

Chapter 26 - The Aging and feuding Young Turks

Shaheed Bhagat Singh, who in his very brief life gained popularity on a par with Gandhi, faced death at the gallows in 1931 pursuing the dream of an Indian revolution and for "priceless ideals" (Gupta & Gupta, 2001). The twentieth century was a century in which many young people from the upper and middle classes dreamt of overthrowing oppressive socio-economic structures to bring about justice and equality and rejected easier options to jump into the fight to end some kind of oppression or other even at the price of death. It is always these people, who have time and again forsaken soft options in the mainstream to descend into the hurly burly of radical politics, that have provided leadership to the mass movements for change. Given the power and complexity of the modern state and later super-states like the World Bank it is unrealistic to expect the working masses to carry on sustained struggles on their own. The mass environmental movements in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh which began in the final two decades of the twentieth century too have been witness to this phenomenon and have been able to leave their mark on national and global politics because of the presence of a host of other middle class activists who have backed up the better-known charismatic leaders. Unfortunately they have now become a vanishing breed because as mentioned earlier the increasing professionalisation of the social work sector has meant that social activism too has become a mainstream career option and campaigns are now mostly run virtually in cyber space. The great thing about some of these colleagues of ours is the maverick and happy go lucky style of their functioning, which has provided a lot of colour to the struggles we have participated in.

One of the worst remnants of colonial injustice in Madhya Pradesh is the forest village. The British used to take whole villages of adivasis from the plains areas and settle them in small villages deep inside uninhabited forest areas to work as labourers for felling the trees. These labourers were not given rights to the land they were living on and neither to the small pieces of land they were cultivating. After independence while the claims of a majority of such cultivators were settled and they were given inalienable rights to their land under the provisions of the Madhya Pradesh Land Revenue Code, a small minority were not and retained as forest villages under the control of the Forest Department. Since the Forest Department could at any time abrogate the rights of the adivasis to cultivate and reside within the forest this effectively meant that the adivasis became its bonded labourers. Despite many efforts on the part of adivasi mass organisations this patent injustice remains uncorrected to this day due to the obduracy of the Ministry of Environment and Forests which takes refuge behind the Environment Protection Act 1980 to deny land ownership rights to the adivasis. The net result is that on the ground local functionaries of the Forest Department take bribes for even the most basic access to forests. In one instance in the village of Chainpura near Katkut the adivasis were not being allowed to collect even the dung of their cattle from the forests. This was challenged in the High Court of Indore through the first ever writ petition filed against the arbitrariness of the Forest Department on behalf of adivasis in Madhya Pradesh bringing relief to them.

Anil Trivedi was the advocate who made this pioneering intervention on behalf of the adivasis. Later when Rajaan from the same village who is an activist of the Adivasi Shakti Sangathan was served a notice by the Forest Department for cancellation of his residence permit and eviction once again Anilbhai fought his case and got the orders quashed. Earlier in his career when he used to practice in the lower courts he would regularly move them for discharge of frivolous cases lodged against political activists by the police under the provisions of section 227 of CrPC on the grounds that prima facie there was no evidence to

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support the charges and get the proceedings quashed thus providing considerable relief to the accused. There are innumerable cases he has fought in the High Court of Indore in general public interest and in the specific interest of workers, peasants and activists. He played a stellar role in getting us bailed out after our arrest in the severe circumstances prevailing in the wake of the Mehendikhera incident, in getting the charge of waging war against the state in that case quashed in the High Court as also the externment order against Chhotelal. The law being an ass it requires equally obstinate lawyers to get it to work for the poor and oppressed. Anilbhai is the only lawyer in Madhya Pradesh who has consistently used the law to intervene in the interests of the deprived people in the state.

