

Chapter 12 - Things Fall Apart

The Sangharsh Yatra was the greatest mass action that the NBA ever instituted. All was staked on the success of this long march from Barwani to the dam site to stop permanently the work on the dam. Preparations began months in advance of Christmas day on 25th December 1990 when the march was to be launched from Rajghat on the banks of the Narmada near Barwani. By that time the NBA had a wide network of supporters in all the major centres of India and in many places in the USA, Europe and Japan. So arrangements were made for people to come for the Yatra from all over the world. Apart from this there was to be mass participation from people's organisations. Press coverage was crucial and so those journalists who were committed supporters of the NBA were given the brief of roping in others also so that the event should get wide publicity. While the people from Nimar and outside the valley were to start the march from the banks of the Narmada at Rajghat near Barwani the adivasis from Maharashtra and Jhabua were to join the yatra in Alirajpur. Baba Amte was to lead the march in his special van.

Subhadra and her teammates spent the last twenty days prior to the start of the march going from village to village in Nimar exhorting people to turn out in large numbers on the appointed day with appropriate preparations. The march was to be undertaken in biting winter cold and could last upto a month or more and so provisions in the form of warm clothing, wood for burning and rations for cooking had to be taken along. These were to be taken on tractors that would accompany the marchers. Finally when the march did take off it was the biggest mobilisation ever by environmental movements in this country and remains unsurpassed to this day. Thousands upon thousands of people from the valley as well as from all over India and abroad joined the march in a joyous expression of resolve to stop not only the dam but also destructive development as a whole and it hit the national and international headlines due to excellent media coverage. I joined the march along with the adivasis from Maharashtra and Jhabua in Alirajpur when it had already been on the road for five days. The next day, early morning, the march started off and by the end of the day reached Ferkuva on the Gujarat border. We had come to know in Alirajpur that the Gujarat Government had posted its forces on the border and behind them the wife of the Chief Minister of Gujarat, Urmilaben, was leading a mass of people who were sitting on the road to prevent us from going ahead to the dam.

The day to day conduct of the Yatra and the planning of political actions were done by a team consisting of leaders from the various parts of the valley and also from supporting movements from outside which was called the Nirnayak Dal. That night at Ferkuva a meeting of the Nirnayak Dal was held to decide on the next step. The decision was that a small band of people would go across the border early next morning led by Baba to test the waters on the other side. No sooner did this group go across the border than it was stopped by the District Magistrate of Vadodara district, who was present there with a posse of armed policemen. He respectfully told Baba that since the people of Gujarat were camping down the road in order to prevent him and his companions from going ahead there was the possibility of a confrontation and so he advised him to go back instead. An argument ensued but the official would not budge from his stand. So finally Baba said that since he had come with the intention of going to the dam he would sit in dharna until allowed to do so. That was that and the dharna began at Ferkuva. It was a stalemate with us on one side, the people of Gujarat on the other and the Gujarat police in between.

The Gujarati politicians, chambers of commerce, intelligentsia, NGOs and the press too had not been sitting idle while the NBA had been campaigning for the scrapping of the

Recovering the Lost Tongue - A Manifesto of Anarcho-Environmentalism

Rahul Banerjee, 74 Krishnodayanagar, Indore, India - 452001, cell no: +919425943023

email: rahul.indauri@gmail.com homepage: www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com

dam. A kind of hysteria had been built up around the idea that the SSP and its canal network were to be the "Jeevadori" or lifeline for the parched state of Gujarat. Thus the debate was shifted from the plane of environmental, social and economic concerns to that of a crass Gujarat versus Madhya Pradesh confrontation. Where blind beliefs hold strong reason takes a back seat. The tremendous amount of data and arguments marshalled by the NBA that showed that the SSP would in the long run be harmful to the state of Gujarat in many ways and that there were other environmentally, socially and economically sustainable alternatives to the water resource problems that the state faced (Sangvai, 2002) were all summarily rejected by the Gujarat Government. It not only put its police on the border at Ferkuva to prevent the Yatra from crossing over but also mobilised people to put up a counter dharna to give the whole showdown a people of Gujarat versus people of Madhya Pradesh colour.

