named (Patel, 1936). He played the mentor to the then young Marxist firebrands led by Jayaprakash Narayan and gave them much greater importance than the mass following they commanded. Presiding over the crucial Lucknow Annual Convention of the Congress party in 1936, held against the backdrop of the British beginning to devolve power to the Indians and the emerging possibility of independence, he not only espoused socialism as the solution to India's and the world's problems but also nominated three members of the Congress Socialist Party which had been formed earlier with his blessings in 1934 to the Congress Working Committee (Sinha, 1984). In this way he both countered the Conservatives and also co-opted these firebrands into the leadership and deflected them from pursuing subversive mass mobilisational work. However, once their purpose of buttressing Nehru's position vis-a-vis the Conservatives within the Congress was served the Socialists found themselves rejected in the same way as the Gandhians after independence. They severed their connections with the Congress and formed the independent Socialist Party in 1948. Following exemplary democratic principles they also resigned their seats in the legislative assembly of the United Provinces and sought re-election. The Congress then used

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its art of winning by hook or by crook developed earlier during the 1936 elections to defeat the Socialists and push them into the political wilderness (Brass & Robinson eds, 1989).

Right from the first general elections in 1951 money power, muscle power and the state machinery were used to vitiate the sanctity of the electoral process in such a way that there was little chance of an ethical person being able to win elections. Both the Socialists and the Communists lost out because of this in most areas except in a few niches where they were in such great mass strength that they could effectively counter the electoral mal practices of the Congress. Losing out on state power in a poor post-colonial country like India with an underdeveloped economy and civil society and an over-developed state apparatus (Bardhan, 1999) meant losing out on everything as the state was the main collector and commander of resources and distributor of largesse. Control of state power also provided the Congress with the opportunity to get massive financial contributions from the industrialists - the nascent Indian capitalist class in exchange for policies and programmes favourable to them. This further reduced the chances of the Socialists or the Communists of winning elections. Even when the Communists despite mountainous hurdles did manage to cobble together a government in Kerala, the first democratically elected Communist government in the world, Nehru threw all political scruples to the wind and dismissed the government in 1959 to impose Central rule in the state. Defections were engineered with the dangling of sops to win away elected representatives and their supporters. Thus there was a continuous exodus of workers and leaders from among the Socialists and Communists to the Congress (Sinha, op cit).

The net result was that both the Socialists and Communists got effectively sidelined in the Nehru era and parliament lost its capacity to act as a check on governance, which increasingly became of a strong centrist nature shedding even the little formal federalism that had been provided for in the Constitution. The extent of the Congress hegemony can be gauged from the fact that the first no-confidence motion against Nehru's government was moved only in the year 1963, all of sixteen years after independence. Nehru became the supreme leader as head of both the government and the Congress party ruthlessly removing those who tried to stand up to him in opposition by overt and covert means and consciously promoting weak politicians without much mass following as the chief ministers in the states (Das, op cit). A patron-client relationship was set up beginning with Nehru at the top and a whole sycophantic pyramid going down to the lowest workers at the grassroots level all trying to dispense state favours. Nehru's daughter Indira Gandhi, who followed Nehru as Prime Minister after a brief interlude after his death when Gulzarilal Nanda and Lal Bahadur Shastri were at the helm, pursued these corrupt practices and perfected them into an art. Finally, the mass movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan, which reached the verge of forcing a general election, challenged this covert subversion of democracy by the Congress party. Indira Gandhi then went to the extent of declaring an internal emergency and overtly curtailing democratic freedoms in 1975.