Anilbhai became a practising lawyer by chance. He is the son of the veteran Gandhian Kashinath Trivedi and so was involved in social and political activism right from his childhood. He, however, chose to follow in the footsteps of Ram Manohar Lohia and became an activist of the Socialist Party. When emergency was declared in 1975 he was arrested and sent to jail. At that time he had been pursuing post graduate studies in psychology and law simultaneously and taking part actively in the mobilisation in support of the Sampoorana Kranti movement in Bihar. Once in jail the hot topic of discussion among all the senior politicians, some of whom were lawyers, was the ease with which Indira Gandhi had subverted the Constitution because there was not enough legal awareness among the masses about their rights. The consensus was that there had not been enough legal activism on the part of lawyers who were members of the progressive parties so as to challenge the arbitrariness of the executive in its actions to repress human and civil rights. Anilbhai had earlier been studying law without any firm commitment to pursuing it as a career. But the discussions regarding the inadequacy of legal activism made Anilbhai decide on choosing the legal profession to try and fill up this lacuna. He studied and appeared for his final examinations from inside the jail.

Immediately after coming out of jail he became involved in electoral politics as he was chosen as the candidate of the combined opposition from one of the seats in Indore in the assembly elections that followed. However, due to the filing of nomination papers by a rebel from the erstwhile Jana Sangh the votes got divided and the Congress candidate won. This loss to the Janata party has turned out to be a gain for the mass movements in Madhya Pradesh. If he had won he would most certainly have become a full time politician and not been able to pursue a career in law. However, this loss in the elections made him concentrate seriously on becoming a lawyer and since then he has devoted most of his energies in brilliantly using the law in favour of the poor. He has stood for elections a few more times as a member of the Janata Dal, a group of former Socialist party politicians and lost but that has been more from a firm belief in the Lohiaite conviction that the legislature and the parliament are the bodies, which should bring about social and economic justice and so more and more people with a commitment to these ideals must try and get themselves elected. He may not have succeeded in this given the corrupt nature of electoral politics but he has definitely made an impact with his legal activism.

The great thing about Anilbhai is that he remains unruffled even in the worst of circumstances and continues to propagate his message. Once while he was crossing the road an under-aged teenager riding a mobike without a driver's license knocked him down. Though nothing was broken he was in severe pain and later had to take bed rest for a fortnight to recover from the sprain of his back. The passers-by as is usual in such cases wanted to beat the culprit black and blue before handing him over to the police. However, Anilbhai would have none of this and instead asked the boy to sit down with him and

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explained to him patiently that riding a mobike was an even greater crime than riding it under-aged! After explaining to the boy the tremendous social, economic and environmental consequences of the over dependence of modern human beings on automobiles he extracted a promise from him not to drive a motorised vehicle again at least till he had begun earning himself in lieu of not pressing charges against him. For many years Anilbhai used to commute to the court by public transport till the increasing pressure of his legal work forced him to opt for a gearless scooter. No wonder that he commands tremendous respect from all and sundry in Indore. What could be a better testament to his integrity than the fact that once when the journalists of Indore owing allegiance to rival political parties fell out among themselves over the conduct of the elections to their representative association they appointed Anilbhai as the supervisor to ensure that the elections were conducted impartially despite the fact that he was an active member of a political party himself.

These days fighting the state has become such a complex matter that the traditional modes of social, political and legal activism do not suffice anymore. Various other innovative strategies have to be devised to impact upon the media and civil society and also mobilise funds. Satinath Sarangi or Sathyu as he is popularly known is by far and above the past master in showing such versatility. He is the hidden force of the struggle of the Bhopal gas affected people and the secret behind its longevity. He teamed up in 1994 with a leading creative designer in advertising in the United Kingdom, Indra Sinha, to launch full page advertisements in the Guardian and Independent newspapers just before the anniversary of the Bhopal gas disaster detailing the continuing suffering of the gas leak survivors and the apathy of governments and the MNCs towards their plight (Sarangi, 2004). They spent eight thousand pounds on the advertisements and raised fifty thousand pounds in no-strings-attached donations from thousands of individuals. More importantly they brought the important issues relating to this disaster alive in public memory and created a massive worldwide network of people in support of the Bhopal gas movement. Such was the impact of this advertisement that the flagging class action suit in the United States against first Union Carbide Corporation and then its later owners Dow Chemicals came to life once again as major law firms agreed to fight the case pro bono. This advertisement campaign has now become an annual feature and is the main instrument for garnering financial and other support for the movement from common people without any conditions attached except those ethical ones self imposed by the users of the funds themselves. Sathyu has also cobbled together a host of organisations in India in support of the mass struggles of the Bhopal gas victims and has actively pursued the various legal cases going on including the crucial one in the Supreme Court that has brought so much relief to the victims.