Indeed such was this fanatical commitment to the SSP on the part of the Gujarat Government that it was not prepared to brook any disruption in the construction of the dam. Jayaprakash Associates, the company constructing the dam, had brought in labourers from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar for this purpose. These labourers were being paid paltry wages and being made to work long hours. They had been put up in tin sheds without even the minimum of basic amenities. These labourers soon sought help to improve their wages and their abysmal working and living conditions. None of the trade unions affiliated to the mainstream parties was ready to take up their cause. Finally they approached the Vadodara Kamdar Union (VKU), which is a trade union affiliated to the Indian wing of the Fourth International - the branch of the international communist movement owing allegiance to Leon Trotsky who was forced to flee Russia by Stalin and later assassinated. The VKU took up the cause of the workers and immediately there was a strike bringing the construction work to a halt. However, Jayaprakash Associates with help from the Gujarat Police cordoned off the striking workers in their hutments and brought in fresh workers to continue the work on the dam. Goons were hired to intimidate the activists of the VKU and its president was even stabbed though not fatally. Finally after a few months the strike broke down under severe repression sanctioned by the Gujarat Government despite the demands of the workers being legitimate ones. No legal and humanitarian scruples were to be heeded if they came in the way of the construction of the dam.

Thus the intentions of the Gujarat Government were clear - they would not let us move an inch ahead from where we were. So we all camped down on the border in the open fields on the side of the road and an impromptu village "Sangharsh Gaon" - Struggle Village came into existence. Each village contingent from Nimar would have its own place around its tractor where food would be cooked. In the night there would be the log fires around which singing or story telling would go on. The adivasis were all together in massive tents that were put up for them and for the visitors from outside the valley. For a few days small groups tried to break the barricades on the Gujarat border and proceed further but the police pushed them back or arrested some of them only to release them at some other point of the Gujarat - Madhya Pradesh border. Then on 7th January 1991 Medha Patkar decided to go on a hunger strike accompanied by six other men and women including an adivasi oustee from Maharashtra, Khajiabhau demanding a comprehensive review of the SSP by independent experts and stoppage of work on the dam during the pendency of the review. The rest of the thousands of people all sat down in support of the striking hunger strikers. The whole scene became like that of a pilgrimage spot. People camping around and biding time. I had left Ferkuva one or two days after reaching there to attend to a problem that had cropped up in one of the villages in Alirajpur where the Forest Department was trying to forcibly cordon off

Recovering the Lost Tongue - A Manifesto of Anarcho-Environmentalism

Rahul Banerjee, 74 Krishnodayanagar, Indore, India - 452001, cell no: +919425943023

email: rahul.indauri@gmail.com homepage: www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com

community grazing land for plantation purposes. I was surprised to find on my return that my old friend from Jharkhand, Meghnad, was also on hunger strike along with Medha. Meghnad is like myself a Kolkatan who had gone over to Jharkhand and joined the grassroots movements of the adivasis there in the nineteen seventies. Like me he too was then carrying the burden of a false charge of murder foisted on him by the police. However he was much better than myself in being a great singer and entertainer. Later on he took to filmmaking and has now become the accomplished maker of quite a few documentary films on environmental and indigenous matters.

Meghnad, possibly because of his Jharkhandi militancy vintage, had been given the responsibility of organising the security of the Yatra and especially of its prominent leaders Baba Amte and Medha Patkar. One day at the beginning of the sit in at Ferkuva he came and said to me ruefully that Medha had ticked him off for standing close behind her during a press conference that she was addressing saying that he should not be so hungry to get himself photographed by the press along with her. He said that he had only been standing behind her and gazing with an eagle eye in all directions to see that no one suddenly got up to shoot her in the same way as the security guards of the Prime Minister did and he was crestfallen that Medha had misconstrued this as an attempt on his part to seek reflected glory! He gleefully resigned his post as head of security for the Yatra citing his unsuitability for the post in the light of Medha's admonition and instead began enjoying himself by singing songs and doing skits.

Meghnad, because of his experiences in Jharkhand had down to earth views regarding what could and what could not be achieved by Gandhian mass action in independent India. I had not known that he was also a part of the Yatra till I met him in Alirajpur when I joined the Yatra there. He told me that he had come to take part in the Yatra to enjoy a change of air from the confrontational politics in Jharkhand. When on coming back to Ferkuva I found him, a hard drinker at that time, subsisting on a diet of pure water, I was dumbfounded. When I asked him if this was his idea of enjoying a change of air he sheepishly said that he had decided to take this golden opportunity to expiate for his many sins!

