

## **Chapter 21 - Jailhouse Rock**

An assistant police sub-inspector posted at Katkut once confidently predicted to Chhotelal at the peak of their struggle that he would remain the supreme pahalwan or don of the village regardless of all that the adivasis could do. In India there is a tradition of indigenous wrestling in which the pahalwans or wrestlers vie against each other in public matches. These matches are all fixed ones since the organisers have to garner the funds for holding them and for paying the participating pahalwans by conducting betting on the side on the results of these matches. These pahalwans have to support their heavy training costs and also their lives once they are too old to enter the ring by practising extortion and so become the local dons. As we have seen Nehru had ensured that the rules for the match between state and civil society in independent India too was similarly fixed in favour of the former and so like Ulysses he and his political successors have since meted and doled unequal laws (Tennyson, 1992) but unlike the Greek hero who detested this, they have taken pleasure in doing so. As the actual implementation of these repressive laws at the grassroots level has to be done by the police it invariably means that they are the ultimate corrupt and extortionate pahalwans in their boroughs and have remained so from the time the British brought them into existence.

The memory of the fear writ large on the face of my cable TV provider friend in Alirajpur after his arbitrary incarceration in jail reminds me continually that the power of the state over its citizens is maintained through the latter's fear of police lock ups and jails. These are two modern institutions, which are an integral part of all forms of states from the right to the left of the political spectrum. No state can continue in existence without these in the face of challenges posed by rebels of all kinds. Thus any mass movement for political change has to have a practical strategy to counter the debilitating effects of these institutions instead of just singing along with the American folk singer Joan Baez and making the militant anarchist demand for the prisons to be razed to the ground (Baez, 1971). Dr Ram Manohar Lohia had stressed that jails were the best finishing schools for the people and activists of social movements and so they should be filled up to bursting in the course of civil disobedience actions (Lohia, 1978). "Civil disobedience is armed reason" and "Jail Bhara" or filling up jails is its main weapon. While ridding the masses of the fear of incarceration it simultaneously stretches the state's disciplining power to its limits. That is why the radical mass social movements have always tried to push the people into confrontation situations with the state that would result in them going to jail. Vaharu of the Shramik Sangathan in Shahada has composed a very nice song that goes like this -

Aana jana police thana (To and fro to the police station)  
Jail hamara ghar (Jail is our home)  
Court hamari anganbari (Court is our play school)  
Kahe ke liye dar (What is there to be afraid of)  
Mat chhero police wale (Police, please do not bother us)  
Mat chhero bhai (Please do not bother us brother)

While working in Katkut, since women were at the forefront of the struggle, Subhadra went to jail along with seven other women and this was the first time they had done so. Confrontation started at the jail gate itself where the jailer asked them to take off their ornaments and deposit them with the gate warden. Subhadra and the women refused to do so as they said they were activists and not criminals. An altercation ensued which was won by the women. This set the tone for the rest of their fourteen-day stay in jail as they had established their superiority before entering its premises. They fought for and got food in

## **Recovering the Lost Tongue - A Manifesto of Anarcho-Environmentalism**

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

email: [rahul.indauri@gmail.com](mailto:rahul.indauri@gmail.com) homepage: [www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com](http://www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com)

---

accordance with the provisions of the jail manual and they were even provided with sanitary napkins, which is probably a first in jails for women. Later Subhadra went on a hunger strike in jail and she had to be evacuated to a hospital before finally being released on her personal bond without having to furnish bail as she had demanded. During their stay they thus got royal treatment because of the tough stand they took in establishing their status as being that of political prisoners despite being arraigned on false criminal charges.

The closest we have ever come to a sustained jail bharo situation was during the Anjanwara incident in Alirajpur. On that occasion a broad section of the KMCS was incarcerated and beaten up in police lockups and then sent to jail. The members of the KMCS kept the jail populated for one whole month. The first person to be arrested in the Anjanwara incident was an adivasi activist and he was severely beaten up before being sent to jail where once again he was persecuted by the jail inmates. Amit led a team of adivasis and activists to Indore by clandestine routes to hold a press conference. They were picked up there at the conclusion of the press conference and brought to Alirajpur and beaten up in the police lock up there. Since the rest of us had all gone underground and could not come to bail them out reinforcements were summoned from outside. The husband of one of the activists came rushing down from Delhi where he was teaching in the University to manage things for us and was immediately arrested and sent to the police lockup. He stayed for three days because the police took remand against him also alleging that he had attempted to murder policemen. By that time our romantic young friend who had swung the marriage of the Baroda lovebirds too had been arrested. The two of them were together in the Alirajpur lockup, which incidentally does not have a latrine. So they were handcuffed and taken to relieve themselves in the open behind the Police station. Both of them sitting naked and exchanging pleasantries while dropping the stools as the police constable looked on.