Sathyu had begun his political career by participating in radical left politics as a student of engineering in the Banaras Hindu University. Factional squabbles within his group led him to become disgusted and so he opted for a job with a government research facility in Bhopal in 1983. That is when he came in touch with the people in Kishore Bharati and gave up his research job to join them in Hoshangabad. He was in the first batch of people from Kishore Bharati who rushed to Bhopal in the wake of the gas leak and has stayed put there ever since. An anarchist through and through he refused to slow down even after the Zahreeli Gas Kand Morcha split up in 1986 and formed a separate organisation the Bhopal Group for Information and Action to carry on fighting the state through individual actions in addition to mass struggles. And these have not been restricted to just the Bhopal gas issue but have also been done in support of other movements. On one occasion when the BJP Government of Chief Minister Sunderlal Patwa was wielding the stick ferociously on the NBA in 1990 and

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most of us were in jail he undertook with another activist an action the likes of which Madhya Pradesh has never seen either before or after. The two of them chained and locked themselves to two pillars in the secretariat building in Bhopal where the offices of the Ministers are and gave the keys to an accomplice who slipped away. The pillars they had chosen were strategically located in the lobby from where all the ministers including the Chief Minister had to pass. They then started shouting slogans denouncing the government. Immediately a crowd collected and also the police. There was a massive commotion and this persisted for a whole hour and a half as the police ran all over trying to find a mechanic to break the chains and remove the two shouting activists to jail.

Sathyu has continually adopted such outlandish tactics to make an impact. On one occasion he launched a campaign against Dow Chemicals in Mumbai. He had activists paste stickers in local trains and buses in the city advertising that people could contact certain phone numbers for answers to problems related to infertility, impotency, unrequited love, jobs, foreign travel and the like. The numbers that were given were those of the Dow office in Mumbai. The Dow office began to be flooded with phone calls from distraught couples, jilted lovers and sundry other such people who were disgruntled with life. Eventually Dow had to change all its phone numbers! The Jharoo Maro campaign launched to force Dow Chemicals to clean up the environmental mess in the factory at Bhopal was also his brainwave. It was tactically a brilliant move since getting Dow to clean up the mess would be equivalent to getting them to acknowledge that they had the responsibility for paying enhanced compensation to the affected people of Bhopal who were still suffering from the effects of the gas leak. That is why Dow is trying its best to avoid doing this. Sathyu has used the weapon of the hunger strike also and by limiting his demands to what the state can agree to under pressure has been successful in getting concessions. But in his effort to nail Dow to taking on the responsibility for cleanup and greater compensation he has not yet been successful. After all he too is labouring under the Sisyphean curse!

Sathyu is unique among social activists in that he is not just a firebrand agent provocateur but also an able manager of a first class social service organisation. Seeing the abysmal level of treatment being provided to the survivors of the gas leak he set up the Sambhavna Clinic and Trust in 1995 with the proceeds of the first advertisement campaign in 1994 to provide proper medical treatment for and conduct research into the causes and effects of the gas leak generated ailments. Over a decade of operation, funded by the annual advertisement campaigns, which are now called the Bhopal Medical Appeal, this clinic has evolved into a world-class facility providing much needed relief to the gas victims. An eclectic combination of therapeutic methodologies spanning across various disciplines like ayurveda, unani, yoga, and the dominant allopathy are used in this clinic. The medical research output that has been generated from this work has been published in top research journals. The Sambhavna Trust has won many prestigious awards for its humanitarian work among a people left stranded by the state and MNCs, the most prominent being the Margaret Mead Award in 2002 (BMA & ST, 2006). Despite having achieved so much Sathyu is a self-effacing man living frugally, working democratically and giving credit for the work done to all his many colleagues the most eminent among them being the indomitable Champa Devi and Rashida Bee. He has remained true to his basic dictum that "political action must involve fun and laughter"!

Perseverance through thick and thin for the emancipation of the oppressed is the hallmark of a true political activist and especially so in these degenerate times when moral values have become passé in the race to earn super profits regardless of the consequences.