The Gujarat government was in no mood to relent and so things began to get desperate as the days wore on and the health of the hunger strikers began to deteriorate. There was an attempt by the Madhya Pradesh police in between to arrest the hunger strikers and shift them to hospital but this was foiled as the people camping around cordoned off the hunger strikers. Hectic lobbying by the NBA's international support groups has been going on for some months with the World Bank to withdraw from the SSP and this had resulted in the executive directors from some countries supporting this campaign. The tremendous international press coverage that the hunger strike was getting finally tilted the balance and the World Bank announced that it would commission an independent review of the SSP. This was the first time in its history that the World Bank had taken such a step with any project that it had funded and so taking this as a cue the hunger strike was withdrawn on 28th January. On 30th January, Gandhi's death anniversary Medha announced that the people were going back to the valley with the resolve to continue the fight in their villages with the famous slogan popularised by Sharmaji, "Hamara gaon mein hamara raj" - our rule in our village. This kind of rhetoric made very romantic and heroic copy for the national and international press but in reality this turning back from Ferkuva without being able to bend the Gujarat and Indian Governments to its demands proved to be the crucial turning point for the worse in the NBA's struggle against big dams in the Narmada valley.

Recovering the Lost Tongue - A Manifesto of Anarcho-Environmentalism

Rahul Banerjee, 74 Krishnodayanagar, Indore, India - 452001, cell no: +919425943023

email: rahul.indauri@gmail.com homepage: www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com

This unfortunate denouement was the result of an inadequate appreciation of the repressive and cooptive powers of the Indian state apparatus and the limitations of satyagraha in countering it. The NBA's decision in 1988 to begin opposing the construction of the dam altogether instead of just pressing for a good rehabilitation of the oustees, however justified it might have been on paper, was not supported by enough mass strength on the ground to carry it through. The paradigm of centralised modern development of which the SSP is a manifestation forms the core of the thinking of not only the Indian state but also all states the world over and is supported by the multi-lateral development institutions like the World Bank and the IMF. Since the fight to scrap the SSP, with such powerful forces ranged against them, could not have been fought by the oustees in the valley alone a drive was begun to enlist middle and upper class urban support in India and abroad against the SSP. This was the beginning of a crucial dichotomy in the support base of the NBA. On the one hand there were the oustees themselves who were mostly indigenous Bhils and backward caste peasants and farmers. On the other there were the middle and upper class urbanites. The former were very simply fighting to save their lands and livelihoods and had little understanding of the forces that had brought them to this sorry pass. The latter were moved by a variety of reasons ranging from pity for the plight of the oustees, romantic notions about the need to preserve the idyllic nature of indigenous lifestyles, the need to protect the environment and a desire to do something radical. Mediating between the two were the middle class non-oustees activists who had digested all the facts and arguments against dams and modern industrial development and formed a neo-Gandhian ideology of alternative development and governance as a challenge to the dominant paradigm (Prasad, 2004).

The NBA thus began working on two planes. One was that of mass struggles and demonstrations involving the oustees in the valley and in the major decision making centres such as Bhopal, Mumbai and Delhi. The other was that of lobbying and advocacy with the urban public, press and decision makers, both national and international. While the oustees played a major role in the first kind of work, invariably they got marginalised in the second kind of work and it was left to the activists to take on the brunt of this work. Naturally to the world at large these activists appeared as the leaders and the most charismatic and hard working among them, Medha Patkar, became the main leader of the NBA. Things went fine as long as the oustees felt that this dichotomy and the resultant leadership of the activists would result in the stoppage of the work on the dam and their deliverance from the predicament that they were in. That is why there was tremendous mobilisation and involvement in the Sangharsh Yatra on an unprecedented scale by the oustees because they believed the activists when they claimed that this mass action would definitely tilt the scales in their favour. However, things went awry when a majority of the indigenous oustees in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra did not buy the "hamara gaon mein hamara raj" rhetoric and perceived the withdrawal of the hunger strike and the retreat from Ferkuva as a crushing defeat.