While they were there in the police lock up yet another person a friend of the activist whose husband had been arrested also came down from the USA. By this time there had been enough noise made nationally and internationally against the high handedness of the police and the administration for things to have cooled down somewhat and the police did not dare to arrest this person but he was summoned to the police station for enquiries. When he was brought to the police station the other two were inside in the lockup and fearing the worst they thought of some way to warn him of trouble. Now the university teacher is also an accomplished musician and so to warn this other guy outside he began desperately whistling Pink Floyd's classic number "Wish you were here" missing the irony! The guy outside started and wondered how someone was whistling Pink Floyd in the police station. He put two and two together and began insisting that he be allowed to meet the activists in custody, as was their basic right. The police did not allow this and shooed him away.

Avalsingh of Attha who had gone to the Chhaktala market on the sunday weekly market day was picked up from there given the customary beatings and then sent to jail. He did not even know at that time that some major incident had taken place at Anjanwara. Another of his village mates Guthia on seeing this slunk off through a back alley and after coming home took off into the hills to camp there till things cooled down. People associated with the KMCS were being arrested left, right and centre, being beaten up in police lockups and being sent to jail. While being taken to the court or being sent to jail they were all being paraded in handcuffs along the main streets of the town. There was terror everywhere. So we who had not been arrested mustered up some of the people and then under Medha's leadership took out a rally in Alirajpur and only then things cooled down somewhat. People from outside came and addressed the meeting that was held and the administration went on

## **Recovering the Lost Tongue - A Manifesto of Anarcho-Environmentalism**

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

email: [rahul.indauri@gmail.com](mailto:rahul.indauri@gmail.com) homepage: [www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com](http://www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com)

---

the backfoot for some time. Anticipatory bail applications were filed for the women activists and after these were granted by the court they could operate freely to free those inside jail.

By this time there were some twenty people including Amit in jail. They were given a spare barrack all to themselves and they demanded and got a dholak or drum also. So they spent their time singing songs and cracking jokes and composing new ones. One new joke they composed was a hilarious one indeed. An illiterate adivasi had heard an activist saying in a meeting that according to the Constitution, which was the "kanoon ki chopri" or main book of law in this country, he had the right to shout slogans against the police for their misdeeds and the police could not do anything about it not even beat him up. Elated and enthused by such a liberating exhortation he went to the thana and indeed stood outside it and began shouting slogans against the police. He was promptly arrested and beaten up. The adivasi hotly protested that the kanoon ki chopri said that he had the right to do what he had done. The police then took out the IPC, and asked him to point out where it was so written. The adivasi put his finger randomly on one page. The police then arraigned him under the section that he had pointed to, concocted a false charge sheet and sent him to jail. On coming out on bail he accosted the activist with his experience, which had been contrary to what the activist had said. The activist went with the adivasi and indignantly asked the police why they had acted in contravention of the Constitution, the supreme law of the land. The latter replied that the only law they knew was the IPC and booked both of them for preventing the police from doing their duty by unnecessarily bringing in the impediment of the Constitution, beat them up and sent them back to jail. On the way to the jail the adivasi patted the back of the disconsolate activist and said, "never mind, you will remember to read the right chopri next time". The moral of the story is that social activists who want to take on the police should read the IPC and CrPC and not the Constitution!