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Like Anilbhai and Sathyu another such committed activist is Sunil Gupta who hails from the obscure town of Rampura in Mandsaur district of Madhya Pradesh. His family was displaced from their original village due to its being submerged in the reservoir created by the construction of the Gandhi Sagar dam on the river Chambal. His father is an economist who used to teach in Government Colleges and is an acolyte of Ram Manohar Lohia. Sunilbhai picked up the basics of Lohiaite Socialism from his father and wended his way to the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) for his post graduation in the late nineteen seventies. JNU was the hotbed of radical left politics at that time with both the faculty and the students distinctly red in colour. Sunilbhai took active part in student politics in the student wing of a particular faction of Socialists and even unsuccessfully contested for the post of the president of the JNU student's union. Finally after spending a few years he decided that academics was not his cup of tea and gave up his studies as a PhD scholar to take up residence in the premises of the defunct and so vacant Lohia Academy in Kesla village in Hoshangabad district to start mass organisational work there in the mid nineteen eighties.

The Gond and Korku adivasis in the area were in a sorry plight. They had suffered multiple displacements without any proper rehabilitation and resettlement from the construction of a dam on the Tawa River, which is a tributary of the Narmada River and a proof range for testing bombs and missiles. Moreover their habitats were converted into the Bori Wildlife Sanctuary leading to a further restriction of their rights to forest access. All this had severely affected their livelihoods and they were living close to starvation. Sunil began organising the people to demand that the government initiate relief works in the area. A mass organisation named Kisan Adivasi Sangathan (KAS) was formed and agitations began involving rallies and sit-ins and long marches to the administrative headquarters. Inexorably this was countered with police repression by the state and Sunil and his comrades were beaten up and put into jail. They were handcuffed while being taken to court from jail to attend their dates and they challenged this illegality in the Supreme Court, which passed strictures against the administration in what has gone down as a landmark judgment regarding the right of under-trial prisoners not to be handcuffed (SCC 1990 (3) p 119). This repression combined with some sops given to the people had the typical result of weaning them away from the KAS and it began losing ground for sometime.

Things hotted up again in 1994 when the fishing rights in the Tawa dam reservoir were auctioned off to a private contractor in Bhopal and a proposal was put forward by the Forest Department to evict the adivasis residing within the Bori Wildlife Sanctuary to make way for the preservation of tigers (Sunil, 2000). The government through its Fisheries Department had controlled the fishing ever since the Tawa dam had been built. The department had brought in people from outside to do the fishing leaving the adivasis literally high and dry. However, the adivasis had learnt to fish and in the absence of any other viable livelihoods used to poach fish from the reservoir and sell them by bribing the department staff. But the contractor from Bhopal would have none of this and he descended with his musclemen and began beating up the adivasis when they were caught poaching. The Forest Department staff too began harassing the adivasis to leave the forest. This became a major issue and once again the KAS under the leadership of Sunilbhai began agitating for the rights of the adivasis through rallies and sit-ins and finally a roadblock agitation. This was brutally suppressed and the agitators thrown into jail. However, the agitation finally paid off as the government took a decision to revoke the eviction orders on the adivasis in the Bori Wildlife Sanctuary and it agreed to give the right to fishing in the reservoir to a cooperative of the adivasi fishermen.

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As mentioned earlier this cooperative has proved to be a resounding success. Not only have the earnings of the members increased substantially but the fishing environment of the reservoir too has been improved resulting in higher and more sustainable output. Since this enhanced output is more than can be sold locally the adivasis have become adept at transporting the fish in refrigerated trucks to far off locations like Kolkata and Mumbai and earning greater profits. The government too is now earning much more from royalties that it had ever done earlier. All the adivasis being members of the cooperative have a vested interest in ensuring that the reservoir is well taken care of and stocked and fishing is stopped during the monsoon months when spawning takes place. The bonus from the profits is distributed during these months so as to balance the loss of income due to stopping of fishing. The social fencing by the adivasis is so effective that even the illegal poaching of tigers and timber has been reduced. On one occasion some adivasis from a distant village wanted to poach turtles required for some ceremony from the reservoir. They were not allowed to do so. They were asked that even if the KAS allowed them to take the turtles how they would cart them through the Bori Wildlife Sanctuary to their village, which was outside it. The answer was that the forest guards were far easier to convince than the KAS members!

