

Chapter 17 - The Evil Empire Strikes Back

The year 1997 saw the mobilisation of the Bhil adivasis around wider livelihood and governance issues in western Madhya Pradesh reach its peak. Massive mass actions took place all over the region. The state has an elaborate set up wherein there are Krishi Upaj Mandi Samitis, agricultural marketing committees, which control the functioning of the agricultural produce auctions at the tehsil and district levels whose administration is governed by a board of elected farmer representatives with reservation for adivasis to ensure that fair auctioning of the produce of farmers takes place in the agricultural produce markets. These samitis function under the overall supervision of an apex Mandi Board at the state level. Unfortunately like in the case of the elections for government bodies the elections for the Mandis too are expensive affairs invariably leading to them being fought on party lines with the attendant influence of the traders and saukars over the adivasi candidates who are elected. Thus the traders, elected representatives and the officials of the Mandi get together to rig the auctioning of agricultural produce and even cheat the farmers in the weighing of their produce. Indeed the many ways in which the farmers are duped in these Mandis are a fit subject matter for a separate book by itself.

The Adivasi Mukti Sangathan waged a longdrawn and fairly successful battle in this regard in the mid nineteen nineties in Sendhwa town of Barwani district. Sendhwa is situated near the border of Madhya Pradesh with Maharashtra and its hinterland is a rich cotton-producing belt. Thus adivasi farmers from both the states come to the Mandi in Sendhwa to sell their cotton in bullock carts. At peak season time there are hundreds of farmers on any day waiting to get their cotton auctioned and weighed. Taking advantage of this massive influx of farmers waiting to get their cotton sold the traders in collusion with the officials of the Mandi used to cheat the farmers with regard to the prices, the calculations and the weighing. Such are the profits earned from these illegal activities that the traders in Sendhwa refer to cotton as "safed sona" or white gold. The Sangathan raised the issue with the District Magistrate and was assured of action. However, nothing materialised so the Sangathan had to organise a dharna in front of the Mandi. This led to an agreement being reached about the setting up of an electronic weighing machine, transparent auctioning process and the payment to farmers by cheque instead of cash to eliminate all kinds of malpractice. Not only was this agreement not adhered to but also goons hired by the traders beat up some of the adivasi activists.

This led to an immediate retaliatory mass action and in February 1997 the National Highway popularly known as the Agra-Bombay road passing through Sendhwa was blocked to traffic by some ten thousand people who had come in from as far as Dewas and Jhabua districts in solidarity. This action had tremendous symbolic significance. As mentioned earlier the Agra-Bombay road is a very old one dating back to Mughal times. The ghat section of this road just south of Sendhwa as it crosses the Satpuras has been a problematical area with the Bhils having continuously waylaid caravans and armed forces. During the Great Bhil Rebellion of 1857-60 the famous battle of Ambapani in which the British finally defeated the forces of the rebel leader Khajya Naik took place near Sendhwa on this road. Thus once again the Bhils had blocked this road demanding justice bringing back memories of earlier uprisings. This finally galvanised the administration into action and the roadblock was lifted only after the goons were arrested. Subsequently all the demands were fulfilled and the Mandi in Sendhwa has since been running according to the rules.

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The functioning of the agricultural credit cooperative societies and banks too is bedevilled with problems similar to those that beset the Mandis. Eventhough the adivasi farmer members are in theory the shareholders and through their elected representatives the governors of these banks, in reality their relationship with the officials of the societies is no better than the one they have with their sahuikars. In the remoter areas where the adivasis are largely illiterate the officials even cheat the adivasis of the loans that are advanced to them on paper. These societies are weighed down by non-performing assets (NPA) arising from large loans that have been given out on political rather than sound financial considerations to the big farmer-trader nexus.