The police, right from the lowly constable to the highest officer, see no difference between criminals and people protesting against some injustice or other. Indeed they are better disposed towards criminals from whom they can extort money. My policy is to avoid meeting the higher-level officers as much as possible and let the people do the talking. However, on some occasions one has to meet these mandarins of the law who are members of the elite Indian Police Service (IPS). The first Superintendent of Police (SP) that I ever met told me after the first few introductory sentences that he would have me locked up in prison if I did not stop my anti government activities. This when it had become abundantly clear by that time that the police lock up or the jail did not hold any terrors for me. Subsequently Many other SPs have used the same language with me. Some have indeed locked me up under preventive sections only to have to release me unconditionally as mentioned earlier. One SP even went to the extent of regretting that I was being able to do what I was doing because unlike in neighbouring Pakistan we had a democratic constitution in this country, which allowed me to go to the higher courts against the illegal actions of the police. Yet another SP told me that the National and State Human Rights Commissions were a nuisance because their continuous monitoring of custodial deaths had hamstrung the investigation into crimes as the police had to be wary of using third degree methods to the hilt! The piece-de-resistance was one SP, who brazenly told me that he did not think anything of the Constitution because given the illiteracy and poverty of the people they could not go to the higher courts and so the police ran the country by the IPC and the CrPC! He went on to say in the same vein as all the other SPs before him that he would screw me. This was after the Mehendikhera firing and its aftermath, which had established conclusively that nothing the state or its minions could do short of killing me was going to stop me in my tracks.

## **Recovering the Lost Tongue - A Manifesto of Anarcho-Environmentalism**

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

email: [rahul.indauri@gmail.com](mailto:rahul.indauri@gmail.com) homepage: [www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com](http://www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com)

---

The conditions in the jails today are of course much better than what they used to be in Jatin Das's time but even so they are nothing to right home about. Whenever I have gone to jail the inmates have said that my entry into the jail premises has resulted in the improvement of the quality and quantity of food served. But this was not the case the first time I went to jail as an accused in a murder case in Maharashtra. Seventeen other accused and I were holed up in the police lockup in Shahada, which was the nerve centre of the Shramik Sangathan. Our arrival created a severe lack of space and we were cramped up with the other inmates in what can best be described as a black hole. The worst part of the whole stay of about a fortnight, before most of us got bailed out, were the mosquitoes. Day in and day out they would come singing their monotonous tune and bite us crazy. One of my co-accused would joke and say that the mosquitoes came singing "kun kun chhe ta, kun kun chhe ta" - who all are here, who all are here. The answer to that question of course was "we who are not all there"! It is after all sheer madness to fight the police pahalwans with the dice so heavily loaded in their favour as my late father had once presciently warned me. While in the lockup I contracted malaria for the first time and thereafter I got it again and again over the next four years or so forcing me to sadly forsake my utopian life in Alirajpur and shift to Indore to cure myself.

This particular case is a typical example of the way the police goes about systematically trying to break mass movements. The KMCS had totally stopped the extra earnings that the police used to get from the many cases that would come to them earlier. Even such trivial things as a dog having bitten another dog would end up for resolution at the police thana with the inevitable extortion of money. The main source of income for the police was from disputes regarding the love affairs of men and women. To the extent that women who became pregnant due to pre-marital or extra marital sex and wanted to get an abortion had to take the permission of the police and pay them a fine to do so! Like in the case of all other reactionary oppressions patriarchal oppression too was ultimately maintained by the police pahalwans. On one occasion after such a case had reached the thana the aggrieved party who was from a village that had not yet become part of the KMCS came to Khemla for help as the police were demanding an exorbitant sum. Khemla in typical fashion went to the police station and scolded the police and came away warning them to desist from such extortionate practices. The police instead decided to arrest the girl's father and force him to make the girl give a statement that it was Khemla who had seduced her and made her pregnant. Somehow we got to know of this and in the nick of time before the police could get to them we brought the pregnant girl and her father to the SDM in Alirajpur to get their true statements recorded. Khemla almost drowned himself when he jumped into a stream in spite to swim across and get to the village of the girl by a short cut route to pre-empt the police. Like me the last thing that Khemla poor fellow wanted was to be saddled with a false rape case against him!

The police then decided to instigate one of its dalals, whose income too had been stopped because of the KMCS, to try and break the organisation. This dalal was a murderous man and he began going around beating up the members of the KMCS. We tried to talk to him and tell him not to behave like this but to no avail. Complaints were made to the police, which were obviously ignored. A meeting was then organised in which I was also present in which he was warned not to confront the KMCS in the way he was doing. He and his cohorts then began beating up the members of the KMCS and this resulted in a free for all with the dalal being chased out by the KMCS members. The village in which the meeting was being held was on the banks of the Narmada River. So the dalal and his cohorts swam across the river on to the other side and the chasing KMCS members followed suit. In the ensuing battle

## **Recovering the Lost Tongue - A Manifesto of Anarcho-Environmentalism**

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

email: [rahul.indauri@gmail.com](mailto:rahul.indauri@gmail.com) homepage: [www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com](http://www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com)

---

with bows and arrows the dalal's brother was killed. This led to the murder charge against the members of the KMCS in which I too was implicated for having allegedly said that I had brought orders from Delhi to kill the dalal and had conspired to hold the meeting that led to the death of the dalal's brother. Khemla somehow escaped the charge of rape but I got indicted for murder. All that is required to register a false case are a statement or two from some people saying that they have seen the accused person saying or doing something that is culpable under some law. There may not be any circumstantial or physical evidence to substantiate these false statements but that is a matter to be decided during the trial.