The immense success of the cooperative in increasing the earnings of their members has meant that they now contribute from their wages to the KAS and so fund its political activities, which are an insurance against any possibility of the government rescinding the fishing rights. Sunilbhai in fact is the national secretary of the Samajvadi Jan Parishad, which is a national level party of Socialists. He is also the convenor of the Jan Sangharsh Morcha, which is a federation of mass organisations in Madhya Pradesh. Thus the KAS now takes part in people's action right from the local to the national level. Sunilbhai is very active in trying to build up national and state level movements of the people espousing a more human and nature friendly model of development. Everything has not been as easy as it sounds. The government and especially the bureaucracy have not liked this success of the people and so have tried to scuttle it at every opportunity. However, a combination of mass agitations and lobbying has ensured that the cooperative has had its fishing license renewed. But now once again the spectre of not only the withdrawal of fishing rights but large scale displacement arising from the expansion of the area of the Satpura National Park in the Pachmarhi region of the district by the inclusion of the Bori Wildlife Sanctuary and also the reservoir of the Tawa dam in it once again looms large. The sequestration of ecological niches as carbon sinks and bio-diversity reserves to compensate for the environmental profligacy of the elite has become a new cause for the displacement of adivasis from their habitats throughout the country. The KAS and Sunilbhai are doing battle trying to stave off this impending disaster and mass agitations have begun in earnest. Once again like the rest of us Sunilbhai too has to relive the Sisyphean curse.

Yet another follower of Lohia who has added considerable verve to the movements for alternatives in Madhya Pradesh is Dr Sunilam. He has been organising the farmers in the Betul district neighbouring Sunilbhai's area of work for over two decades now. He shot into fame in 1998 when the police fired on and killed nineteen farmer members of the Kisan Sangharsh Samiti who were demonstrating before the Tehsil building in Multai demanding compensation for crops damaged due to heavy hailstorms. Under Sunilam's leadership thousands of farmers had been demonstrating for more than a month but the government and administration as is so typical in this country chose to look the other way for fear that giving in to their demands might encourage other farmers elsewhere to voice similar demands. The government only responded with guns blazing when finally the farmers got impatient and

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conveniently put the blame on Sunilam for having incited the farmers. However, Sunilam's uniqueness transcends this grassroots mobilisation of farmers, which others too have done quite well and sometimes with better results than him.

Sunilam is the only one among the middle class activists of the environmental movements in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh who has translated mass mobilisation around grassroots issues into electoral success. Despite being heavily handicapped with nearly fifty false criminal cases following the Multai massacre Sunilam successfully contested the 1999 elections as an independent candidate from Multai to the Madhya Pradesh legislative assembly. Not only this he retained the seat in the 2004 elections. He has thus been able to raise the many issues dear to all the mass environmental movements in the legislative assembly and put the government in the dock. One significant contribution of his has been his expose of the Government's cover up of the persistent starvation deaths among tribals that were taking place in Madhya Pradesh in 2005. The great orator that he is he has single-handedly raised the level of the debate on environmental issues in the house. His main thrust obviously has been on the issue of the adoption and implementation of an agricultural policy that is both environment and farmer friendly as opposed to the current green revolution strategy that has proved to be such a great disaster. He has been so vociferous and trenchant in his lonely mission that the Speaker has suspended him from the house quite a few times. Typically he has refused to leave voluntarily on such occasions and so has had to be dragged away by the wardens! However, there is a limit to such lonely battles and so he has now become a member of the Samajwadi political party and has busied himself in building up its base in Madhya Pradesh along with the other law makers of that party. Not everyone fancies a Sisyphean lifestyle!