The governments of all the states had in the meantime been identifying alternative land for rehabilitating the adivasi oustees from Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra in Gujarat and Maharashtra and actively trying to woo them over. Some of the people who had been active in the struggle had already accepted the package being offered and got themselves resettled. So immediately after the failure of the Sangharsh Yatra there was an exodus of major proportions and even Khajiabhai who had sat on hunger strike for twenty-two days with Medha Patkar opted for the alternative land being offered by the government. The oustees were not fighting the dam in the same way as the activists for whom it was a

Recovering the Lost Tongue - A Manifesto of Anarcho-Environmentalism

Rahul Banerjee, 74 Krishnodayanagar, Indore, India - 452001, cell no: +919425943023

email: rahul.indauri@gmail.com homepage: www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com

demoniacal symbol of the abstract concept of modern development. They were fighting against the threatening reality of their displacement caused by the concrete construction of the dam. Their main aim was to save their livelihoods. Thus when they perceived that they could not stop the dam, a perception that has been borne out by later developments, they opted for the next best option of resettlement on land offered by the government. Despite a host of problems with their rehabilitation and resettlement, which has been far from ideal, these people have nevertheless felt that it is better than being submerged and left with nothing at all. "Agar gaon hi nahin rahega to raj kahan karenge - if our village does not exist anymore over what shall we rule!" as one oustee, Dhankia, cryptically commented.

Prior to this a BJP government had come to power in the spring of 1990 in Madhya Pradesh. The NBA had planned a mass action on March 6th just two days after the results of the elections were announced in which the bridge over the river Narmada on the Agra-Mumbai National Highway at Khalghat was occupied by thousands of oustees led by Baba Amte demanding the scrapping of the SSP. The BJP had come to power for the first time in the state on its own, as earlier after the emergency it had been part of the erstwhile Janata Party. After two days of blocking the bridge the government gave the assurance that it would take up the matter of review of the dam with the Central and Gujarat governments and the blockade was lifted. I was the only one on that occasion to protest. I had said that getting up on such a flimsy assurance was of no use as the government was bound to renege later on. I suggested that we force the state to take police action to remove us. In this way we would be able to know how strong we were in bearing the repression that was bound to follow. Taking this test to know our mettle was important I felt because given the kind of demands that it was making the state was bound to resort to repression to crush the NBA sooner or later. I was overruled and we weighed anchor after that. The events that followed after the failure of the Sangharsh Yatra about a year later proved my words to have been prophetic.

The new government had found its feet by the time the Sangharsh Yatra was over and it decided to let go at the NBA with all it had at its disposal. So as local actions were started to stall the processes of survey by the government with regard to determining the number of oustees in Nimar, police repression began and the protesters were beaten up and sent to jail. Major local leaders, some owing allegiance to the BJP, were taken to the police stations and stripped before being beaten up and sent to jail. This severely reduced the efficacy of the NBA and the number of people prepared to undertake mass actions or even attend plain rallies began to dwindle after some time. The government also intensified its efforts to pay compensation to the oustees and resettle them on land in Gujarat and was able to win over many of them. This is the time tested carrot and stick policy of the British that has been continued by the executive in independent India. This policy had earlier put paid to the numerically much stronger Lal Topi Andolan and the Communist and Socialist movements in the different parts of the state. The Zahreeli Gas Kand Sangharsh Morcha in Bhopal had also been laid low by such a policy.

The KMCS too was not spared. The problem that had cropped up during the Sangharsh Yatra of the Forest Department trying to close in traditional pastureland for plantation purposes in Kiti village reached a head with the government bringing in police forces in support of the Forest Department staff. The people refused to give ground. Shankar and I along with some of the people were then called to Alirajpur by the administration for discussions. This was just a ploy and we were arrested under provisions for preventive detention in the CrPC and sent to jail without much ado. In midnight swoops all the other activists who were in various other places too were arrested and sent to jail. Fortunately this

Recovering the Lost Tongue - A Manifesto of Anarcho-Environmentalism

Rahul Banerjee, 74 Krishnodayanagar, Indore, India - 452001, cell no: +919425943023

email: rahul.indauri@gmail.com homepage: www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com

did not serve the purpose because the people still resisted the police forces and forced a showdown where there was police firing. In the meantime our lawyer in Indore and some other activists who had escaped being arrested filed a habeas corpus application in the High Court for our release and this sobered up the administration. Giving up enclosure of community pastureland was a far less serious loss for the government than stopping the construction of the dam. So ultimately the Forest Department had to abandon its ill-advised plan under pressure from the administration, which balked at killing adivasis to implement it.

All this while the independent Review Committee appointed by the World Bank had been working diligently talking with all concerned parties and unearthing all relevant facts and in June 1992 they made the unequivocal recommendation that the World Bank should "step back from the Projects and consider them afresh" (Morse, 1992). The Committee found that the environmental stipulations had been violated, the expected benefits would not accrue, the submergence due to the backwater effect would be much higher than estimated and the number of displaced persons was so large that rehabilitation and resettlement would not be possible according to laws and regulations. This was a big victory for the NBA but symbolic in nature because the World Bank initially refused to step back and instead in September 1992 stipulated that a six month period of monitoring would be done to see whether the environmental and rehabilitation benchmarks were being achieved or not. This put pressure on the Indian Government to ensure that all data regarding the oustees was collected and a proper rehabilitation plan put in place. Catchment treatment and afforestation plans, which had been pending ever since the conditional clearance given by the Ministry of Environment and Forests in 1987, were also to be readied in six months time. All this meant that the submergence area would have to be surveyed in detail.

The Alirajpur villages where the KMCS was active were to be the first to be submerged in Madhya Pradesh. So from October 1992 the Government of Madhya Pradesh stepped up its campaign to get these surveys done and wean away the people from the NBA. The District Magistrate of Jhabua held a so-called "Problem Mitigation Camp" in Kakrana village on October 30th to talk to the people about the benefits of resettling in Gujarat. He not only exhorted the people to go over to Gujarat but also warned them of dire consequences if they continued to associate with the activists of the KMCS and defy the might of the state. Khemla was present there in the meeting with a lot of people and irascible as he is, immediately got up and began taking the District Magistrate to task as to why he was forcing people to go to Gujarat when the NWDT had provided that people would have to be resettled in the place of their choice in Madhya Pradesh. The police who were present there in large numbers arrested Khemla and brought him to the District Magistrate who slapped him repeatedly and ordered that he be arrested and taken along to Alirajpur. This angered the other activists of the KMCS and also the people and so a confrontation ensued which ended with the police arresting four more people, beating them up and taking them along with them to Alirajpur while dispersing the rest of the crowd.

Khemla was tied up with his hands arched over his back to his ankles and thrashed severely in the police lockup in Alirajpur with canes by no other than the Subdivisional Magistrate, an IAS officer, who told the police that they did not know how to beat up people and he would teach them how! (LCHR, 1993) The others too were beaten up mercilessly and all of them were humiliated by having to catch their ears and do situps. As is the norm in such cases false charges were cooked up against them and they were sent to jail. Khemla has never recovered fully from the beating that he got and his back is paralysed with pain quite

Recovering the Lost Tongue - A Manifesto of Anarcho-Environmentalism

Rahul Banerjee, 74 Krishnodayanagar, Indore, India - 452001, cell no: +919425943023

email: rahul.indauri@gmail.com homepage: www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com

frequently. After this temporary police camps were set up in a few villages along the Narmada, which were approachable by road and forcible attempts were made to survey the villages. This resulted in more confrontation as the people went in strength and uprooted the tents in these camps overpowering the limited police presence in them. This brought things to a head and the administration responded by bringing in more police and setting the camps up again.

The process of forcible survey of villages commenced once again in January 1993 with augmented police escorts for the survey teams. Village after village was surveyed and those protesting were severely beaten up. The villagers in Anjanbara village were celebrating the important religious festival of Indal at their Patel's house on the 29th of January and so there were a lot of people there from neighbouring villages also. In the midst of the festivities the survey team arrived and the policemen began misbehaving with the women. This proved to be the last straw and the villagers confronted the police and being in much larger numbers forced the team to retreat. News of this was sent to the higher ups and the next day a much bigger police team of some two hundred came to the village and began beating up people, breaking their utensils and looting their household goods. After some time the men were forced to flee. Taking advantage of this the police then arrested some women and began taking them back with them. This once again led to a confrontation between the men and the police resulting in one person being injured in police firing. Once again the police implicated scores of people and all the activists of the KMCS in false criminal cases and arrested them one by one, beat them up in police lockups, paraded them in the streets of Alirajpur in handcuffs and sent them to jail.

The administration even organised a rally of the people of Alirajpur against the KMCS branding it as an anti-national organisation for opposing the World Bank! Despite this heavy repression the KMCS took out a counter rally in Alirajpur to protest these grossly illegal activities but the attendance was only in the hundreds as opposed to the thousands that normally take part in such demonstrations due to the fear of further arrests being made. The rally was well covered by the national and international media as was the heavy repression unleashed on the people in the course of the surveys and this went a long way in persuading the World Bank to withdraw from the SSP. Ultimately in a face saving arrangement the Government of India announced on 30th March 1993 that it would not avail of the remaining amount of the World Bank Loan. Even though following on this the Japanese Government too withdrew its loan for the turbines of the powerhouse this did not in any way deter the Gujarat and Central Governments from proceeding with the construction of the dam, which proceeded apace.

The same process had also started in Chhattisgarh with the CMM being exposed to heavy police repression. Shankar Guha Niyogi had begun organising the workers of the various factories in and around Bhilai that had been set up to utilise the steel being produced by the steel plant for downstream manufacturing from 1990. There was gross violation of labour laws in these units and so the workers were working on pittance without the mandatory welfare provisions like permanency of tenure, house rent allowance and pension benefits. The struggle had picked up in strength and there were widespread strikes in most units in the area demanding the implementation of labour laws. The mobilisation spread like wild fire and workers of almost all the units that employed labourers on an ad hoc basis were unionised. This was when the owners of these units decided to gang up and they hired a professional assassin from Uttar Pradesh, Paltan Mallah, to kill Niyogi. This man shot Niyogi dead in sleep at night in his residence at Durg on 28th September 1991. The immediate

Recovering the Lost Tongue - A Manifesto of Anarcho-Environmentalism

Rahul Banerjee, 74 Krishnodayanagar, Indore, India - 452001, cell no: +919425943023

email: rahul.indauri@gmail.com homepage: www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com

response of the BJP government was a negative one in that it did not even acquiesce in the legitimate demand that the police register the names of those being accused by the CMM in the FIR. However, there was a countrywide furore over this and under pressure from the central government it had to order an investigation by the Central Bureau of Investigation.

Meanwhile the agitation of the CMM continued for the implementation of labour laws in the units in and around Bhilai. The government under pressure from the factory owners was not prepared to implement the demands of the workers that they be made permanent and given proper benefits. Finally the CMM workers sat in dharna near the Powerhouse railway station in Bhilai. This movement for regularisation of workers in Bhilai was taking place at a juncture when a whole new era of globalisation characterised by off-shoring of manufacturing to low labour cost locations was just taking off worldwide. The new watchword for global capital at that time and ever since has been that of "labour market flexibility" (Brodsky, 1994) involving the right of the employers to hire and fire labourers at will, pay them subsistence wages and not provide any accompanying benefits that the regularisation of employees entails under labour legislation. These labour laws had been put in place as a result of more than a century of trade union struggles and a clear realisation by the capitalist states in the wake of the Great Depression of the nineteen twenties that unrestricted capitalism without welfare measures for the labouring class would lead to demand collapsing and leading to markets being flooded with goods that no one could buy leading to the collapse of the economy altogether.

Marx had pointed out that this situation arises from a fundamental contradiction that has plagued capitalism right from the beginning - that of falling rates of profits due to increasing competition and technological advancement (Sweezy, 1991). To keep the profits rolling in, production and sale of commodities have to be expanded continually with the introduction of newer and newer technology while the wages of the labourers have to be suppressed. But there is a limit to how much of this can be done within one country and so a stage comes when there are too many products to sell and too few buyers with the wherewithal to buy them. In the early stages of capitalist development this problem was solved by imperial control, which allowed the European nations to export their excess labour and goods to the colonies. In the immediate post World War II years too the capitalist firms of the developed West could provide good wages and considerable benefits to their labourers at home and thus keep demand high by extracting super profits from the exploitation of the labour and natural resources of developing countries and get around the contradiction. However, as these developing countries too began to catch up and develop industrially competition grew to the extent that it became uneconomical for companies in the developed world to employ regular labour with good wages and side benefits. This forced the shut down of manufacturing units in the developed countries and their relocation in locations closer to cheap natural resources and labour.

Thus globally China in particular and east Asia in general was becoming the favoured destination for the off-shoring of developed country manufacturing units and within India an exodus of manufacturing had begun from the traditional centres like Mumbai and Kolkata to places like Bhilai or even less developed locations in search of cheap and unregulated labour markets. Under the circumstances the industrialists in Bhilai would have to cut down on their profitability and global competitiveness considerably to accommodate the demands of the CMM. So they put pressure on the government to crush the movement once and for all instead of negotiating with it. Even after a few days when the demands were not met the workers went on to the rail track and stopped the running of trains on the trunk Howrah-

Recovering the Lost Tongue - A Manifesto of Anarcho-Environmentalism

Rahul Banerjee, 74 Krishnodayanagar, Indore, India - 452001, cell no: +919425943023

email: rahul.indauri@gmail.com homepage: www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com

Mumbai rail route on 1st July 1992. The government was in no mood to find a solution through discussions and so suddenly in the evening armed police began firing on the protesters killing seventeen of them. Then a severe crackdown followed in which anybody connected with the CMM was arrested and beaten up in the police station before being sent to jail. A false case of murder of a police inspector was foisted on the major leaders of the CMM and so they all had to go underground. The whole process of mass mobilisation in the Bhilai region was set back greatly and never recovered from this body blow.

This had its effect on the Dalli unit of the CMM also. The deposits of iron ore in Dalli were slowly coming to an end. So the Bhilai Steel Plant management wanted to introduce machines and mine out whatever was left. They proposed to the CMM that they would give a golden handshake and lay off most of the workers and retain some as permanent BSP staff. The CMM sensing that in the changed global environment there was little possibility of a successful mass agitation against this proposal agreed to it and so over the years the main Dalli mass base of the CMM too has become dissipated. Indeed with the closure of the mines due to the exhaustion of all the ore the once vibrant town and worker's bastis where one of the most inspiring of mass movements had been incubated now wears a deserted ghost town look.

Similarly the various activists associated with Prayog which had in 1991 consolidated all its mass units under the umbrella organisation Ekta Parishad, too had to bear the brunt of police repression. One particularly militant activist Sitaram Sonowane was abducted by the Forest Department in Raipur district where he was working with adivasis for their right to continue to till forestland as they had been doing since ages. There was no news of him for almost a week. Only after national human rights organisations created a hue and cry did the Forest Department staff produce Sitaram before a magistrate as is required by the law. A meeting being held by some members of Ekta Parishad in a village Manpur in Satna district was arbitrarily declared illegal by the SDM there and he went with a posse of policemen and beat up the activists and people who had congregated there and then arrested some of them and sent them to jail.

Subhadra and her fellow activists had to face repression also. One day a policeman came to their office in Dahi and called Subhadra and her co-worker Shraddha to the police station saying that some enquiries had to be conducted. When Subhadra and Shraddha went to the police station they were told in no uncertain terms that they could not stay in Dahi block and go around inciting the adivasis as they were doing. The sub-inspector sent them back with a police escort to their office to collect their belongings and ordered the policemen to put them on the first bus out of Dahi with instructions that they were to be taken to Indore. The policemen accordingly took Subhadra and Shraddha to the bus stand and told the conductor of the next bus that was to leave that he should take both of them to Indore and left. These private bus operators had to listen to the police because they always overloaded their buses beyond the permissible limit. However, Subhadra told the conductor that there was no need to take them to Indore and they got off at the next stop on the road. They then went to a village where another activist was staying and with him they went to Indore to meet the support person there. He took them to meet the Inspector General of Police to complain of the highhandedness of the sub-inspector in Dahi. The IG ticked off the supporter for sending young girls alone into the villages to incite adivasis against the government and the administration. He could not be responsible for their safety if anything untoward happened to them he said and refused to take any action against the inspector for his misbehaviour towards Subhadra and Shraddha.

Recovering the Lost Tongue - A Manifesto of Anarcho-Environmentalism

Rahul Banerjee, 74 Krishnodayanagar, Indore, India - 452001, cell no: +919425943023

email: rahul.indauri@gmail.com homepage: www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com

Subhadra and Shraddha then went off to Bhopal to meet Bhargavji and apprise him of the situation. Bhargavji arranged for an appointment with the Chief Secretary and the latter, a lady, heard them out patiently. She said that she would institute an enquiry into the matter and that they could go back and continue to work as they had done before. So Subhadra and Shraddha came back to the Dahi office feeling that things must have calmed down. But within a day or two a police constable came to their office and once again summoned them to the police station. The sub-inspector told them that even if they thought they were smart the reverse was true. He said that an enquiry had been ordered into the incidents of the other day when he had packed them off from Dahi and that he had been asked to conduct it. So if they had anything to say in complaint against him they should say it to him and he would take down their statement. Since this was absurd they came back without recording any statement whatsoever. This is par for such departmental enquiries. Earlier when complaints had been made about the Kakrana incidents to the authorities in Delhi it had resulted in such a departmental enquiry in which the SDO Police in Alirajpur who had been responsible along with others for beating up Khemla was to take down the statements of the complainants against himself.

All the mass organisations got together and decided to protest this repression by organising a massive rally in Bhopal on the first anniversary of Niyogi's assassination on September 28th 1992. The rally was a huge success as thousands of people from all over Madhya Pradesh attended it. Despite this, however, the repression continued unabated. Even after the BJP government was dismissed in the wake of the Hindu-Muslim riots that followed the demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6th 1992 and President's rule was imposed there was no let up as far as state repression on the environmental mass movements went. The net result of all this was that all over Madhya Pradesh the groundswell of opposition that these movements had generated against destructive development and callous governance began to ebb. All the great hopes of posing a viable challenge to the established order that had been generated over the past few years began falling apart within the space of just a year or so of repressive actions by the state and all the mass organisations found themselves fighting rearguard actions. The mass bases instead of increasing began shrinking continuously. The tragedy of this turnaround is even more poignant than earlier such instances of things falling apart in the colonial era (Achebe, 1990) in that it took place in a sovereign democratic republic whose Constitution declares inter alia that social, economic and political justice will be secured to all its citizens (GOI, 2005).

There was a silver lining to these dark clouds however. It was in these depressing times of political uncertainty that Subhadra and I came close to each other. A journalist from Delhi who had come to cover a particular action in the valley about this time expressed surprise when he got no for an answer from me to the question whether I had had any legal or illegal relationships with adivasi women. I had been so involved in my activism and so steeped in the ascetic and workaholic philosophy of the Bhagvad Gita that I had never had time to spare for romance. Anyway, I had told the journalist, there were always so many false allegations being made by the local government functionaries and politicians about our taking advantage of the innocence of poor adivasi women that it was politically unsafe to even think of romantic liaisons with them. Similarly Subhadra was also very involved in her work in which she had at last begun to get some response from the people. All her time was taken up with getting her sangathan going well so that her own position within her organisation would improve. Thus even though some of the other activists who had come with her to Dahi had

Recovering the Lost Tongue - A Manifesto of Anarcho-Environmentalism

Rahul Banerjee, 74 Krishnodayanagar, Indore, India - 452001, cell no: +919425943023

email: rahul.indauri@gmail.com homepage: www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com

paired up during the course of their work Subhadra herself had remained aloof from such romantic pleasures.

The offensive launched by the BJP government upset our political apple carts altogether and made us more amenable to the proverbial apple of romantic predilections. It so happened that we came back together from a meeting in Bhopal to protest against the murder of the CMM workers in Bhilai in 1992 and got all of twelve hours to talk to each other sitting side by side in the bus. We never knew how this long journey drew us close to each other and very soon we were making excuses to meet oftener than we would have in the normal course of work. One thing led to another and we began thinking of tying the knot. That is how we took the plunge in Bhopal in 1993 and later found ourselves in Machla physically ill, politically uncertain and economically poor but romantically rich and with our zest for life undiminished!

References

Achebe, C (1990): *Things Fall Apart*, Allied Publishers, New Delhi.

Brodsky, M A (1994): *Labour Market Flexibility: A Changing International Perspective*, Monthly Labour Review, Vol. 117 No. 11

GoI (2005): *Constitution of India*, Government of India, Delhi.

LCHR (1993): *Unacceptable means: India's Sardar Sarovar Project and Violations of Human Rights October 1992 through February 1993*, Lawyer's Committee for Human Rights, New York.

Morse, B (1992): *Sardar Sarovar: The Report of the Independent Review*, Resource Futures International, Canada.

Prasad, A (2004): *Environmentalism and the Left: Contemporary Debates and Future Agendas in Tribal Areas*, Leftword Books, Delhi.

Sangvai, S (2002): *The River and Life: People's Struggle in the Narmada Valley*, Earthcare Books, Kolkata.

Sweezy, P M (1991): *The Theory of Capitalist Development*, K P Bagchi & Company, Kolkata.