After the Mehendikhera incident the police once again cooked up a false case against us to cover up its own illegality in having fired on and killed defenceless adivasis. Apart from such standard sections of the IPC as attempt to murder and armed unlawful assembly for the first time we were also implicated under the serious charge of waging an armed war against the state. When the case finally came up for trial we invoked the relevant section of the CrPC to have the case discharged because there was prima facie no evidence to support the charges made and especially the charge of waging war against the state. Since this is a very serious charge there is a provision in the CrPC that permission must first be taken from the state government to apply this section so as to prevent its misuse. The police had not done this. The judge was sufficiently impressed by all the arguments and references to case law that we had presented and was on the verge of discharging me and some of the other accused when the administration got wind of this. Immediately the administration swung into action and the Collector and SP of Dewas went and met the District Judge and requested him to give them more time, which was readily granted. Then they rushed to Bhopal and informed the higher ups of the imminent disaster of their bete noire Rahul Banerjee being discharged at the charge stage itself! There were hasty consultations and the missing permission to prosecute for waging war against the state was granted in a hurry. A lot of pressure was brought to bear on the poor judge not to discharge us. Ultimately he dismissed the application for discharge and framed charges against us.

My longest stay in jail and also my most enjoyable resulted from this case. I spent two and a half months in prison before getting bailed out. When I went in I was initially on hunger strike and if I had persisted with it I might have got released earlier. However, I desperately needed some rest at the time both physical and mental as various kinds of pressures had made me tired. Since there was no possibility of my going on to bear death I also felt that my going on hunger strike just for securing my release would be the same kind of half hearted individualistic Gandhian action that I was ideologically against. The whole idea behind the work that we had done in Katkut and Dewas was that the people should carry on the struggle by themselves. I thought that the state having come down like a ton of bricks the people should have a full taste of this pounding so that they had a clear idea of the kind of strength and stamina required for fighting the state. The boxer Muhammad Ali in his famous "rumble in the jungle" comeback fight for the World Heavyweight Title with George Foreman in Kinshasa in Zaire in 1974 had used the "rope-a-dope" technique in which he used to lean against the ropes allowing Foreman to punch at his stomach. Since he had made his stomach into a stonewall through practice it did not affect him at all but Foreman got tired from all the punching and exposed himself to a vicious punch from Ali to the head that knocked him out in the eighth round (Hauser, 1992). We too have to discover such a rope a dope technique to KO the state and what better way than to start practising by making the people continuously take punches on their stomachs from the police pahalwans!



## **Recovering the Lost Tongue - A Manifesto of Anarcho-Environmentalism**

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

email: [rahul.indauri@gmail.com](mailto:rahul.indauri@gmail.com) homepage: [www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com](http://www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com)

---

Jail is an ideal place for someone who wants to spend time in deep thought. For undertrial or preventively detained prisoners there are no worries as the food is supplied on time and all one has to do is sit and twiddle one's fingers if one does not busy oneself with study and thought. Nehru read and wrote on Indian history while in jail in the early nineteen forties and firmed up his modern temple building plans. While in jail at about the same time as Nehru, Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Communist, on the other hand churned out an inspiring and innovative analysis of capitalist state oppression and some interesting insights into the reasons for its dominance that remain relevant to this day as we shall see by and by (Gramsci, 1971). So I began by reviewing my years of activism and that is how the idea of writing this book first took nebulous shape in my mind. I decided to use the time in reading and asked my well wishers outside to supply me with some books. But before they could oblige I got help from an unexpected source. I was lucky to have a sympathetic person as jailer. He also happened to be a religious man. He gave me his copy of the Hindu scripture Madbhagwata Purana written by the sage Vyas who has also written the epic Mahabharata. This is a tour-de-force in ancient Hindu mysticism and has set forth the benefits of renouncing worldly desires in the pursuit of transcendental truths through interesting stories. It is said that once a person hears the continuous recitation of this purana over fourteen days she is completely freed from all worldly ills! It was a great read as I have always been fascinated by the Upanishadic philosophy of spiritual transcendence even though I have never practised it and in my daily life I have been an atheist. Initially on going to jail I had been a little miffed with the world for various reasons that I will detail a little later. But after taking daily dips in the Madbhagwata, I became indifferent about what was happening to the adivasis' struggles and life in general and began enjoying my sojourn in prison to the full.