It's not as if only the male activists have shown spunk and grit because there is one woman who has matched them in every way and even surpassed them in some and that is Chittaroopa Palit known to all and sundry as Silvy. Amit and I were the only two middle class activists left holding the fort of the KMCS in Alirajpur after the exit of Khemraj when one day in 1988 Silvy came down to our office in Attha to interview us regarding our political perceptions so as to be able to judge whether we were worthy enough for her to join us or not! Silvy had completed her diploma in rural management from the Institute of Rural Management in Anand in Gujarat and had put in two years of compulsory apprenticeship in various NGOs before she decided that she wanted to be a political activist instead. She was then going round visiting various mass organisations in Madhya Pradesh evaluating them. She took out a sheet with questions and began grilling us with them. I remember only one after all these years because it annoyed me very much at the time. She asked us whether we did not think that by fighting for the provision of land rights to the adivasis within the reserved forest area we were following a reformist line of action as against the ideal course of building up a broader movement for the repeal of the Indian Forest Act itself. Anyway we passed the test because she eventually came to work with us.

Subhadra says that all men are pigs and the self-righteous ones like I even more so and it is the misfortune of women that they have to bear with them. Much before I came to know Subhadra, however, it was Silvy from whom I got my first formal lessons in feminism. Amit and I are fairly decent chaps as far as men go and have rejected the cruder forms of male dominance, which manifest themselves through a clear division of labour especially in men not doing domestic work. But we had not then given any deep thought to the way in which patriarchy still constrained women in society. Silvy's advent into the KMCS was like a feminist tornado in an all male teacup. Despite being handicapped by not being able to

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traverse the hilly terrain as well as we used to do she nevertheless made up for this with her combativeness and began organising the women and taking us to task for not having done much in this sphere. Unfortunately this initial enthusiasm for women's mobilisation around the issue of patriarchy soon took a backseat because Silvy decided to concentrate all her energies on the struggle against the Sardar Sarovar dam in which she immersed herself for a long time. When that struggle waned in the field the passion to save the River Narmada made her move upstream to try and prevent various other dams being built on the river itself and on its tributaries.

Silvy has a bubbly personality and she brought a welcome whiff of light banter into the austere and ascetic life that I used to live in Alirajpur. She would go away to Vadodara, Mumbai and Delhi and come back full of colourful gossip about who was dating whom and about someone who had been jilted by some other person. She herself was married at that time but being a follower of the school of feminists, which held that women could be bisexual if they so wished, she once said to me that she would not baulk at a parallel relationship with a woman if the opportunity came by. I could not keep myself then from commenting cryptically "God save the other woman"! This was one joke that did not go down at all well with her to the extent that she shooed me out of her house in Alirajpur with a broom. I used to hear a lot about the sexual escapades of the Bhils during the course of my travels through the villages and also by participating in their panchayats to settle the disputes that inevitably arose but these all seemed far removed from my own personal life which used to be a firmly celibate one! So, the memory of the many evenings spent listening to Silvy's jokes and gossip while we sat, cooked and ate our evening meals in the jumping shadows of the lantern lit kitchen in Attha is something that I will always treasure.

We were all very good friends then and when tragedy struck in 1993 in the form of dacoits who murdered her parents in their home in Delhi we all rallied round and spent time with Silvy as she tried to recover from the shock. The police as is usual in such cases was doing nothing but Silvy ran around and used some of her old contacts at higher levels of the government to finally get the culprits arrested and sent to jail. She recovered from this tragedy pretty soon and came back to the fight in the valley with a vengeance. Unfortunately by that time I had begun having misgivings with the way in which the NBA was going about its work. Most members of the KMCS were not inclined to devoting all their energies solely to the struggle against the dam, as Silvy and Medha would have liked. Hot headed as we both are this led to some furious debates and our eventual estrangement. Anyway I left the area to depart for Indore and we lost contact for a number of years only to patch up somewhat after the Mehendikhera incident. However, the camaraderie and joking that used to mark the earlier phase of our friendship and was a very valuable part of those golden years spent in Alirajpur is no more.

If the struggle in Bhopal has remained alive and kicking after all these years because of Sathyu then the struggle for the Narmada in Madhya Pradesh continues to act as a brake on the arbitrariness of the state in no small measure due to the all round tenacity of Silvy. Whether it is in organising at the grassroots, lobbying at the higher levels right up to international fora, writing analytical papers, popular articles and press notes or in mobilising funds she has proved herself to be a veritable reincarnation of the ten armed Goddess Durga who in Hindu mythology brought salvation to the Gods by killing the evil demon Mahishasur. Though Silvy hasn't been as successful and the Mahishasur of the state continues to oppress the children of God and nature in the Narmada valley, nevertheless she has kept the hope alive of a final deliverance from destructive development and repressive

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governance. The people to be affected by imminent submergence due to the closing of the gates of the Indira Sagar dam were in dire straits just before the monsoons in 2005. The state adopted the time tested policy of flushing out the people by flooding them, thus depriving them of rehabilitation and reducing the attendant costs.

The only course left was to move the High Court in Jabalpur against this blatant violation of the NWDT Award and the recent Supreme Court judgment supporting it in the case filed by the NBA with regard to the rehabilitation of the Sardar Sarovar oustees. Lawyers from Delhi came down and the petition was filed in the High Court. However, they expressed their inability to come down again and conduct the case in detail. There were no good lawyers available in Jabalpur who would fight the case pro bono. So Silvy who had sat down with the lawyers in Delhi and drafted the petition decided to plead the case herself. The senior lawyers in Jabalpur laughed and said that the judges would not hear her for even five minutes and throw out the petition. Undeterred Silvy prepared her plea and began arguing on the appointed day. The judges heard her for thirteen days and finally ordered that the gates of the dam should not be closed until proper rehabilitation had been provided.

One persistent problem among radicals involved in mass political movements right from the time of the French Revolution is that of internecine squabbling. This becomes even more virulent and assumes murderous proportions when these radicals manage to overthrow the ruling order and come to power themselves as in the case of the Jacobins in the aftermath of the French Revolution (Dowd, 1965). The Bolsheviks in Russia too followed this gory tradition. A process that began with the annihilation of the anarchists in 1921 became even more chaotic after the death of Lenin in 1924 as two broad groups emerged led by Trotsky and Stalin and a power struggle ensued (Callinicos, 1990). Trotsky lost out, had to leave Russia in 1929, and was finally assassinated in 1940 in Mexico at the behest of Stalin, whose secret police had managed to kill many others of his relatives and supporters in and outside Russia earlier including his son Leon Sedov in Paris. In between the murderous purges of the nineteen thirties played themselves out in Russia as Stalin consolidated his position there, as so vividly fictionalised by Koestler. The communists, socialists and environmentalists in India too have squabbled similarly without having come to power in any substantial manner as has been noted earlier. The activists of the mass environmental movements in Madhya Pradesh have not been able to buck this trend either.

I had always naively wondered as a youth when reading this history of infighting as to why people committed to a similar mission of radical social change should differ so vehemently on ideological grounds and then carry this difference into the sphere of personal relations leading in the end to murderous feuds. The two decades of trodding the dusty activist trails of Madhya Pradesh have been a saddening lesson in realism in this regard. There are a host of talented, brave hearted and committed activists, both men and women, who have consistently fought the state over this long period, many of whom have not been mentioned here because of the limitations of space or my lack of a deep acquaintance with their work. Apart from I there are three other IIT alumni, Shripad Dharmadhikari, Himanshu Thakkar and Alok Agrawal who have provided creative midfield support to the striking prowess of Medha in the game to save the Narmada. Nevertheless, the mass environmental movements in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh have not been able to fulfil their promise because at the end of the day we have not wanted to collaborate in any serious way to build up a common front that can challenge the state significantly. Ideological and programmatic differences have taken a backseat as the trading of personal level charges questioning the integrity and commitment of one-time comrades in arms have come to the fore, a

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phenomenon that has been characterised by Trotsky as striking not at a political opponent's ideas but at his skull (S T, 2000). Fortunately or unfortunately none of us with our own small outfits have come close to winning state power and so have not been able to murder each other!

So much and yet so little - that in short sums up the contribution of the one time Young Turks who have added so much colour to the political spectrum in sleepy and backward Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh over the past three decades or so. Today these diehard activists have all passed into middle age and are mostly ploughing lonely furrows without a second generation of equal calibre having yet emerged to carry on the battle from where they will finally leave it off in a few years time due to old age. Matters have been compounded by the fact that middle class youth these days prefer to roll bowls at pins in swank bowling centres rather than roll stones up hills even more than they used to a decade or two earlier.

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