The long incarceration in jail during the emergency must have given the opposition leaders of all hues an opportunity to review the reasons for their electoral marginalisation and they probably realised that winning elections and being able to cut and distribute the developmental cake were crucial to effective operation in the Indian democratic system as it had evolved under the Congress. So when the parliamentary Socialists and Communists finally made their way to power at the centre and in the states following the historic elections of 1977 after the internal emergency was lifted they too began treading the corrupt trail blazed by the Congress. Winning elections and staying in power became the driving goal and

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ideology began taking a back seat as Jayaprakash Narayan's ideas of total revolution too were floated down the Ganges with his funeral ashes as Gandhi's had been earlier (Sinha, op cit). The Socialists and Communists, with a few hiccups in between, have at present surpassed the Congress in the art of rigging elections, garnering resources illegally and misusing the state machinery and so have done much better than the latter in the last elections of 2004. Nowadays all political parties, and there are many to accord with the varied diversity of the people across the spectrum from the left to the right and from the bottom of the social order to the top, that take part in elections, have recourse to unfair electoral practices prior to winning and dubious parliamentary practices after that. Indeed the Bahujan Samaj Party of the dalits, which had given a clarion call for cleansing the dirty politics of the "Manuvadi" upper castes when it first began participating in elections, too has gone the corrupt way of the other parties. All parties have also duplicated the patron-client relationship on which the Congress is based and are all top down parties centred around single leaders or a small group of leaders. No wonder then that hardened criminals who have both power and pelf in the local settings have begun winning elections in embarrassingly large numbers and dictating what little is left of party policy. Since winning elections and staying in power have become ends in themselves rather than being the means for social transformation and people oriented governance, both electoral and legislative practice have been reduced to being a theatre of the absurd with bizarre goings on these days.

The decade of the nineteen nineties saw this theatre of the absurd start to be acted out at the grassroots level also with the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment introducing a third tier of governance at the community level in urban and rural areas all over the country. Nehru as a part of his penchant for centralisation of political power had initially given Panchayati Raj the complete go by. However, the failure of the Community Development Programme initiated in the early nineteen fifties led to the appointment of the Balwantrai Mehta Committee to review this in 1957. The Committee found that in the absence of people's planning and participation the programme had fallen prey to bureaucratic malfeasance and suggested that a three tier Panchayati Raj system be initiated (Bandyopadhyay et al, 2003). Thus a rudimentary local government system was begun in many parts of the country but it soon perished. The main reason was that the state governments did not want to devolve powers to the panchayats. Given the strong concentration of resources and power with the union government the state governments had little room for manoeuvre and they did not want to lose what little they had. Apart from this the district level bureaucracy was obviously dead against handing over the control of the rural development schemes to the panchayats.

The Naxalite upsurge of the late nineteen sixties followed by the mass movement of Jayaprakash Narayan in 1974-75 had made it abundantly clear that mass aspirations at the grassroots were pressing for a more accessible institutionalised democratic outlet for their expression. Thus after the elections in 1977 the union government set up the Ashok Mehta Committee and it too made wide-ranging recommendations for the establishment of Panchayati Raj. Following on this the Left Front Government in West Bengal and the Janata Party Government in Karnataka began on a new note with institutionalised rural local self governance. These experiments were immensely successful in that they provided greater participation of people, who had earlier been excluded from electoral politics, in governance and development. Throughout the decade of the nineteen eighties the dominance of the Congress in Indian politics began to decline and strong regional parties began coming to power in the states. The states thus began to increase their share of the power and resources at

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the cost of the centre and gain more independence in their own spheres of action making them more amenable to the idea of devolving resources to the grassroots. So with time the pressure building up at the grassroots has resulted in the countrywide adoption of Panchayati Raj.

Nevertheless the framework adopted for this rural self-governance is such that it acts as an adjunct to the mainstream political process instead of a challenge to it as envisaged by Gandhi. It just provides a forum for the training of grassroots leaders in political practice and local area development and their cooption into the system of graft and patronage that exists at the higher levels. The modes of participation in this grassroots level politics are the same as those for the legislative and parliamentary levels that had been initiated by the Congress party and later adopted by all other parliamentary parties. The same use of money and muscle power and misuse of state machinery and the same patron-client relationship between the leaders and their followers are manifest at this level also. The political leaders at the higher levels disburse favours to those at the panchayat level in return for their support during the elections. This has led my friend and colleague Shankar to aver that the rule of the sarpanch or the elected head of the Panchayat is in reality a "parpanch" or hoax perpetrated on the people.

It does not require much perspicacity to see that given this corrupt milieu it is next to impossible to win elections at levels higher than that of the panchayats, and there too with much difficulty, while remaining true to ethical canons and anarchist principles. This is why the environmentalist mass movements have been unable to make any electoral headway at the legislative and parliamentary levels apart from some stray MLAs here or there (Rahul, 1996). They have been able to win some seats in panchayats but since these have little financial or political powers this does not help in influencing policy at the state or national level. A vicious circle of marginalisation results from this. There is a tendency among the masses to vote for those parties who they feel will be able to win and make an impact on governance. That is why the marginal "bin pende ka lota" image of the environmentalists has resulted in electoral formations set up by them falling flat and becoming even more marginalised because people do not want to waste their vote by voting for a losing candidate (Sunil, 2005). The "Father of the Nation" in forsaking anarchism for the sake of controlling the mainstream political process disinherited his true ideological progeny, the sarvodayis and the mass environmentalists, who presently find themselves forced to sit on the sidelines of the political system, which he set out to dominate.

Theoretically it should be possible to counter the corrupt political practices at the level of the panchayats if there is a fairly good local mass organisation. This is what prompted the KMCS to actively participate in the panchayat elections when they were first held on a direct voting basis in Madhya Pradesh in 1989. The KMCS was in a clear majority in four panchayats. In two of them prior meetings held to decide on the candidates for the posts of panches or ward members and the sarpanch ended amicably with unanimous choices and so there were no contests as only one candidate filed nomination papers per seat. In the two other panchayats things were not so smooth. The Congress saw to it that candidates filed nominations to oppose the KMCS for the post of sarpanch and panch. The KMCS coasted through with handsome margins in one of these panchayats despite this opposition. However, shockingly for us, the KMCS lost the post of sarpanch in the Attha panchayat in which we were headquartered and the KMCS candidate for panch from our ward also lost by one vote. It was clear that KMCS members had voted against the official candidates that had been decided on in the meetings prior to the elections.

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The post mortem that ensued has remained the most chastising political lesson that I have ever had. The Congress candidate for the sarpanch's post was the patel of Gendra village who had in the initial stages picked up the courage to let Khemraj and Amit stay in the school at Gendra. However, when later the KMCS was formed and a systematic fight began against the state he backed out of this direct confrontation. That is why in the meeting to decide on the KMCS candidate the articulate members of the Sangathan chose another person who had remained steadfast in the battle against the administration. The post mortem meeting revealed that a majority of the members of the Sangath felt that since the immediate goal of securing the cultivation on nevar land had been successfully achieved the administration should not be upset too much lest it decided to dispossess them once again. Thus they favoured the patel's soft approach as opposed to that of the hardline one of the more radical section of the Sangath who took their cues from us activists. In the case of the panch it appeared that the KMCS candidate had in the early years when the logging contractors had begun operating acted as their agent and cheated the rest of the people of their wage dues. He even used to beat up the people when they protested. Despite the fact that he had later reformed himself and played a stellar role in setting up the Sangath nevertheless the people decided to pay him back for their earlier insults and torture at his hands. What shook me most was that we activists did not get an inkling of this massive undercurrent of secret "resistance" (Scott, 1990) among the people to the radical anti-statist direction that we were giving to the Sangath's politics. Instead of coming out and stating their preferences openly in the meetings they decided to use the secret ballot against us! I learnt the important lesson at that early stage of my activism that the peasant masses offer covert resistance not only to their oppressors but also to their liberators when the latter begin to go too fast for their comfort.

This of course is an old problem that has confronted activists fighting for radical socio-political change for quite some time. The common people are interested only in their immediate betterment and not in the grandiose plans of building up a larger struggle against the state that enthuse activists like us (Orwell, 1958). A few of them might grasp the need for such a long term struggle to hold on to the immediate gains but the vast majority just want a decent life and with even a little bit of improvement want to desist from active political struggle. Alternatively, as we have seen with the exodus from the NBA after the failure of the Sangharsh Yatra, when the people see the futility of political struggle they prefer to opt for a compromise with the oppressors rather than go for an all out battle. Due to the patron-client system of electoral politics, the state in independent India, however oppressive it might be, still has to be responsive to a certain extent to the demands of the people if it has to retain legitimacy. If nothing else it is able to win over the likes of the patel of Gendra with various kinds of sops. The politics of the KMCS became diluted after this to accord with the preferences of the people rather than that of the activists! There is an anecdote about a king once asking his people to contribute a glass of milk secretly into a big cauldron through a hole in its lid for the purpose of a feast. When finally the lid of the cauldron was taken out it was found that it was filled with water. Everyone had contributed a glass of water thinking that it would go unnoticed amidst the contributions of milk by the others! Similarly for anarchists like us who rarely have anything tangible to offer to the people in the short run other than stints in jail, secret first past the post secret ballots result in a watery grave for our anarchist dreams.

That panchayat election of 1989 was the only time in my whole life that I have ever voted. Previously I had considered the whole system of elections a sham and never voted. The hectic campaigning and managing that I had to do in the run up to those elections

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enthused me enough to go and vote. On going into the cubicle with my folded ballot paper I found that the stool on which the stamp was kept was covered with stamp signs. Later on when the counting was going on I was there as the agent of our panch candidate and saw a number of ballot papers that had not been stamped at all. Investigations later revealed that the women who had been brought to the booths to vote for the first time in their lives without much training had not understood anything at all of what had to be done. So one of them must have gone in and stamped the stool and brought back the ballot paper folded as it was and put it into the box. Others following had then taken her lead and stamped the stool time and again and put blank ballot papers into the box. Over the past decade and a half the women have surely become more proficient what with electronic voting machines and regular training in the technicalities of voting having made their debut. But disillusioned totally with the electoral process after that debacle I have since busied myself with stamping cockroaches rather than ballot papers.

The corruption in panchayats is made possible because the first past the post electoral system has been adopted at this level too. Actually there is no need for a sarpanch to be elected as the Gram Sabhas or village general bodies, being small in size, can be easily convened every month or so to decide on the various matters that have to be considered and they can depute people by turns to undertake any work that may have to be done. This would also obviate the need for the small Gram Sabhas splitting up into various camps led by the contending candidates for the post of sarpanch or panches. Instead all contentious issues can be debated in the Gram Sabha meetings in front of everyone and a consensus reached. However, this simple method, which has been adopted traditionally by villagers, has been rejected and an executive elected by the perfidious first past the post system has been given the responsibility for the affairs of the panchayat. Since the sarpanch and panches do not have any salaries they must perforce resort to graft to compensate themselves for the time that they give to the panchayat. This problem came up in the three panchayats in which the KMCS came to power in 1989. We tried to circumvent this problem by having a team of people working by rotation in support of the sarpanches and we activists too did a lot of the running around. Soon we found that it was a Herculean task getting any work done because of the opposition of the "local state" (Corbridge et al, 2003) constituted by the rural development bureaucracy, to our plans. Nevertheless we did some very good work in watershed development for the first time in Jhabua district and used most of the development funds made available for the purpose of income generation at the village level (Rahul, 1992). This arrangement was not a sustainable one as it depended for its success on us activists monitoring it closely. The moment we withdrew from the process as we got involved in wider issues the system we had put in place collapsed. People tended to leave the sarpanches to their own devices and only expected them to deliver the goods. So eventually all the three sarpanches were forced to resort to graft in collaboration with the bureaucracy who were only too willing. Things became even weirder in later elections with members of the Sangath fighting against each other. The KMCS finally took the position that it would not actively participate in the panchayat elections as an organisation while its members were free to do so.

The Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) in the state of Rajasthan, which later took up the same issue of corruption within the panchayats and elevated it into a very successful national campaign for the right to information, has also not been able to overcome this basic problem of the apathy of the people towards higher political goals and support for the sarpanches who have to give their time for the work of the panchayat. The two MKSS sarpanches who had won in the panchayat elections of year 2000 had to be compensated with

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funds garnered by the organisation from outside sources for the time that they had spent in managing the panchayat affairs (Khera, 2005). Despite having worked well in the interests of the panchayat with this external support the MKSS was unable to retain these seats in the 2005 elections. One of these seats in fact includes the village that is the headquarters of the organisation. The MKSS fought these elections on an anarchist plank with a people's manifesto and a declaration that no candidate for sarpanch would spend more than Rs 2000 on the election expenses and also the promise that the elected sarpanches would be supported with external funds for the time that they would give to the panchayat. Yet only two of the twelve candidates for sarpanch managed to scrape through against the other candidates who spent tens of thousands of rupees on their election campaigns. The people demand immediate fixes to their problems without being prepared to fight long battles to change the skewed over centralised distribution of political power and the resulting corruption that bedevils the system of governance. Obviously the people thought the MKSS to be a "bin pende ka lota" which could not be trusted to wangle resources from the state in sufficient amounts for the development of their panchayats. Thus between the devil of the state and the deep blue sea of the inscrutable masses the true blue anarchist stands absolutely alone, thoroughly and exasperatingly checkmated.

This inability to make its presence felt in the parliament and the legislatures and even at the panchayat level has severely handicapped the environmentalist movement in India. It has perforce had to rely on lobbying and advocacy. However, these modes of applying political pressure have their limitations when fundamental issues of development and governance are involved. The NBA has taken the lead in forming a coalition of all the major environmentalist mass movements in the country under the umbrella of the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM). But since all these movements separately do not have a mass presence capable of winning elections they have not been able to do much better together either. Like in mathematics fractions multiplied with each other have resulted in a smaller negligible fraction at the national level! Despite arguing factually against the now defunct Enron Corporation promoted Dabhol Power Company project in Maharashtra and predicting that the Maharashtra State Electricity Board would not be able to buy the expensive electricity produced by it, NAPM could not prevent its construction (PEG, 2005). Today the NAPM can turn round and say "I told you so" given the fact that its prediction has come true and the project is bogged down in legal wrangles but that is little consolation. In a similar kind of bull headedness governments of all hues are going ahead with the grandiose plan to link rivers through inter-basin transfer of water resources disregarding the impeccable logic being given against this foolhardy venture by the NAPM (Patkar, 2004).

Yossarian in Heller's novel is asked which he prefers more, staying alive or winning the war. He replies that he wants both because winning the war is of no use to a dead man. He is castigated for such a view, which it is alleged would only help the enemy. He cynically replies that the enemy is the person who gets one killed regardless of the side he is on. Present day anarcho-environmentalists find themselves forced to be a part of a highly centralised human civilisation at war with nature. The crazy warriors who control the affairs of this global civilisation are constantly berating them for not wanting to win this war, which is both futile and fatal. When the anarchists are castigated for being enemies of progress they can only reply forlornly that all so called progress is in the long run the enemy of both nature and humans. Of what use is progress if billions of deprived people all over the world continually have to pay with their lives and livelihoods for it?

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As a case in point the poor African Americans have had to bear the costs in New Orleans of the damages in the wake of Hurricane Katrina (Cohn, 2005). Ongoing Congressional investigations have revealed that there were severe governmental failures in preventing and then coping with this worst of natural disasters in modern American history (Lipton, 2006). These failures occurred because the Bush administration had to cut down spending on repairing and maintaining the levees that keep New Orleans, which is situated below sea level, from drowning. These cuts in spending had to take place to pay for the war in Iraq. The war in Iraq like all the previous ones in the Middle East is basically about retaining control of crude oil resources in the Gulf region. The ever increasing use of energy and other products generated from crude oil is necessary to keep the United States and so the world economy growing at a frenetic pace. This in turn is leading to greater and greater global warming through the increasing emission of waste heat and waste green house gases. So the temperatures in the Gulf of Mexico have been going up creating lower and lower pressure depressions in the atmosphere and higher and higher amounts of energy being made available for storms in the rising moist and warm air, which in turn are giving rise to fiercer and fiercer hurricanes like Katrina (Travis, 2005). The more the mad spending on economic growth, the more is the spending on wars to secure the crucial natural resources for this growth and so less are the funds for countering the increasingly dangerous environmental fallouts resulting from this profligacy. Like Yossarian anarcho-environmentalists too can find no escape from a crazy predicament brought about by the warmongers incorporated.

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