I used this opportunity provided to talk at length to criminals for the first time. There were adivasi thieves and robbers there in the jail with me. These people had been implicated in a number of cases together. It is the practice of the police that once they catch a thief then they torture him and make him confess to having done several other thieveries for which they had hitherto had no clues. At one go these thieves become hardened criminals and after being released are constantly pestered by the police whenever some place is robbed in their vicinity. These poor adivasis asked me what was the solution to this. I told them that the best solution was that once they were acquitted, as they invariably would be because of the poor quality of investigation that the police does, they should institute criminal defamation proceedings against the police. My general advice on various things related to the law and rights turned out to be so interesting that soon I was holding regular informal sessions for the jail inmates on the legal methods of fighting the state.

News of this soon leaked out to the police. The police had charged me with having conspired to wage an armed war against the state. Obviously they did not have an iota of evidence to support this charge. They had recorded some fabricated statements by witnesses but these were of a very wishy washy nature. So this news of my holding informal legal classes was sweet music to their ears. One day the jailer, who was sympathetic to me, called me and told me that there was a complaint that I was instigating the adivasis inside to stage a revolt and seize the weapons in the jail and stage a break out. Thereafter I had reportedly planned to take the weapons and the adivasis and begin a full-fledged war against the state. I told him that he could ask the adivasis if I had said or planned anything so crazy. Anyway soon after this I was removed from this jail to another jail. After that the Subdivisional Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police went to the jail and began beating up the poor adivasis severely to try and force them to give statements to the effect that I had planned 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](mailto:rahul.indauri@gmail.com) homepage: [www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com](http://www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com)

---

jailbreak and a subsequent war against the state with them. They refused to do so despite this harassment and later told me so when I met them again outside the jail.

This reminds me of an anecdote about Mao ze Dong related by the American Marxist historian William Hinton (Hinton, 1997). Once when Mao was camping in the house of an old villager he and his comrades were listening to a radio that they had with them. The old villager, who had never seen a radio before, wonderingly said that this must be the voice of God coming from the heavens. At this everyone began laughing. But Mao immediately scolded his comrades and then spent a painstaking half an hour explaining to the old man how the radio worked and that it was not conveying the voice of God. Later this particular village fell into the hands of the Kuomintang and they tortured this old man to get some information about the whereabouts of Mao. The old man refused to divulge any information despite the torture. In the same way as that old man the poor adivasis I had talked to in jail were hungry for knowledge and a little sympathetic treatment. They valued the few hours I spent with them so much that they refused to bow down to the demands of the police to give false statements against me despite being beaten up.

Any person coming into jail for the first time, who was not a hardened criminal, invariably told me that he had paid the police thousands of rupees in bribes. I asked them why they had not been let off altogether instead of being implicated in a criminal case after paying such hefty bribes. They used to answer that this bribe was just so that the police would not beat the stuffings out of them in the lock up. So they would own up to the crime, pay through their noses and then mope in jail while waiting for bail. The police use this fear of merciless beating to extract both a confession and money from the accused. Once this is done some desultory statements are recorded often from professional witnesses who hang around the police station and a shoddy chargesheet is prepared. That is why in most cases there is no conviction after trial. Only in rare instances do the police put in hard criminal investigation work to unearth solid evidence in support of their charges. The intention of the police is not to control crime but to profit from it. When their palms are greased the police are only too ready to look the other way. Subhadra presently volunteers for an NGO in Indore that works with destitute children. Indore is a major centre for the processing and transport of illegal opium, which is cultivated in the districts nearby. The law for the control of this criminal activity is so stringent that people arraigned under it cannot get bail till their cases are disposed of. So the criminal gangs who are in this business have begun using the destitute children who clean the compartments in the trains running between Indore and Mumbai and beg for money to act as transporters of the various refined opium based drugs. The police obviously know of this but do not do anything to prevent it as they are handsomely bribed. The French author Anatole France once sarcastically wrote - "The law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread" (France, 2004). The rich can always violate the law with impunity and it is only the poor who are caught by the long hand of the law and packed into jails. All in all I have found my sojourns in Indian jails to be among the best experiences I have had in life. And like all exclusive clubs entry into these is only by invitation!