The pressure on the finances of these banks created by such malpractices is sought to be relieved by putting the screws on the minor adivasi debtors to pay up the small consumption loans they take even when they are unable to do so due to crop failure. In one such instance officials of the district cooperative bank murdered Gyan Singh a twenty six year old Barela adivasi of Savriyapani village in Barwani tehsil on May 3rd 1997. Gyan Singh's father Rabba had taken a loan of Rs 3500 and the four officials of the bank had gone to collect the interest on this loan in a jeep. Not finding Rabba they caught his son and brought him back with them in the jeep. In the jeep they beat up Gyan Singh so severely that he died of his injuries by the time they reached Barwani. The news spread like wildfire and immediately thousands of adivasis of the Adivasi Mukti Sangathan gheraoed the police station in Pati demanding the registration of a case of murder against the culprits and their arrest. Subsequently the Adivasi Mukti Sangathan held a massive rally and public meeting in Barwani on the 9th of May in which the President of the district panchayat paid a cheque of Rs 1,00,000 to the widow of Gyan Singh as compensation.

This incident and the uproar created by it due to the massive public action undertaken by the Adivasi Mukti Sangathan started a debate in the press (Nai Duniya, 1997) regarding the state of the cooperative banks in the adivasi areas and the way in which they had become institutions for their exploitation instead of emancipation. Incidentally all the arraigned officials were not only non-adivasis but two of them were of the trader caste. The main point to come out of this debate was that even after fifty years of independence adivasis in the western Madhya Pradesh region had not yet been accorded an equal status with the non-adivasis and there were blatant violations of their rights. To the extent that even officials of a cooperative bank could assume unto themselves arbitrary powers of arrest and torture with impunity.

The Congress party was in power at the time and the party bigwigs deemed this burgeoning mobilisation to be a serious threat. Several cabinet ministers including the two deputy chief ministers hailed from this region and they perceived this increasing expression of people's power as a death knell for the kind of corrupt cronyism that they practised in the name of democratic politics. The bureaucracy as has been its tendency right from colonial times had always been inimical to people's mobilisation. However, in the initial stages the mainstream politicians could not go against the people for fear of alienating their voting blocks. But gradually as the movements grew to challenge their hegemony and their political bases they became apprehensive and harked back to colonial repression in time-dishonoured fashion. The last straw was the action against the cooperative bank officials.

A local murderous skirmish, internecine to the adivasis, between the Bhagwanpura block president of the Congress party and members of the Sangathan around a private dispute was taken as a pretext in August 1997 to launch a massive police crackdown on the Sangathan as a whole. False cases were registered against many members and activists and

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they were arrested and jailed. Police terror was unleashed and in many areas adivasis had to flee into the jungles to avoid getting arrested and beaten up by the police (NCW, 1998). Such was the ferocity of this repression that subsequently the Sangathan has not been able to recover the strength it had prior to it. Fortunately support from fraternal organisations in the region and human rights organisations all over the country helped the Sangathan to tide over this crackdown. On 18th September, 1997 all the adivasi organisations of the western Madhya Pradesh region took out a massive rally in Indore to protest the atrocities being perpetrated by the administration all over Khargone district. Thousands of men and women came to that rally disregarding dire threats. This drew the attention of the world at large and the press in particular to the blatant violation of the rule of law by those entrusted with securing it. Once again this flare up received attention in the press with the focus being on the antipathy of the government and the bureaucracy towards the legitimate demands being voiced by the mass organisations of the adivasis (Free Press, 1997).

The administration took this opportunity to crackdown on the Adivasi Shakti Sangathan (ASS) also. Innumerable false cases were lodged against the members of the ASS implicating scores of men and women. Over and above they were prevented by the administration from taking out rallies and holding public meetings to vent their grievances. When massive rallies were planned to be taken out in the towns of Sendhwa and Barwah on 24th and 25th November 1997 the administration clamped the preventive section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code preventing the assembly of five or more persons on the whole of Khargone district. A massive force of some three thousand police personnel was brought in from other districts to enforce the ban. Since such mass public rallies invariably show up the administration in a bad light it always tries to prevent them and so stifle the voices of dissent.

All the adivasi organisations of western Madhya Pradesh took up the challenge and decided to take out the rallies and hold the public meetings come what may. A jeep full of men and women going to take part in the rally in Sendhwa were stopped at the dead of night at 2.30 a.m. on 24th November 1997 by the police in Katkut and arrested along with the driver and the jeep was confiscated in a blatantly illegal misuse of the provisions of section 144 of the CrPC. The women of the ASS then staged a sit-in in front of the police outpost in Katkut from 27th November to agitate for the release of those arrested and to protest against the highhandedness of the administration. This too was a first for Nimar that women in their hundreds sat in front of the police outpost for all of twenty four hours braving the cold and the rain. Immediately the police personnel and the non-adivasis began misbehaving with the women and calling them all sorts of dirty names. The police outpost is situated in the panchayat of the non-adivasis and has two gates. The women then sat in dharna in front of one the gates in protest against the misbehaviour of the police and the non-adivasis. The executive magistrate who came to Katkut too refused to intervene against the non-adivasis saying that the women should lift their sit-in or face the wrath of the latter. Instead two false police cases were registered against Subhadra for publicly berating the magistrate for taking the side of the non-adivasis.

A small revolution of sorts took place after this on the morning of 8th January 1998 in Katkut as a group of women arrived in a rally at the police outpost to be arrested and sent to jail in connection with the various false cases that had been registered against them, shouting slogans, the main one being, "sarkar ni jail mein katri jagah baki chhe, dekhne chhe dekhne chhe" - we want to see how much space is left in the government's jails. Instead of meekly bailing themselves out these women had decided to launch a struggle

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against governmental apathy and repression by going to jail instead. The first victory in this struggle was won at the police outpost itself when the police refused to arrest all the twenty women who had cases against them and took only eight into custody despite repeated attempts on the part of the women to be arrested.

The police normally use their power to implicate people in false cases and arrest them to terrorise the common people at large. The police have been long used by the administration and the upper-caste non-advaitis to subjugate the poor and illiterate adivasis. Any adivasi who dared to protest invariably used to be beaten up and a false case used to be registered against him. Thus by frightening the police into not arresting all the women an authoritative statement was made by the ASS in defence of the right of the poor downtrodden people of the area to organise themselves. The arrested women subsequently shouted slogans even in court and argued with the magistrate that they had a right to do so when the latter objected.

For quite some time false criminal cases had been lodged against the members of the ASS whenever they had agitated either for access to the forests or to prevent the sale of alcohol or in the latest instance when they staged a sit-in in front of the police station. Subsequently the judicial magistrate too instead of releasing the accused on bail invariably misused his judicial discretion to send them to jail. From the beginning the policy of the ASS had been to refuse to be arrested. This finally forced the police to conduct raids to arrest people in which they were mildly successful but had to desist in the face of opposition, which could escalate into a major confrontation. The ASS members then took the decision to court arrest voluntarily and launch a "jail bhara" or fill the jails agitation to show the administration that they were not afraid of going to jail. Subhadra subsequently went on a hunger strike in jail from 11th January 1998 as a last resort stating that as a dalit woman she did not find any substance in the guarantees to life and liberty enshrined in the constitution and so preferred death in jail instead. Her demand was that the arrested members of the ASS be released on personal bonds from jail, all the eleven false cases lodged against the members of the ASS be withdrawn and the right of the adivasis to stage peaceful demonstrations be restored.

The rest of the members of the ASS who were outside remained active during this period taking out a massive rally in support of the struggle of those inside jail in Barwah on 13th January and then joining the members of a sister organisation the Adivasi Mukti Sangathan in a sit-in in front of the Divisional Commissioner's Office in Indore to demand the transfer of the District Magistrate and Superintendent of Police of Khargone district. The administration had on that occasion given an assurance that three false cases would be withdrawn and no further victimisation of adivasis would take place in future. The Superintendent and District Magistrate were also transferred at the behest of the election commission and Subhadra broke her fast after eleven days.

Repression, however, continued unabated with two more false cases being registered against the members of the ASS. It all started with a seemingly innocuous problem of proper hostel facilities for adivasi girls studying in Katkut. The non-advaiti headmistress of the government adivasi girl's hostel in Katkut had been defalcating the funds meant for the running of the hostel for over a decade resulting in poor living conditions for the girl students. This affected their studies and so invariably the results in the board examinations were very poor. Some of the girl's parents were members of the Sangathan and so they had come in touch with the new atmosphere of revolt that was pervading their villages. Naturally they were affected by this and decided to do something to improve matters in the

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hostel. They prepared a detailed report of the irregularities and sent a complaint to the Joint Director of the Adivasi Department in Khargone in January. An officer deputed by the joint director came to investigate matters and made only a perfunctory enquiry even going to the extent of warning the complainant students not to make any more complaints in future. The headmistress took this as a cue to start harassing the girls who had complained. Apart from berating them in the worst manner she began to deprive them of food. The girls then complained to their parents. The parents brought up the matter in the meetings of the Sangathan.

The Sangathan leaders knowing that the political and administrative powers were against them decided to proceed cautiously. They first asked the girls to give a written complaint to the Sangathan and a copy to the police officer in Katkut. They then passed a formal resolution in a general body meeting of the Katkut adivasi gram sabha or village general body that an enquiry should be conducted into the running of the hostel. A delegation of men then went to the hostel to enquire and investigate. The delegation members had discussions with the girls as well as the headmistress. They submitted a formal report of their findings to the headmistress and also sent a copy to the Joint Director of the Adivasi Department in Khargone recommending that he take steps to improve the sorry state of the hostel.

The girls after this decided to take over the management of the hostel themselves with the help of some of the adivasi teachers. The money for running the hostel was deposited in a bank account, which was jointly operated by two of the senior students. The headmistress used to draw out all the money by forcing the students to sign on the cheque every month. The girls then began withdrawing the money themselves and then managing the hostel activities with this money and keeping records.

All these years the headmistress had been getting away with her corrupt practices by bribing the higher authorities in Khargone and also the local political leaders. She now turned to these local leaders to get back control of the hostel funds. These leaders too saw this as an opportunity to get even with the Sangathan. They advised the headmistress to lodge a complaint with the police and then they got the police, who were only too ready, to register a false case against the people who had gone to investigate the running of the hostel on behalf of the Sangathan. A false case of having abused and threatened to kill the headmistress was framed against five members of the sangathan. Then the police began arresting them one by one and sending them to jail. In the process they did not fail to rough up the arrested persons severely.

The women once again intervened. When the third person was thus arrested and beaten up on the 28th of April, 1998 women staged yet another sit-in in front of the police outpost and prevented the police from taking the arrested person to court until some responsible officer had explained this lawlessness on the part of the police. Even though the Tehsildar and the Subdivisional Police Officer did come and assure the women that such illegal actions would not take place in the future and that no case would be registered against them for having sat in front of the police station nevertheless another case was framed against fifteen members of the Sangathan including Subhadra and I of having threatened to kill policemen.

All the accused immediately went underground in preparation for a long struggle. First a press conference was held in Indore to publicise the way in which the police and the local vested interests were going about repressing the organisation. Next an intense bout of

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lobbying was undertaken in Bhopal, New Delhi and Mumbai to build up external support. Finally a rally was taken out by hundreds of women in Indore on 1st June, 1998 and a memorandum of demands was submitted to the Divisional Commissioner. The main demands were that the administration takes steps to provide proper reproductive health facilities, prevent the sale of illicit liquor and stop its repressive policies. Significantly this was the first mass rally of women in support of reproductive health and rights in Madhya Pradesh since the introduction of the target free approach.

The Commissioner said that he would conduct an inquiry into the complaints of repression made against the police and only then would he be able to say whether any action could be taken or not. When asked why he had not done so earlier as these complaints had been continuously made for the last six months he replied that he could not believe that the police officers could be misbehaving with the women and so had thought the complaints were frivolous! He went to the extent of saying that the bonded labourer adivasis who had boycotted working on the fields of the non-adivasis for the past month in protest against the non-payment of minimum wages had caused a national loss by causing the cotton crop to be thus wasted on the fields. A typically cynical upper class response to the severe livelihood problems of the rural poor - you may not have bread but that does not mean you can spoil our cake! The problem of agricultural wages is a deep-rooted one. As will be explained a little later modern artificial input based green revolution agriculture has become unprofitable due to increasing input costs, decreasing yields and prices of output and decreasing state subsidies. Big farmers are consequently unable to pay the stipulated minimum wage to the agricultural labourers as this would squeeze their margins. The state and the ruling class priority echoed in the response of the Commissioner is to maximise output regardless of the agricultural labourers getting the statutory minimum wage or not.

It has been suggested that the great dynamism of capitalist growth in the information technology and other high tech industrial and service sectors of India in recent times are an indication that its hidden potential has been "unbound" and so it should be given further unrestricted flight (Das, 2002). Characteristically the problems confronting agriculture are ignored it being presumed, I suppose, that they will wish themselves away. However, the serious crisis in the agricultural sector and the consequent impoverishment of the vast majority of people who are dependent on it cannot be solved through capitalist growth, which as we shall see, has in fact created these problems. Capitalist growth in the cities that has been so eulogised has only resulted in the elite becoming unbound enough to be able to take off to greener pastures abroad while the likes of the adivasi women of Katkut are cynically bound to living their abject rural lives by the policies of the state.

The continual rejection by the administration of their demands and pleas forced these women to take the drastic step of launching a mass hunger strike. Eighteen Bhil women went on an indefinite hunger strike from 2nd June 1998 to press their demands for a more just livelihood and a repression free existence for the adivasis of Barwah tehsil. Apart from demanding an end to police repression and the withdrawal of false cases lodged against them these women also demanded that adequate health services be provided and action be taken against the exploitative practices of the non-adivasi people of the area. The federation of women's organisations of Indore, Mahila Chetna, sent a delegation to the Commissioner to express solidarity with the striking Bhil women and to demand that the government fulfil their just demands. The police administration was particularly obstinate in refusing to change its repressive ways. The reason was that the ASS had effectively put a spanner into the corrupt and repressive functioning of the lower level police functionaries.

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The previous Superintendent of Police of Khargone district had categorically stated that he could not tolerate the fact that his staff should be scared of the organised power of the adivasi masses. So there was no response at all from the local administration. The strike was eventually ended on 10th June after receiving an assurance from the National Human Rights Commission that an independent enquiry would be conducted into the complaints of human rights violations made to it by the ASS.

Karotibai of Katkut had emphatically told the Commissioner in Indore when he had proved so insensitive to their demands that if he was incapable of providing good government to them then they would form their own government. Towards this end an independent organisation to privilege women's issues was formed on 27th April 1998 in village Mehendikhera in Dewas district and given the name Kansari Nu Vadavno. The name means "Felicitation of Kansari". Kansari, as mentioned earlier, is the Goddess symbolising the life giving power of the cereal jowar (sorghum), which is the staple of the Bhils. In this way the women were stressing both the importance of women power and also the need to conserve traditional Bhili agriculture of which sorghum used to be the mainstay but which was gradually declining due to the spread of environmentally unsustainable nutritionally undesirable but commercially more profitable soybean cultivation. This was a last ditch attempt on the part of the women to retain the gains of the organisation process in the face of unabated state repression.

Contemporaneous with these struggles of the adivasis in the western Madhya Pradesh region the Chiapas movement of indigenous people in Mexico had also broken out in January 1994. This movement voiced concerns that were similar to that of the Bhili mass organisations. Chiapas, the southern state of Mexico bordering on Guatemala, was among the poorest places in Latin America (Gonzalez, 2004). In 1990 fifty percent of the indigenous population of the state were malnourished, forty two percent had no access to clean water, thirty three percent were without electricity and sixty two percent did not complete their primary education. Yet this state provided crude oil, electricity, coffee and meat in huge proportions to the Mexican economy. The Chiapas movement led by the Zapatista National Liberation Army said that enough was enough and not only revolted against the Mexican state but also posited an alternative form of development and collective governance that had the traditional indigenous culture as its bedrock. The tremendous support that it got from the intelligentsia in the whole of the Americas catapulted this movement into instant fame at a time when mass movements were on the decline there. This movement too was subjected to the standard repression and cooption that is employed by centralised states all over the world despite this groundswell of support in its favour. Consequently even though the movement is still alive today it has been hemmed in from all sides and has so failed to live up to its initial promise of turning the tide against the greed and destruction of modern industrial development that had enthused many.

Similarly the repression of the state in western Madhya Pradesh, even though it was not able to crush the organisation process altogether, nevertheless achieved its immediate objective of putting a brake on the revolutionary advances being made by the adivasis. In Katkut the women were no longer able to take action against the sale of illegal liquor. So the sale of illegal liquor began again in a clandestine manner. This resulted in the men reverting back to their alcoholism. The social control that had been established over the consumption and sale of liquor and so on the patriarchal oppression of women was destroyed. There have been innumerable movements in India for the prohibition of the sale of liquor right from the time of Gandhi. Women have always been at the forefront of these

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movements because they are the worst sufferers of the alcoholism of their men. At times this has resulted in the imposition of legal prohibition in some of the states. The anti-liquor campaign in Andhra Pradesh took off from the Total Literacy Campaign that was being conducted there by the government. Despite the government's best efforts this snowballed into a mass movement of such proportions that mainstream political parties had to espouse the cause and prohibition had to be imposed. This has not worked, as later prohibition has had to be withdrawn in Andhra Pradesh (Rao & Parthasarathy, 1997). Prohibition is still in place in Gujarat but liquor remains freely available there.

The state encourages drinking because it is an important source of revenue and the police condone the illegal sale of liquor because they profit from it individually. The more important reason for the rampant illegal sale of liquor is that it is in the interests of the powerful classes in society that the poor and oppressed should douse their frustrations in alcohol rather than give vent to them through organised mass action to improve their condition. There is a beautiful medieval English ballad, one version of which has been sung in modern times by the British rock group Traffic, which ends -

Sir John Barley-Corn fought in a Bowl,
who won the Victory,
Which made them all to chafe and swear,
that Barley-Corn must die.

John Barleycorn is symbolical of alcohol, which has been cursed by alcoholics and women throughout the ages for the miseries that excessive alcohol dinking has brought on, and yet he refuses to die. The swashbuckling novelist Jack London has in a moving autobiographical novel of this name, in which he describes his own lost battle against the bottle, begins by saying that he has voted for the amendment allowing women the right to vote in elections in the early twentieth century because, "When the women get the ballot, they will vote for prohibition.....It is the wives, and sisters, and mothers, and they only, who will drive the nails into the coffin of John Barleycorn." (London, 2001)

But in the end this has been one area in which not following Gandhi has cost the country very dear. Possibly even dearer than having rejected his clarion call for village self rule. Without social control on the production and consumption of alcohol, the bringing about of which invariably mobilises and liberates women, patriarchal oppression and so also the fertility rate to secure male children have remained at high levels and burdened us with a burgeoning undernourished, under educated and under skilled population living in dire poverty. No woman in her senses will go through the drudgery of repeated pregnancies, childbirths and childrearing unless forced to do so by circumstances beyond her control. Ultimately there seem to be no easy solutions to the problems faced by poor adivasi women. Women's empowerment has become a buzzword among feminists and also within the more sedate establishment. There is of course a difference in perspective between the two. While the more radical feminists urge for the fulfilment of what have been called strategic gender needs, those within the establishment and the less revolutionary among the feminists generally content themselves with meeting practical gender needs (Molyneux, 1985). The former question the gender division of labour and male control of women's sexuality which are at the root of patriarchal oppression while the latter accept these for the time being and try to alleviate women's troubles without challenging patriarchal structures hoping that education and increased employment opportunities will gradually improve matters. Distinct from these two is the grassroots perspective which stresses that empowerment should be a process from within the oppressed community rather than being imposed from above. Thus

the women should themselves decide on the needs, whether strategic or practical, that they would like to fulfil (Kalegaonkar, 1997).

This dilemma at the grassroots of choosing between practical and strategic gender needs cropped up in the struggle of the Bhil women of Nimar too. Events proved that it is not possible to fulfil the former without addressing the latter. The women initially demanded that something be done to meet the former but in the end the movement had to begin addressing the latter. However, all these perspectives, like that of the Gandhians lack a proper understanding of the fundamental anti-people character of the modern state and its inherent distrust of emancipatory mobilisations. As we have seen the state is an evil empire and it strikes ruthlessly against organised dissent of the masses, however justified it may be, regardless of whether it is directed against the lawlessness of the Forest Department, against the construction of big dams, against the non-implementation of labour laws, against exploitation by non-advasis or against the sale of illicit liquor. Even such a small thing as adivasi girl students demanding that they be given proper food in their hostels brings down the wrath of the state. Consequently not even women are spared if they begin rubbing the state the wrong way, as they must if they have to free themselves from patriarchal oppression. Thus the sad reality is that poor women everywhere are the end sufferers of a vicious combination of globalised capitalist industrial development and patriarchal oppression (Mies, 1999).

In the initial stages of our work when we were only conducting health clinics and helping the Primary Health Centre to fulfil its Pulse Polio targets or mobilising women for sterilisation camps we were in the good books of the administration. On one occasion the Block Development Office in Barwah had arranged an information camp for women in Katkut. The target for development schemes for adivasi women had not been fulfilled and so this step had been taken. Despite repeated enticing announcements not a single woman came to the tent set up for the purpose even though it was a market day and the village was crowded with people. Such is the distrust of the government in the minds of the adivasis. Finally in desperation the government extension worker came to Subhadra and asked her to help out. Subhadra then went round and convinced some twenty odd adivasi women she knew to come to the camp and register their names for financial assistance. The Block Development Officer on that occasion thanked her profusely. However, things changed dramatically when the women began demanding development services as a right in an organised manner. The state then came out in its true anti-people colours. Beg and thou shalt be tolerated if not humoured but demand and thou shalt be crucified! Things haven't changed much since the time of Jesus Christ even though there have been quite a few more social revolutions in the two intervening millennia.

Meanwhile the Panchayat Provisions Extension to Scheduled Areas Act (PESA) had been passed in 1996 as a consequence of the sustained campaign in this regard that had been carried out under the aegis of the Bharat Jan Andolan led by Dr B D Sharma. The Madhya Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act was amended in 1997 to accord with the PESA. Later in 1998 the rules for the implementation of the Act were also framed and published in the gazette. This for the first time provided grassroots mass organisations in adivasi areas with a powerful legal instrument for the actualisation of viable village self rule. So faced with the intransigence of the local administration the provisions of this new Act were used to set in motion a robust process of rural mobilisation that immediately began to bear fruit. Even though Subhadra and I left the Katkut area after 1998 to move back to Indore, the mobilisation for the establishment of village self rule in accordance with PESA continued in

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this region for three more years and both the men and the women took the struggle to a peak till eventually the state struck back with illegal vengeance to crush the movement at high noon on 2nd April 2001 in Mehendikhera village.

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