Not surprisingly the police pahalwans are sulking about the monitoring of custodial violence by the Human Rights Commissions, which has made the use of third degree methods for eliciting information a risky proposition these days. Nothing irks pahalwans in India more than honest refereeing. That is why our wrestling pahalwans lose continually in the Olympic games because match fixing is not allowed there. The jail wardens too complained to me while I was there that frequent inspections had made life hell for them and

## **Recovering the Lost Tongue - A Manifesto of Anarcho-Environmentalism**

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

email: [rahul.indauri@gmail.com](mailto:rahul.indauri@gmail.com) homepage: [www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com](http://www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com)

---

they could not trample the prisoners' rights at will as they used to earlier. These Commissions were constituted after the enactment of the Protection of Human Rights Act in 1993. The pathetic state of custodial rights in this country just prior to this can be gauged from the following excerpts from a report prepared by Amnesty International in the year 1992, "Torture is pervasive and a daily routine in every one of India's twenty five states..... many hundreds, if not thousands, have died because of torture during the last decade.....(often) never charged with any crime.... the main reason why torture continues to be practised on such a scale throughout India is that the police feel themselves to be immune - they are fully aware that they will not be held accountable, even if they kill the victim and even if the truth is revealed." (AI, 1992, p 76) Things continue to be bad despite the greatly increased surveillance of human rights and the absolute number of custodial deaths has gone on increasing. This has forced the Supreme Court to keep pending the original petition filed as far back as 1987 against arbitrary detention and torture, which has been mentioned earlier and monitor the police continually. The problem is that political parties support the use of the arbitrary powers of the police to settle scores with their opponents and to crush any radical people oriented mass mobilisation and so there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel.

The police have never touched me physically. Not even when I went to jail for the first time under the serious charge of conspiring to murder. In the Mehendikhera incident the moment the police took me into custody I began pestering them to make out an arrest memo against me as ordered by the Supreme Court. They dithered around for all of twenty-four hours deciding on what to do while I continually put pressure on them to prepare the arrest memo. They finally did so on the dot when the time limit of twenty-four hours for the preparation of an arrest memo was about to elapse. Since the arrest memo was not prepared they could not inform anyone as to where I was and what were the sections under which I had been arrested and so people outside had to be fobbed off with vague replies, which led to their fearing the worst. Amnesty International sent out red alerts saying that my life was in danger and mails and faxes began pouring in to the Government of Madhya Pradesh. As a consequence of this international pressure nothing happened to me. But all the other first few detainees in the case were badly beaten up and as usual the judicial magistrates did not take cognisance of the complaints being made to them about this illegal chastisement.

One of our comrades, Basruddin, was apprehended under section 151 of CrPC and similarly beaten up. He was kept in jail for all of two and a half months, which is illegal because this section is a preventive one and an accused under it should be automatically released after fifteen days at the most. It was only after I got out of jail and threatened to take the SDM to the High Court that he relented and set him free. This was the same SDM who had beaten up the adivasi inmates of the jail to try and force them to give false statements against me. Basruddin is an expert in ayurvedic medicine. He had started his career as a water quality analyser at SWRC Tilonia. However, fed up with testing water he went roaming round the country to various SWRC centres. That is how he landed up in Alirajpur in the year 2000 where he met Shankar. By that time he had transformed himself into an ayurvedic medical practitioner. From Alirajpur it was a short step to Katkut where he took up residence in our centre there and began dispensing ayurvedic medicine. Later he moved over to the nearby Dewas district. Here he began involving himself in the political activities of the Sangathan and was instrumental in organising some of the dharnas in front of police stations. That is how he became a marked man and when the crackdown came he was apprehended under preventive detention provisions. While in jail he had everyone from the jailer down to the warders eating out of his hands by solving some of their chronic ailments including of course the oldest one of impotency! The jail staff was in fact sorry to see him go when he was



## **Recovering the Lost Tongue - A Manifesto of Anarcho-Environmentalism**

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

email: [rahul.indauri@gmail.com](mailto:rahul.indauri@gmail.com) homepage: [www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com](http://www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com)

---

finally released. Sadly this stint in jail took the wind out of Basru's sails and he has since moved out of the area for more politically safe havens. He obviously did not have the stomach for playing the rope-a-dope game with the state.

The most bizarre of all was the tale of one old man would come into the jail the first week of every month and spend a fortnight before going out again. This man was regularly charged under the provisions of the law for control of public gambling. The old man was part of a "satta" operation. Satta is a kind of numbers game in which the kingpin who controls this game chooses the numbers every afternoon in the city of Mumbai. These numbers are then communicated across the country. Throughout the day the gamblers place their bets as to the numbers they think will be chosen later on in the day. There is a whole chain from the grassroots right upto the kingpin in Mumbai that keeps this operation going. The police and through them the political parties get a cut from this lucrative business. However, just to maintain a show of control the police have to arrest some people from time to time. The old man, who had no one to support him, was paid a daily wage by the boss of his group to spend fifteen days in jail as part of the deal he had with the police. There are a variety of dons and mafiosi in this country, the pahalwans, who live by extorting "hafta" or weekly instalments. The police pahalwans in turn take their hafta from them and also directly from the poor who have to practise occupations which are illegal according to the law. Thus haftas extorted from poor people vending merchandise in zones in which such activity is forbidden in cities are a source of income for the street corner police pahalwans. However, the most lucrative haftas are earned from illegal liquor selling and gambling, the two most vicious businesses that have kept the poor firmly tied to their poverty. Both these socially and economically harmful activities go on openly and the police look on benignly. The moment there is a popular mobilisation against these activities, the police begin flexing their muscles and those foolhardy enough to have started the protest find themselves firmly lodged in jail as Subhadra and the women of Katkut found to their cost.

Most of the poor and deprived all over the world in order to survive have either to resort to crime, illegal migration, illegal occupations, living in illegal habitations, drowning their sorrows in drug abuse or taking part in emancipatory mass agitations for social and economic justice. This brings them continually into confrontation with the police and leads to their constituting an overwhelming majority in the jails. It is his opposition to this injustice against the poor in the USA who are mostly Black and Hispanics and to the war in Vietnam that led Muhammad Ali into confrontation with the US Government. He was stripped of his first World Heavyweight Boxing Title and imprisoned. Muhammad Ali has been an iconic character who has played the rope-a-dope outside the ring against the state also. This is also what led Joan Baez to exhort the poor to get together and raze the prisons to the ground. In reality however both playing the rope-a-dope against the police and razing the prisons to the ground are difficult propositions fraught with danger. The mass jail bharo programme advocated by Dr Lohia is a much easier strategy for fighting the state but this too requires that the masses and activists learn to make the most of their sojourns in jail instead of treating them as avoidable aberrations. The quintessential American Dreamer, the "King of Rock and Roll", Elvis Presley, advocated the adoption of precisely this positive attitude towards stints in jail when he sang in Jailhouse Rock (Presley, 1957) -

Shifty Henry said to Bugs, "For Heaven's sake,  
No one's lookin', now's our chance to make a break."  
Bugsy turned to Shifty and he said, "Nix nix,  
I wanna stick around a while and get my kicks."

## **Recovering the Lost Tongue - A Manifesto of Anarcho-Environmentalism**

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

email: [rahul.indauri@gmail.com](mailto:rahul.indauri@gmail.com) homepage: [www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com](http://www.rahulbanerjee.notlong.com)

---

### **References**

AI (1992): *India: Torture, Rape and Deaths in Custody*, Amnesty International, London.

Baez, J (1971): *Joan Baez Prison Trilogy Lyrics*, at url <http://lyrics.duble.com/lyrics/J/joan->

France, A (2004): *Red Lily*, Kessinger Publishing, Montana

Gramsci, A (1971): *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Hoare Q and Nowell Smith G, Lawrence and Wishart, London.

Hauser, T (1992): *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times*, Simon & Schuster, New York.

Hinton, W (1997): *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village*, University of California Press.

Lohia, R M (1978): *Marx, Gandhi and Socialism*, Rammanohar Lohia Samata Vidyalaya Nyasa

Presley/Jailhouse-Rock.html accessed on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2005.

Tennyson, A (1992): *Ulysses in Tennyson: Selected Poems*, Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth.