

RECOVERING THE LOST TONGUE

An Anarcho-Environmentalist Manifesto

A part autobiographical, part epic and part academic account of the Globally Significant Mass Environmental Movements under way over the past two decades in Central India written by an activist of these movements.

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Chapter 1 - Putting Black on White

An eloquent new star began rising in the sagging firmament over the struggles of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) in the summer of 1999. The NBA had been fighting valiantly to save the Narmada river valley from submergence arising from the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam at Navagam in the state of Gujarat for a decade and a half but with less and less success at that time. Then, all on a sudden, the Booker Prize winning novelist Arundhati Roy renounced the pleasures of reading James Joyce and Vladimir Nabokov in the air-conditioned comfort of her Delhi home and decided to take on the searing dry heat of the central Indian summer and the antipathy of the Indian ruling classes. She worked her way on foot through the hilly fastnesses adjoining the river to meet the Bhil adivasi indigenous people who were to be ousted from their lands. On her return she chose to give literary pursuits a go by. Instead she poured through books on irrigation and dams and came abreast with the terms of reference of the attritive battle for survival that was being fought by the adivasis and began wielding her formidable pen in their defence.

This was hot news for the media. A mainstream celebrity, one able to write with passion and style, deciding to pitch in for Medha Patkar and her band of mostly adivasi passive resisters against the nexus of powerful interests building the dam, made good copy. On the whole media persons, like the punters at Ascot, love only winners. The NBA had begun going down hill from the mid nineteen nineties onwards in its efforts to inculcate some respect for Mother Nature in the minds of those who monopolised the running of the affairs of the Indian state and so by 1999 apart from some committed reporters and editors its actions were not getting the kind of attention that it used to. Arundhati Roy changed all that as she first wrote a long and detailed monograph making a factual and at the same time impassioned plea for stopping the dam and the kind of destructive modern development of which it was a manifestation, which was widely published and read (Roy, 1999). Then she led a few hundred people from cities both in India and abroad to undertake a "Rally for the Valley" during the monsoons in the Narmada valley in support of Medha Patkar and the NBA activists who had declared their intention to drown in the rising river waters in protest against the building of the dam. The press went gaga over a dramatic picturisation of the two Amazons, one wielding the pen and the other the moral strength of satyagraha - Gandhian passive resistance, rendezvousing amidst the swirling waters of the Narmada.

This shot in the arm provided then by Arundhati Roy to the NBA's flagging fortunes later proved to be like all such shots only a temporary relief. However, over the years she herself has emerged as a major champion of environmental and human rights on the national and international stage and won quite a few awards, the proceeds of which, to her eternal glory, she has then distributed among the chronically fund hungry environmental and human rights activists of this country. This meteoric transformation wrought by the media of a mainstream celebrity into an international star of the anarcho-environmentalist (as will be detailed later this term describes most succinctly the decentralised nature friendly outlook of the modern mass movements against centralised and destructive modern development) fringe had initially amused me but then a photograph in a local newspaper made me start thinking in new directions. The photograph showed Arundhati Roy coming out of the airport in Indore on her way to the Narmada valley in support of an action of the NBA and there was an old friend of mine, a senior activist of the NBA, along with her in the background. The caption read "Arundhati Roy, leader of the NBA, passing through Indore on her mission to save the Narmada".

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This friend of mine, many other activists and I had worked hard in the background along with Medha Patkar to build up the struggle against the dam from scratch for a decade and a half and yet in the eyes of the press she had no value and it was Arundhati Roy who was the leader. This picture and caption cut into my cynicism with regard to the power of the pen like a scythe and showed me the way out of an impasse that I had got into for sometime. The roots of the problem I was then facing went back to 1994 when my activist wife Subhadra Khaperde and I had to leave our mass organisational work deep in the rural Bhil homelands and come to the city of Indore for reasons that will unfold with the yarn that I have just begun to spin.

We hadn't a penny when we came to Indore except for a dole given to us by a well wisher. I had no work and I was also seriously ill from repeated bouts of malaria. Luckily a veteran Gandhian, Mahendrabhai, gave us a place to stay free of cost in an ashram, of which he was the coordinator. This ashram is a retreat from where Gandhians carried out rural development and awareness work and is situated in village Machla near Indore. But this ashram had for sometime fallen into disuse, as there was no one left to run its programmes and so Mahendrabhai welcomed our decision to stay there. Some of my classmates from school contributed sums of a thousand rupees each and my mother and younger brothers too chipped in with some aid. Subhadra and I sold the magazines and literature produced by the mass organisations of the Bhils to people in Indore. Somehow we got by with a little help from our friends for a few months till I could recover from my illness. On one occasion while I was cycling with Subhadra seated behind me on the carrier on our way to sell some literature suddenly a police jeep stopped in front of us. A police officer stepped out against whom we had once taken action when he was posted in our area of work for having extorted money from a Bhil adivasi. He shook hands with me and asked me what I was doing in Indore. He said that he had always respected us for the work we were doing even though personally this had caused him harm. He laughed and said that the system was so crooked that despite all we could do crooked people like him were going to shine anyway! When I asked him to buy a few copies of the literature we had with us he laughed again and said that from the look of me it looked like I would have to sell a lot of literature to continue the good work and gave us a thousand rupees and took all the stuff we had with us. As I cycled back to Machla I could not help tears welling up in my eyes.

This was not going to do I had thought at that time. Some reliable source of income had to be sought out. As the saying in Hindi goes "Bhookhe bhajan na hoye Nandalala" - psalms can't be sung on an empty stomach! It was not just a question of defraying our living expenses but also meeting the heavy costs of fighting the innumerable court cases that I had pending against me from my activism against the Indian state on various issues. Finances had to be sought for the expenses of future activism too. The costs of fighting cases, lobbying, advocacy and travel had become so huge that the contributions of the poor adivasis with whom we worked could not meet even a small part of them. This is when the idea, that I had earlier discarded as pointless, of taking up research projects and writing in journals and magazines took on a new appeal. This would help me to establish my credentials as a competent researcher and help me earn money I reasoned in desperation. If 'publish or perish' was the going buzzword for academics it became so for me too. So amidst derisive shouts from fellow activists that I had 'withdrawn from struggle' and become a pen pusher, I set aside my earlier abhorrence for research and writing and put my head down to do deskwork.

Even if the anarcho-environmentalist movements for alternatives to destructive modern development have remained on the fringe in terms of popular appeal they have certainly made an impact on the mainstream discourses of development and governance. This has been manifested in academic and popular writings and the formulation of many new policies and enactments that are an improvement over what existed before. Everyone is talking about saving the environment these days even if most of them are not prepared to do anything radical on the ground in this direction. There is a lot of well funded research and debate going on and it is by participating in these that I found a way to make money to finance my actual mass organisational work among the adivasis on the ground, which no funding agency is prepared to touch with a bargepole! The two premier fora in India in this respect are the magazine 'Down To Earth' (DTE) and the journal 'Economic and Political Weekly' (EPW). I began my writing forays by contributing to these periodicals in the early 1990s and was pleasantly surprised to find my pieces accepted for publication. DTE even commissioned me to do some studies on forest and water resource management. However, as my viewpoint was an overly radical, activist one, very soon DTE distanced itself from me and declined to carry my pieces anymore, especially when I began writing critically of the Madhya Pradesh Government whose Chief Minister had been declared to be a Green politician by DTE.

I have had a longer and still continuing association with EPW, which is situated considerably more to the left of the intellectual spectrum than DTE. But the EPW too has gradually mutated to an intellectual position, which considers the process of globalisation to be a positive one on the whole with market 'reform' being a better recipe for social and economic justice than a radical overhaul of resource guzzling and wasting centralised modern industrial development. Things came to a head when in 1998 I was asked by the editors of EPW to review a book brought out by some researchers and activists on the process of formulation of an alternative draft Forest Bill to the one that had been brought out by the Ministry of Environment and Forests in 1993. The mass adivasi organisations in Madhya Pradesh had boycotted this so called 'people's process' of formulating a draft bill because it did not reject the centrality of the role of the forest department to the management of forests and their colonial demarcation as reserved and protected forests. All it proposed was the insertion of the policy of Joint Forest Management (JFM) into the bill without changing the basic framework of forest management itself. So in my review I had given examples of how JFM had generally proved to be a failure because the basic anti-people framework of the Indian Forest Act prevented any genuine transfer of control over forests to the people and criticised the authors for having presented what were their own views as being that of the forest-dwellers (Rahul, 1997a). The authors' rejoinder basically supporting JFM was published in the EPW. I duly sent in a counter rejoinder but to my surprise the EPW did not carry it. When I asked the editors about this they hemmed, hawed, and changed the subject. So what could have flowered into a lively debate on forest management was nipped in the bud because I found that in research and publication too there is power play involved that can influence even the likes of the editors of EPW against an obscure activist like myself.

The EPW continued to publish other contributions of mine till yet another such incident occurred in 1999. Two Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers who were the guiding force behind the famous 'Education Guarantee Scheme' (EGS) that is being implemented in Madhya Pradesh published a paper in EPW extolling the virtues of the EGS and claiming that it had brought about a revolutionary and paradigmatic change for the

better in both quantitative and qualitative terms in the government primary education sector in Madhya Pradesh and especially for the adivasis (Gopalkrishnan & Sharma, 1998). I sent in a short rejoinder saying that while it had definitely increased the access to schools among the poor adivasis the quality of the education offered was very poor and could not in any way ensure that the adivasi children receiving it could in any way compete on the basis of this with the much more privileged sections (Rahul, 1999a). Not surprisingly the IAS officers sent in a rejoinder (Sharma & Gopalkrishnan, 1999) and got a noted economist who had apparently reviewed the working of the EGS also to send in a rejoinder (Vyasulu, 1999) both criticising what I had said. I too then did a more elaborate survey and sent in a counter rejoinder and once again to my consternation the EPW did not publish it. Despite several reminders there was no response from the editors of EPW. Interestingly field experience has shown that overall both JFM and the EGS have belied the initial rhetoric that was dished out in their favour. Precisely because of the kind of entrenched power structures and colonial bureaucratic mindsets that I had pointed out would come in the way of their succeeding on the vast scale in which they have been mechanically implemented these schemes have failed to do anything other than put some institutions in place where there were none before. Without enough financial support and true people's participation these institutions have at present degenerated into being a cheap means for the government to claim that it is investing in the social sector while actually ensuring the cooption of the more vocal among the rural poor.

This problem of power play in research refused to stop bugging me. The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) commissioned me in 2000 to do a research study on the overbearing influence of sahkars or moneylenders in the adivasi regions of Western Madhya Pradesh and the way in which the adivasi mass organisations had fought against them. The output paper roundly put the blame for the power of the sahkars over the adivasis on the commissions and omissions of the politicians and the bureaucracy including dereliction of the responsibility of regulating the functioning of the cooperative credit societies by NABARD itself and proved to be a little too hot for the latter. Initially they sent in a rejoinder saying that I had not fulfilled the requirements of the contract, so my paper would not be accepted and I would not be paid. I wrote back to them saying that I had done exactly as was written in the terms of reference and if they did not accept my paper I would publish it elsewhere mentioning that NABARD had chickened out of publishing it. This seemed to work and eventually a compromise was reached that I would tone down some of my observations and the paper would be published as a limited circulation working paper rather than as a widely circulated occasional paper as had been the original agreement and I would be paid my agreed consultancy fee (Banerjee, 2003). I agreed because being short of funds as I perennially am, I needed the consultancy fee money desperately at the time! I later sent in an edited shorter version of this monograph for publication in the Indian Social Science Review. Despite both of the two anonymous referees saying that the paper was excellent and recommending its publication the editors refused to do so citing that its length was beyond the norms prescribed.

I was thoroughly flummoxed by this problem of failing to get my anarcho-environmentalist views aired in journals and magazines when out of the blue I got an email from a publisher of books. After reading one of my articles in EPW he suggested that I write a book instead of just articles and if it was good enough then he would think of publishing it. This set me thinking and I recalled the fanfare with which Arundhati Roy had burst on the environmental scene. She took all the old facts and analyses that the NBA had

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gathered regarding the harmful effects of big dams, laced them with verve and panache and as mentioned earlier rolled out an eminently readable slim volume. So successful was she with this that she was invited to go on lecture tours all over the country and abroad and single-handedly she managed to revive interest for a while in the issues raised by the NBA. In the process she became the leader of the NBA in the eyes of the world at large! The trick, it became clear to me was to write entertainingly about the work that we were doing because in this age of marketing, packaging has become the most important thing. In the present culture of titillating soap operas sponsored by advertisement campaigns on television, the medium, more so than when Marshall McLuhan presciently predicted all of forty years ago, has become the only message! (MacLuhan & Fiore, 1967) A story well told twangs the innermost chords of people much better than a thousand weighty treatises can ever do.

About this time my mother once wanted to know what it was I was writing that helped me to earn money and make a living as I claimed. I happened to have with me a copy of a discussion article that I had once written on the problems of the Russian Revolution in EPW (Rahul, 1992a) that had been well received by people in the know and gave it to her to read as a sample of my writing. She went through it and said she could not make head or tail of it and commented that whoever it was that was paying me money for writing like this must be bonkers! When pop has become the toast of the season, serious and abstruse academic stuff can hardly stand a chance. I felt some hesitation initially about migrating from the rarefied environs of academic writing to popular story telling but as always at such critical moments my love for rock music came to my rescue. I remembered a particularly favourite number of mine by the rock singer Eric Clapton (Clapton, 1970), which goes –

I'm standing at the crossroads
Trying to read the signs
To tell me which way I should
Go to find the answer
And all the time I know
Plant your love and let it grow

My enduring love, ever since I landed up amongst them in 1985, has always been the life and culture of the quintessentially anarcho-environmentalist Bhil adivasis. One important facet of their culture is a rich repertoire of myths and stories, which are recited and sung with much fanfare in nightlong celebrations. There is for example the creation myth sung in the villages near the Narmada which details how God was suddenly beset with the idea of creating the universe and he looked towards Relu Kabadi the woodsman to go into the jungle and fetch him wood. Thus starts the whole story of how slowly all the animals and plants are created and finally the rivers Narmada and Tapi. These rivers eventually meet up with the ocean Dudu Hamad in marriage and during their journey are created the various villages, hills and valleys. The main story is interspersed with many smaller stories and sung through the night. This epic song while being highly entertaining at the same time imbues the listeners with a sense of the vastness of nature and the strength of natural processes and inculcates a respect for these in direct contrast to the hubris of modern human beings who have over the past three centuries since the industrial revolution tried to subordinate nature to their own ends and given rise to the serious environmental problems that face them today. Thus the Bhils have achieved an admirable mix of Veer - bravery, Shringar - love and Hasya - comedy in their story telling making their tales very enjoyable

while at the same time succeeding in giving them an unobtrusive fable like didactic character. The Bhil Gayans or bards are in fact not only great storytellers but also first class teachers of a pristine morality.

As they do not have a high opinion of our "civilised" ways, the Bhil gayans are disdainful of literacy and traditionally these myths and stories have been conveyed from generation to generation by oral recitation. Today, however, this lack of a culture of writing not only jeopardises the continuance of their oral folklore as the newer generation loses its interest in them but also puts the Bhils at a disadvantage in negotiating the intricacies of the modern economic and political systems. Thus, as one Bhil elder told me, just a few days after I landed up in the Bhil homeland for the first time, they had become civilisational discards in modern India because of their inability to put black on white - pen to paper. Recalling that conversation fifteen years later I felt that we activists of the environmental movements too were figuratively in the same boat because of our failure in conveying our simple message of the need for humility and continence in our dealings with nature to the world at large. There are so many billions suffering from the ravages of environmental profligacy, nay reprobacy, the future is so starkly scary and yet our arguments do not move the people and rulers to action. We too, unfortunately, have not been able to effectively put black on white. Actually in this modern consumerist age hypnotised by the magic of colour television even black has become passe and it is necessary to dress a message in the united colours of Benetton to attract attention!

I had first to find out what kind of a kaleidoscope would be colourful enough to break the jinx and push the history of our anarcho-environmentalist struggles in defence of Mother Nature and her children, the adivasis, into the limelight in the way Arundhati Roy had done with the NBA. It had to have some new colours and patterns in it. With a combination of luck and hard work I had been able to achieve financial stability in a short while from my writing after coming to Indore and so from 1996 onwards Subhadra and I had hit the dusty village trails once again. We had had to decide then on what kind of work to do and where to do it. Subhadra had said that she had had enough of organising the Bhil men and had pointed out that the egalitarianism of the Bhils, which I was so fond of harping about, did not extend to their women. There is a clear gender division of labour with the women having to do the domestic work and also take on the responsibilities of child bearing and rearing in addition to agricultural work. Socially too the women have an inferior status with little say in community affairs and are considered as commodities to be sold off for a bride-price at the time of marriage. Married women have to submit to polygamy and witch-hunting and also have to veil their faces in front of elder male relatives on their husband's side. Women have no right of inheritance or to property. As with poor rural women elsewhere in India (Shiva, 1988), the major burden of the modernising thrust introduced by the British and continued by the independent Indian state that has adversely affected the Bhils' traditional lifestyles has had to be borne by the women. This bias against women and the lack of education and proper reproductive health services had resulted in the birth rate remaining uncontrolled further adding to the miseries of the women in particular and the Bhils as a whole through a population explosion (Subhadra & Rahul, 1997).

Whenever there is a widespread struggle against oppression by a set of people, women participate shoulder to shoulder with the men to throw off the yoke of the oppressors. Nevertheless they do not get enough space to articulate problems specific to themselves, which arise from structures and customs restricting women within the oppressed sections themselves. This is a universal phenomenon that can be seen in social

movements (Singha Roy, 1995), national liberation movements (Zerai, 1994) and socialist revolutions (Mariam, 1994). It is not surprising therefore that this should have been the case with the various mass organisations in Central India. The women members of these organisations have been particularly militant and on some occasions even surpassed the men in their bravery in fighting the repressive organs of the state. Consequently, sometimes as a matter of strategy the women have been pushed to the front. Yet when these very same women have raised the matter of oppression within the home the men have been reluctant to reform themselves. Particularly troubled are the grassroots women leaders. Their men get jealous of them and object to their travelling around a lot and neglecting housework.

The presence of many articulate and militant middleclass women activists among the various mass organisations in Central India had meant that there had been a considerable amount of discussion on the deleterious effects of patriarchy, which can be defined as the social institution that ensures men's power over women (French, 1986). Nevertheless there had not been any concerted attempt at organising women to smash patriarchal structures within and without their homes. Often the need to press on with the general struggle and not let it flag due to internecine fights over women's issues has been the cause of this neglect (Vimochana, 1994). Subhadra herself is a dalit woman. The dalits are the previously untouchable outcasts of traditional Hindu society, who formed its menial foundation and are referred to in official parlance as the Scheduled Castes. This is because of the special affirmative provisions made for them in a separate schedule of the Indian Constitution (Ambedkar, 1948). Similarly the adivasis are referred to as Scheduled Tribes because there are affirmative provisions for them too in a separate schedule. Gandhi referred to the dalits as Harijans or the children of God in his effort to reform Hindu society from within. However, beginning with Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, popularly called Babasaheb, who had first begun the struggle to get affirmative provisions made for them during British rule and later in the independent Indian Constitution, this term was rejected as trying to hide the cruel nature of the discrimination that was practised against these castes by the upper caste Hindus. Ambedkar described Hindu society as a multi-storeyed building with the dalits doomed to rot in the basement with neither any staircase up which to climb nor any door through which to escape (Ambdekar, 1993). The Scheduled Castes have now begun referring to themselves more appropriately as dalits or the trodden under in their ongoing saga of liberation from upper caste Hindu oppression. As such Subhadra had had to face and fight various forms of patriarchy right from childhood onwards. So she had suggested that we start afresh in a new area where there weren't the usual pressures of an ongoing struggle, which invariably led to the sidelining of women's issues.

We were starting our work at a time when most of the earlier environmental mass movements in the western Madhya Pradesh region and over the rest of the state excepting the Adivasi Mukti Sangathan in Sendhwa had gone past their prime due to some heavy state repression and also because of the inability to address issues of a general nature that affected a wider cross-section of the masses. Thus it was necessary to evolve a new mode of organisation in a new area that would be able to garner greater mass support than hitherto. At the same time this new work had to be done in proximity to the mass organisations already working nearby so as to benefit from their positive achievements. Previously all our work had been concentrated in the Western Nimar region and the lower Narmada Valley so Eastern Nimar was chosen as our new area of work. Over a period of four years up to 2000 the Bhil adivasi women's organisation that we helped in setting up, Kansari Nu Vadavno, did path breaking work before Subhadra decided to stop breaking her head working in the

field against the unyielding wall of the Indian state and instead she took a sabbatical to catch up on her lost education for a while.

An interesting and puzzling thing about the Bhils' myths and stories is the central and powerful roles played by women in them which is in direct contrast to the reality of their patriarchal oppression in present day Bhil society. Possibly at some time in the distant past Bhil women did have a lot more power than they have now. Whatever may be the reason, to add a new gender sensitive twist to the old tale of struggles against the exploitation of nature and adivasis, I have followed this commendable tradition in weaving the present story too. In what follows the story of Subhadra's personal struggles as a poor dalit woman against the combined weight of economic, social and patriarchal oppression and that of the Bhil women she has inspired has pride of place among the many other narratives which push the stories of the various mass movements of which she has been a part sometimes to the forefront and sometimes to the background, embellished with lavish autobiographical touches of my own. Since for militant women activists like Subhadra, personal as well as public struggles are both political ones this story follows the Bhili tradition in the other respect of having an undercurrent of morality in it. So it is not just a story of the garden variety it is a fable also. Since this story is also a factual history of the rebellions and mass movements that have taken place and are still under way in the Central Indian region, the narrative is studded with a few glorious gems from this history.

The other great set of indigenous people in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh apart from the Bhils are the Gonds. A section of the Gonds in fact became feudal kings in the middle ages and ruled over a vast area extending from around present day Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh to Nagpur in Maharashtra, which is called Gondwana. They retained their independence from Muslim rule till Akbar the Mughal emperor overcame them in 1564 with their famous widowed martial queen Rani Durgavati, who incidentally was a non-adivasi, preferring to kill herself rather than surrender (Richards et al, 1996). The Gonds, even more than the Bhils, put up a stiff resistance against the British and are to this day fighting valiantly against the destructive development policies of the Indian state. So they too have entered this narrative from time to time but since Subhadra and I have not worked much with them they have not figured as prominently as the Bhils have. There is a beautiful poem in Hindi by one of its best modern poets Bhavani Prasad Mishra, one stanza of which lyrically describes the ideal nature friendly life of the Gonds. This stanza roughly translates as follows -

Deep inside the Satpura hills in woods sleepy and unmindful,
Amidst their hens and pheasants all harmonious and peaceful,
In huts of mud and thatch live the Gonds dark and powerful.
When spring comes and the grass is swaying in song so lilting,
And mahua flowers mesmerising all with a scent so intoxicating,
Then dance the Gonds in gay abandon their drums a thumping.

Unfortunately this idyllic lifestyle not only of the Gonds but also of indigenous people all over the world has been torn asunder over the centuries in the greedy pursuit of pelf and power by non-adivasis. The present story is essentially about the attempts that are being made to exorcise the evil spirits of destructive modern development that have caused this tragedy. So its later parts also include a politico-philosophical reflection on the pros and cons of this struggle so as to be able to draw the moral of the story as in a fable.

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The Bhils have a fable that there was once a woman, Jeevla Kuvar, who had disobeyed her husband and spoken up against him. A panchayat meeting was called and there it was deemed that she had spoken wrongly and as punishment the elders ordered that her tongue be cut off and given to her husband to swallow. This was done but the tongue got stuck in the husband's throat where it has remained lodged ever since. This quaint tale allegorically describes how women are oppressed in Bhil society or any society for that matter. However, the fact that the tongue has not been swallowed completely has left open the possibility of its being recovered. Indeed not only women but dalits, adivasis and such other oppressed sections are all bound by a culture of silence and need to recover their lost tongues. The tale that is about to unfold is thus all about the joys and sorrows involved in the still unfinished Herculean task of recovering their lost tongues by a people stifled for centuries by a deafening culture of silence. But first like Ishmael in Herman Melville's classic allegorical novel *Moby Dick* (Melville, 1851) I too shall start by setting out my credentials as the storyteller. Whereas Ishmael survived to tell the story of how Mother Nature in the form of the white whale *Moby Dick* put paid to the rampant greed and vengeance of modern man personified by the cruel and sinister Captain Ahab, I have the much sadder tale to tell of the legions of modern day Ahabs, armed with much more powerful technologies, putting paid for the time being to our valiant attempts to nail the coffin of unjust and destructive modern development. Nevertheless the struggles go on as the deprived people in this country and all over the world fight the continual loss of their livelihoods and habitats to the insatiable greed of modern industrial development.

Tuneful though this composition seemed to me it failed to make the publishers and literary agents sing! I sent the manuscript again and again to various publishers and agents only to be told that it had no market value and so was not worth investing in. So I was back to square one faced with the perennial problem of failing to air my anarcho-environmentalist views. This is when I came across the concept while surfing the internet of publishing on the world wide web. Here there was no question of making a heavy upfront investment. All that was needed was to get the written matter uploaded on the internet and then send the link to people all over the place and get it meta-tagged so that it turned up in search engines. If the stuff was good enough then people would automatically read it and the word would spread around. From an anarcho-environmentalist perspective too publishing on the net is much better than standard publishing in print. And on the basis of feedback and new experiences it is much easier to revise the content continually. That is how this book is finally appearing as an e-book on the internet for free dissemination in tune with the anarcho-environmentalism that is its core value.

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Chapter 2 - A Mission Found

A soothing cool wind was blowing across as a friend of mine and I stood chatting together lounging against the balcony wall in front of our second floor rooms in our hostel on a hot summer evening in Kharagpur in West Bengal. We were cogitating over the publication of the next issue of an independent campus magazine that my friend used to publish at that time. I was then in 1983 in my final year as a student of civil engineering in the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Kharagpur. The road from the rural interior to Kharagpur town used to pass through the IIT campus at that time bifurcating it into two. The administrative buildings and the academic departments were on one side and the hostels, recreation centres, markets and the residences were on the other. The hostel in which I used to stay was the first one on the side of this road and had a big open field in front of it. As we looked out onto this field we saw a caravan of bullock carts laden with hay slowly wind its way into it.

On earlier occasions too I had seen these caravans come in on Thursday evenings to spend the night on this field and move out again the next morning. I felt a little curious and asked my friend whether he was ready to come down with me to talk to these carters. He was reluctant at first but when I pointed out to him that we might get a story for the magazine he agreed. By the time we reached them the carters had already had their frugal dinner and were preparing to stretch out for the night. They gathered together as we began talking to one of them. They were all adivasis living in villages on the banks of the River Subarnarekha some twentyfive kilometers away. They were either landless or marginal farmers. In either case they were short of cash all the time and so did all kinds of odd jobs. One of these was to cart the hay from the fields of big landowners to the weekly auction held every Friday in Kharagpur town. They were paid Rs two per day for their labours.

Conversation warmed up and we asked the carters whether they knew what the big buildings in front of which they were camping were for. They replied in the negative. Then my friend explained to them at length, patiently replying to their interested queries, the unique nature of the imposing buildings, before which they so regularly camped for the night under the open skies. On an impulse I asked them whether they thought that their children might some day study in them. The wry smile on the emaciated face of an adivasi carter as he asked me whether I was joking has remained etched on my memory ever since.

Right from my fourth year onwards at IIT, it used to be a five-year graduate course in my time, I had been troubled by the relevance of the education I was receiving to the improvement of the lot of the teeming poor millions of our country. Some of us had formed a science education group and we used to go out to nearby villages and give free tuitions to the school children in science and mathematics, which have always been the fearful bugbears. The sorry plight in which they lived had made me wonder about ways in which their livelihoods could be improved so that they could have at least a leveller playing field than the quagmire of poverty and lack of opportunity in which they were stuck. For the life of me I could not see how the kind of engineering I was being taught could impact on the lives of these people in any positive way. So for quite some time I had been undecided about what to do with my future.

Towards my last years of schooling in Calcutta too I had had similar feelings. Jayaprakash Narayan's epoch making Sampurna Kranti Andolan in 1975, which for the first time effectively questioned from within the constitutional framework the stunted and restricted nature of the parliamentary democracy that was being practised in the country, the

imposition of the draconian internal emergency in response by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi with its accompanying crackdown on civil liberties and mass incarceration of opposition politicians and activists that followed and then the historic election victory of the Janata Party in 1977 had all stirred my teenage mind. I used to walk to school and one day for some unknown reason the beggars on the road attracted my attention. I began thinking about the kind of insecure and useless life they led. From this my thoughts went to the domestic servants who worked for us who all hailed from nearby rural areas but were then living in slums in the city. Their lives too were totally insecure. I found it to be very unjust that so many people had to live such demeaning existences without any hope of realising their potential as human beings. However, apart from doing some social work with the pastor of St. Paul's Church who used to come to our school to give us a sermon on Fridays I did not pursue these thoughts very far in any practical way.

Thus I had had no plan for the future at the end of my schooling also. Those were considerably more easygoing times and there was no career counsellor in our school. When I got into IIT it was more because all the better performing students in my class in school were appearing for the entrance examinations and so I being one of them, followed suit. In those days in 1978 there weren't any coaching classes and the kind of cutthroat competition that there is now and so I had cleared the entrance on the strength of the preparation for the school leaving examinations alone. Thus it was more through inertia and less through any commitment to preparing myself for a career as a technologist or manager that I had drifted into IIT. I forgot my niggling worries about the fate of the poor in the initial years as for the first time I tasted the freedom of hostel life and the great fun that was there for the having. Those were the days when there was neither any relative marking nor any cumulative grading system and so one could easily sail through the exams on the strength of last night cramming sessions. Thus a whole host of IITians used to spend the better part of their time doing everything else but studying (Deb, 2004). But after three years and on the threshold of official adulthood, the voting age was twenty-one at that time, I had finally to begin reckoning what I was to do with my life. All my old concerns about the poor and especially their insecure and demeaning livelihoods began troubling me again.

The adivasi carter's reply shook me to the core. What is the use of such high quality institutions I thought if even after thirty-six years of independence at that time their graduates had not been able to create an India in which the poorest of the poor could dare to dream big, which is the sine qua non of all advancement? There used to be an arrogant saying amongst us then that we IITians were the cream of the nation. So I mentioned jokingly to my friend as we came back to our hostel rooms, leaving the carters to their involuntary communion with nature, that we may be the cream all right but instead of producing butter we had gone rancid! That adivasi carter helped me find my mission in life. I decided then and there that I would devote the rest of my life to helping the adivasis better their lot. Nowadays the whole campus has become a high tech island walled in within itself. The road from the rural heartland has been diverted and it now innocuously skirts its periphery as if to doubly ensure that such rural yokels do not accidentally find their way into the fast lane. Nor are there any possibilities for the inmates to have informal close encounters of the rural kind that I had enjoyed. They instead spend their spare time surfing the net from the comfort of their hostel rooms, which are all wired. Indeed one inmate of the hostel I used to stay in recently hit the headlines for selling CDs of steamy video clips via the internet and landing both himself and the CEO of the internet auction site BAZEE.COM in jail! (Techtree.com, 2004)

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Embarking on my mission was easier said than done and I decided to read up for help in deciding on my precise course of action. The library at Kharagpur had an excellent humanities and social sciences section. I had begun reading up on philosophy and social change as very good teachers of sociology, psychology, and economics triggered my interest in these subjects in our third year. I read voraciously across the spectrum from the left to the right to try and find answers to the questions that had risen in my mind. Hailing as I did from Bengal which had since the pre-independence days been a hot bed of Communist activity I could not but be impressed by Marxism. Indeed right from the early nineteen seventies when I was in my teens and had become capable of cogent political thinking I had been drawn by the idea of revolutionary societal change facilitated through the means of an armed struggle conducted by a party of the dispossessed masses to capture state power that forms the centre-piece of Marxist theory and practice (Marx & Engels, 1964). This idea is especially appealing because it posits that revolution is inevitable. The history of the human race, Marx said, has been one of class struggles in which with the rise in productivity due to improvements in the means of production, a stage invariably comes when further rise in productivity is impossible without a seizure of power by the newer classes that are emerging and becoming conscious of their power. These newer classes then seize power at such times and bring about a new social order. So this law of history ordains that eventually the modern labouring class - the proletariat, too, will overthrow capitalism and bring about a new socialist order. All that one has to do is make the proletariat conscious of their power and the rest will follow as the night the day. The milieu in Bengal in the nineteen seventies was very radical. Even though the heroic Maoist Naxalite uprising of the late nineteen sixties had been quelled it had left a lasting impact and its reverberations could still be heard.

Earlier the Communist Party of India (CPI) had sounded some discordant notes in the ears of the ruling Indian elite through its initial revolutionary thrust immediately after independence in the form of militant peasant movements, radical trade unionism and also some surreptitious armed militancy. These were, however, summarily quelled by ruthless and wholly illegal state repression. So later on instructions from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union the CPI had settled down by 1951, with the formal inauguration of the liberal democratic Republic of India, into playing second fiddle in tune with the pseudo-Socialist orchestra being conducted by the Indian National Congress under the leadership of the first Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru (Damas, 1991). The first rift in the party came about around leadership disagreements that had emerged after Nehru very undemocratically dismissed the first democratically elected Communist government in the world in the state of Kerala and which gradually came to a head after the Chinese invasion of 1962 as a section of the party felt that a more independent line separate from the Congress party should be adopted. The split in the international socialist movement between the Soviet Union and China following on Stalin's demise too played a role (Ray, 1988). However, the new party formed, The Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)), too remained wedded to working within the liberal democratic parliamentary framework of the Republican Constitution despite being perceived as a threat to it by the Congress party which had most of its leaders thrown into jail immediately. The more decisive second break came in 1967 when the radical section of the CPI(M), which was then a part of the first United Front Government in West Bengal, renounced parliamentary democracy altogether and instead advocated the adoption of the strategy perfected with resounding success by Mao Ze Dong and his comrades in China of organised armed militancy of the peasant masses, first in small isolated base areas and gradually expanding to take over national state power. This faction, which later went on to form the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)

(CPI(ML)) in 1969, started its revolutionary campaign with the seizure of landlords' lands by armed adivasi peasants in the Naxalbari area of North Bengal and that is how they have come to be popularly known as Naxalites. The Communist Party of China (CPC) set its imprimatur on this revolt and in its daily newspaper Renmin Ribao or the People's Daily, published from Beijing, welcomed this development as the onset of a peasant revolution in India in an overly optimistic and effusive editorial with the heading, "Spring Thunder over India" (Renmin Ribao, 1967).

My maternal grandfather's youngest brother, who was just a little older than my father, had in fact joined the Naxalites and gone underground and had been caught and tortured by the police before being wondrously let off without any criminal case being instituted against him. One of the young men from the street in which I lived in Kolkata had vanished during the peak of the Naxalite struggle and then surfaced again only after the Left Front Government had been formed in West Bengal in 1978 after the revocation of the internal emergency. Unfortunately by the time I was passing out of school heavy state repression had ensured that the Naxalite movement though alive had become splintered into ineffectiveness. Moreover, the landslide victory of the electoral front of the parliamentary leftist parties led by the CPI(M) in the legislative elections in West Bengal and the immensely successful "Operation Barga" launched by them to give permanent legal tenure to the shareholder tenant farmers of landlords (Bandyopadhyay, 2000) had seemed to renew hope in the scope for radical action within a liberal democratic set up. Consequently there wasn't any viable and practising revolutionary party that I could turn to for firm guidance in the early 1980s when all kinds of questions began bothering me.

Whatever else the rigorous "scientific" training that is given at IIT may or may not do it certainly inculcates a critical attitude in one because this is absolutely essential for the kind of cutting edge problem solving that the modern technologist is expected to do. While this had led me to question the utility to the country of the kind of technological problems that we were addressing in the IITs it also prodded me to question some of the basic assumptions and predictions of Marxism especially in the light of the initial failure of the Naxalite movement and also of the obvious "revisionism" that had taken place in the Soviet Union and China. So I decided to give the ideas of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi regarding non-violent passive resistance and rural reconstruction through the formation of autonomous village republics as set out in his path breaking work "Hind Swaraj" too a try (Gandhi, 1959). This was in part motivated by the fact that in my eclectic search for intellectual direction I had in the meantime also savoured the austere mystical wonders of Hindu Upanishadic philosophy which forms the bedrock of Gandhian thought and action.

About this time I saw Govind Nihalani's heart wrenching film on the oppression of adivasis, 'Aakrosh' (Nikunj, 2006). There was an idealistic new lawyer in the film who was trying to get a poor adivasi man, falsely accused of having killed his wife to tell the truth - that she had actually been raped and killed by an oppressor. A kurta pajama clad activist character chided this lawyer that he would not be able to understand the reality of the oppression of the poor which kept their lips sealed against injustice. However, at the same time this activist tried his best to convince the adivasi man to speak up and so got bumped off by the goons in the process. The whole film made a deep impression on me and I came out from the cinema hall with a romantic idea that I wanted to be like that activist working among the adivasis. I am a great fan of the Nobel Laureate author Ernest Hemingway. Just after seeing this film I laid hands on a copy of his masterpiece novel "For Whom The Bell Tolls" (Hemingway, 1955). There too the character of the American dynamiter Robert

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Jordan, engaged in a dangerous mission behind the fascist lines in the Spanish civil war of the late nineteen thirties that was doomed from the start, fired my imagination. What impressed me about this character was that he was ambivalent about ideology and the result of the war but was still risking his life for a cause. All my reading had by that time matured my understanding enough for me to realise that the project of radical social change, whether of the Marxist or the Gandhian variety would in all probability be a lost cause in the long run and yet there was an yearning in me to rebel. In the words of the famous ghazal sung by Talat Mahmood –

Ae meri jaan-e-ghazal (Oh my dear friend)

Chal mere saath hi chal (Come with me)

In samajon ke banaye hue bandhan se nikal (Break free of the shackles forged by society)

Kab badla hai jamana tu ye jamane ko badal (When has an era changed, change this one)

So while all my other classmates were busy trying to get jobs or seats in the Indian Institutes of Management and in American universities I was floundering around in search of serendipitous utopias! My father, a no nonsense died in the wool technologist and manager himself, had by this time already got an inkling of my predilections and had begun putting pressure on me to abandon what he considered to be nothing more than useless lotus eating! We have a saying in Bengali, which pejoratively depicts all voluntary social activism as a futile attempt to go out and chase wild bison in the forest on the strength of frugal meals taken at home! My father would repeat this often and exhort me to leave this God forsaken country of ours and take wings to America as one of my elder cousins had already done. I might as well mention here that ever since my great grandparents who had been landed gentry in the eastern part of undivided Bengal had been chased out even before the partition at the time of independence in 1947, the next four generations in our family have produced quite a few technologists and doctors and those of them that have migrated to greener pastures abroad are looked upon as great achievers.

The net result of my father's opposition to my lotus eating was that I decided to join the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) as a trainee engineer having been impressed by the literature I had read on the "white revolution" brought about by Amul in Gujarat that had reportedly transformed the lives of poor farmers there. So after passing out on one fine day in 1983 I went to the NDDB office in Kolkata to report for work dressed in a kurta and pajama and sandals. The first thing that the officer there said on seeing me was that I was not properly dressed. This angered me and I shot back that I was in national dress and how could he speak derogatively of it. An altercation ensued and at the end of it I was unceremoniously shooed out of the officer's cubicle. Outside the cubicle was a big hall in which all the babus with their tables loaded with files were ranged in front of me. I am a big fan of the British rock group Pink Floyd and involuntarily a few lines from their great album "Wall" (Pink Floyd, 1979) flitted through my mind –

We don't need no education

We don't need no thought control

No dark sarcasm in the classroom

Teachers leave them kids alone

Hey! Teachers! Leave them kids alone!

All in all it's just another brick in the wall.

All in all you're just another brick in the wall.

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I came out of the office and dashed off a letter to my father saying I was leaving for the great unknown to fulfil my dreams and took off to the Santhal Pargana in Bihar where some young people I knew, belonging to one of the many splinter groups of the CPI(ML), were working among the adivasis.

Soon, however, I felt uncomfortable there because of the dogma of my co-workers and a refusal on their part to question received wisdom. They would not budge from the position that the Indian state was semi-feudal and semi-colonial in character. This is how Mao Ze Dong had characterised the Chinese state in the late nineteen twenties (Mao Ze Dong, 1952). Even in the late nineteen sixties when the Naxalbari uprising took place this characterisation could hardly hold for the Indian state and by the early nineteen eighties it had become totally obsolete. Moreover, the Indian state was more powerful than the Kuomintang of Chiang Kai Shek had been in China, especially in the crucial final years just before the Chinese Revolution when Japanese occupation during the Second World War had further weakened it. The CPC may have eulogised the Naxalbari uprising as a peal of thunder crashing over the land of India but it did little to provide any direct military support to the CPI(ML) of the kind it had itself received from the Soviet Union. Thus not only had this kind of blinkered approach on the part of the CPI(ML) led to the dissipation of the Naxalite movement it was also not helping us to address the burning issues that faced the poor Santhals around us. I felt at that time that Marxism was a living ideology and had the capacity to be adapted to suit local conditions as a first step to building up a larger programme for challenging the state. The challenge lay in formulating a praxis that was appropriate to the objective situation of the adivasis and their immediate problems rather than dreaming about a peasant revolution depending for its success on an archaic and downright naive characterisation of the Indian state.

I returned to face the taunts and scolding of my father. I needed time to read more before I could decide on what exactly to do to pursue my mission in life. I finally convinced my father with some help from my mother to let me supervise the building of their post retirement residence for them in Santiniketan and simultaneously indulge in further self study. I began ploughing through more philosophy, politics, sociology and anthropology to chart a path for the future. The more I studied the more dissatisfied I became. So much had been written on social change but eventually little of a lasting nature had been achieved. One of the more inspiring predictions of Marx and Engels was that even though the modern state was a necessary evil that would continue in the interim after the proletarian revolution, albeit under the control of the proletarian party, it would later "wither away". As the productive forces of society grew sufficiently and the capitalist class was eliminated completely the state would wither away as an ideal situation would come into existence in which the mode of production and distribution of the social product would be according to the principle - 'from each according to their capacity and to each according to their need'. A situation in which there would be no need for the disciplining force of the state as people would generally be well disposed towards each other bereft of selfish individualistic goals (Marx, 1949 & Engels, 1947). But in reality all practical efforts at change had tended to wither away after some time rather than the state, which had got stronger and stronger with the passage of time! Whether in Capitalist or Socialist dispensations the basic credo of production and distribution of the social product was more or less the same differing only in degree - from each in inverse proportion to their power and to each in direct proportion to their power! The Nobel laureate author and educationist Rabindranath Tagore's Visva Bharati University in Santiniketan, where I was staying then, had itself drifted far away from his dreams of liberating humanity from self made prisons (Tagore, 1961) and had been

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reduced to the performance of rituals rather than posing a challenge to the rot in the education system.

I wanted to get down to work myself but could not find any light. I felt there was no point in studying and writing any more as almost everything possible had already been written. Lack of adequate good practice was where the problem lay in the various approaches to social change. Much more field level work, especially in the rural areas was needed, as the people there were still unaware of their hidden potential. I also came round to the view that despite its limitations the Indian Constitution, especially with its exemplary protective provisions for the adivasis, provided a legal space for dissent and mobilisation that had not been adequately utilised. In a direct reaction to the challenge of Marxism, capitalist liberal democracy had become much more mass oriented and this was reflected in parts in the Indian Constitution though it largely retained the colonial oppressive character of governance from the British times. I was particularly disillusioned by the way in which the post-revolutionary states in the Soviet Union and China had been converted into anti-people apparatuses of domination far removed from the democratic ideals espoused in the Marxist texts. So I became increasingly inclined towards attempting to exhaust the liberal democratic methods rather than launch into a premature armed struggle against the state. Then the break came from an unexpected source altogether. One day I had gone to a friend's place only to find he had gone out somewhere. While waiting for him I began to flit through a copy of a back issue of Reader's Digest and came across an article on the work being done by Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC) in Tilonia in Rajasthan. This was the first time I had come across the mention of a secular social service organisation, a non-government organisation (NGO), working for rural development and the concept of a mass participatory approach to such work. Here was a chance to do something from a new angle I felt. I wrote to SWRC saying that I would like to offer my services. On receiving a positive response I decided to go to Tilonia once the construction of the house was over.

So in the summer of 1985 I arrived at Tilonia and the first person I met there was Khemraj. We began talking and he told me that he hailed from a jat farmer family of Chittor district and was a first generation literate. He had got involved in student politics while studying in college and joined a radical students' union. Then he had come to hear of Tilonia from a friend and joined the SWRC. He said that after some time he found that rural development work had its limitations, however much one may try to make it participatory, as long as a direct attack wasn't made on the oppressive socio-economic structures that restrained poor people from becoming powerful. This was the kind of stuff that I knew like the back of my hand but what interested me was that Khemraj had left Tilonia some two and a half years back and gone to Jhabua district in Madhya Pradesh to organise the Bhil adivasis there to fight for their rights guaranteed in the Constitution and made some actual headway on the ground. I asked Khemraj if I could come down and join him too and he got up and embraced me with a warmth the memory of which still enthuses me after all these years. Thus, after a brief month's stay in Tilonia supervising the making of lime stabilised mud bricks for a proposed low cost building construction, I packed my bags and took off to work with Khemraj and the Bhil adivasis in Jhabua and finally begin realising my mission in life.

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Chapter 3 - Nature's Children Unarmed

I spent almost a decade in Jhabua living among the Bhils and they have been the best years of my life. It all began with my first meeting with the most colourful Bhil character I have known, my colleague and fast friend Khemla in his small hut in Badi Vaigalgaon village. Khemla is a born rebel. He is the only one of five brothers who attended school. Traditionally the Bhils mostly make their children tend to the cattle when they are small and once they reach adolescence they marry them off and harness them to the farm operations. Not surprisingly they have been highly reproductive as a result and combined with a continuous dispossession from their lands, water sources and forests by non-advasis and the colonial and post-colonial states, this had led to them being reduced to penury by the time Khemla grew to school going age in the early nineteen seventies. His father decided to send him to school seeing that there wasn't enough land to sustain all his sons.

The government had introduced a residential school system for adivasi children who cleared the primary level to counter the high dropout rate and so Khemla went to study in a hostel school in class six at the nearby weekly market village of Umralli. Unfortunately corruption, which has been and continues to be the bane of Indian governance, meant that the children in the hostels used to be dished out substandard food. Khemla protested against this and when the hostel supervisor beat him for this Khemla hit him back and was rusticated for his pains. So that was the end of schooling for Khemla. Naturally he got married once he was back home in accordance with custom. But that did not douse his latent fire. He had taken training under a "burwo", a traditional medicine man, and was capable of going into a trance to commune with the spirits. So he was highly respected by villagers far and near and was quite effective with his cures for sundry ailments. About this time the government decided to introduce a new scheme of barefoot doctors called the "Jan Swasthya Rakshak Yojana". Khemla, being educated and also a burwo, was easily selected for this, given some training and then appointed. This increased his prestige within the community, as he became a "sarkari" or government man.

What bothered Khemla the most was the tremendous repression and extortion that his people suffered at the hands of local government officials and the ubiquitous sahuakar or moneylender-trader. The most reprehensible was the behaviour of the police. The Bhils had a traditional community dispute resolution system in which the aggrieved parties and the whole panchayat, which could be as big as the people of ten to twelve villages in case of inter village disputes, would sit together and sort out matters. However, this was not favoured by the police obviously because it would reduce their earnings and so they systematically weaned the village patels or headmen off this system and instead encouraged people to report disputes to them. Thus over time an excellent community system was destroyed and the misrule of the police established. Once this was done custodial torture and the many other tools of harassment that the police have were brought into play to extort money from the illiterate adivasis.

Khemla began a singlehanded struggle against this malpractice. Every time the police would arbitrarily pick up some adivasi and the news reached him Khemla would go to the police station and get him released. He even went to the tehsil town Alirajpur and met the Subdivisional Police Officer on a few occasions and submitted written complaints to him. The news of his activism reached the local Member of the Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly (MLA) who was himself a patel and had been one of the first people to be lured by the non-advasis to break the traditional adivasi system. He called Khemla to Alirajpur

Recovering the Lost Tongue - A Manifesto of Anarcho-Environmentalism

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and told him to give up his foolhardy ways and join his political party instead. There was so much to be earned by cooperating with the police and other government staff and acting as their agent and informer the MLA said to Khemla. Khemla in his inimitable style ticked him off for being a traitor to his people and living off their blood and sweat and came away determined to continue his campaign.

No sooner did he get off from the bus at Umralli on his way home than he was arrested by the police there and taken to the police station. There he was stripped to his underwear and given the lambasting of his life by the assistant sub-inspector and told that he had better desist from his wayward ways. He was kept in the lockup for a night and released the next day. Instead of going home he took a bus back to Alirajpur and then from there to Jhabua. He went straight to the District Collector, the head of the district administration and gave him a written complaint and also a vivid oral description of what the police had done to him. The net result was that the ASI was transferred and an inquiry instituted against him. This concatenation of events added to the legend that Khemla was becoming and made him into a one-man army.

Khemla is a resourceful guy. He regularly took advantage of the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) schemes. He had been given ten goats and two thousand rupees for tending to them as a loan once. He said that money was not needed for tending goats, which had to be grazed in the forest. So he had immediately sold two of the goats for three hundred apiece and along with the two thousand rupees cash had made up the two thousand five hundred rupees that he had to pay back as there was a fifty percent subsidy and deposited it in the bank thus becoming debt free. The remaining goats have ever since provided some supplementary income. Since he promptly paid back his loan he became eligible for another grant. This time he had landed another rupees six thousand for the construction of a hut under the Indira Awaas Yojana and built his own home. This scheme at that time was so structured that the grants could be given only to a group of people who were setting up a new colony together. So Khemla had roped in six other people from his village, done the entire running around, got a barren hillock sanctioned for the purpose and got the money released for all of them together. He had then got another loan sanctioned under the IRDP for starting a provisions shop and his wife was running it when I met them for the first time. Once again he had paid back the seed money immediately and so cleared the loan and had no payback problems to worry about.

Khemla was to take me to Gendra village where Khemraj stayed, so I got down from the bus at Umralli on a hot summer afternoon in 1985 in the midst of barren hills like red dragons all round. I had been told to ask for directions at a pan kiosk. The owner of the kiosk raised a clenched fist in salute and greeted me "zindabad" - long live, when I introduced myself to him. He called a young boy and told him to take me to Khemla's hut. I crossed the Angkhar River, which was a dry sandy bed, walked along a dirt track behind my young guide in between hedgerows of cactus boundaries of fields and finally reached the bottom of the hillock on which stood Khemla's hut. My young guide shouted out to him and we climbed up the last few rocks to the hut. A dark short man with muscular limbs and a round face emerged and raised his fist in greeting saying as was customary – zindabad. I responded similarly a thrill going through me. I had found my romantic revolutionary niche at last! Inside was Thavli, Khemla's wife who was slim and tall, taller than Khemla and sharp featured and as I was to learn later sharp tongued too! He had three daughters at the time one of them a toddler. All of them were living together in a dark windowless hut, whose walls were only shoulder high.

After spending a night in novel surroundings listening to Khemla's second daughter singing a lullaby while she swung her younger sister to sleep in an improvised cradle made from a rope and a bedsheet we set off the next morning for Gendra. The road from Umralli to Bakhatgarh was metalled but not macadamised and was a dusty brown in colour. The joke was that the road upto Mathwar ahead even of Bakhatgarh was black in colour only on paper as the money had in fact been used to colour the lives of the government staff, contractors and the political leaders instead. So Khemla and I bumped along in a ramshackle bus and after some time got off at a village called Palvi. From there it was nine kilometers of walking up hill and down dale to Gendra. We were greeted by occasional shouts of zindabad as we wended our way to and finally reached Gendra and the picturesque country tiled primary school, one small room of which was to be my home. Khemraj came out, hugged me and said he was really happy that I had come. At last he could boast, he said, that there was a man in the organisation who had actually read Marx in the original! He introduced me to Shankar an adivasi boy who had just passed his higher secondary examinations. Shankar had heard of the exploits of the activists and come to Gendra to meet them. He had liked what they said and what they were doing and decided to join them. Amit the other non-adivasi activist in the group had gone home to Delhi for a change of air.

We immediately set off for a swim and fish in a big tank in nearby Kosaria village some three kilometers away. Khemla dived into the water and by some magic of his own caught as many as six fish with his bare hands. We came back, cooked the fish over a slow wooden fire, and had them with rotis made of maize flour, something that I had never had before. There was no electricity so we had a flickering lantern light dinner – all so romantic. Then Khemraj turned on a transistor and tuned it so that the BBC Hindi Service broadcast came on the air. The teacher of the school who stayed in the other room also came along to hear, he had not participated in the meal as he was a vegetarian. Khemraj related how the radio too was initially considered to be an unnecessary luxury by them. But when the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had been assassinated by her own Sikh bodyguards in 1984 he had not come to know of it till almost a week later. After that he had decided that there should be at least a radio around to cut off the isolation.

Gendra is a lovely little village perched on a series of hillocks. The Bhil adivasis here build their houses on their farms. Thus all the hillocks have houses on their crests with the farms surrounding the houses. There are small gullies in between these hillocks, which flow down into the main stream Kara, which flows through the village. Just outside this narrow stretch of private farmland hillocks rise the larger hills, which are separated by the demarcation line of the forest department from the farms. Here there are a lot of trees and unlike Umralli one gets the feeling of being in a forest. The kutchra road from Attha goes through Gendra to Mathwar and the school building is beautifully situated on the edge of a cliff on the side of this road. Khemla left the next morning and Khemraj, Shankar and I went down to the stream below to take a bath. I was itching for a bath not having had one the previous day. Khemraj said that he bathed once a week. I made a face at this and said that I was used to bathing everyday. Khemraj smiled and said that soon I would sing a different tune. He had the last laugh of course as the unavailability of water and the need to climb up and down hillocks to reach a water source soon forced me to become if not a weekly at least a twice a week bather.

Before launching into the main course of our modern day struggles against the marginalisation of the Bhils we must first have an entree to imbibe of the true flavour of Bhil militancy with which this tale is liberally laced. This requires a brief perusal of their

intriguing history, which finds little mention in standard history books. The Bhil, Bhilala, Barela, Mankar, Naik and Patelia tribes together constitute the indigenous people known generally by the name of Bhils. They are the third most populous adivasi group in India after the Gonds and the Santhals and inhabit a large area spread over the states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. They find mention in the ancient Hindu texts of the third century AD and were originally concentrated in a small area in Sindh, Southern Rajasthan and Northwestern Madhya Pradesh (Russel & Hiralal, 1916). Traditionally the Bhils lived by practising shifting cultivation, hunting and gathering in dense forests. A combination of the reduction of the fertility of their farms and epidemics would cause them to move every few years to new locations.

Living at subsistence levels and being heavily dependent on physical labour they had no alternative to being integrated into tightly knit communities by customs of labour pooling in most aspects of their material and cultural life. The egalitarianism of the Bhils was further ensured by customs that decreed that surpluses accumulated beyond a certain limit be spent on communal merrymaking and feasting. This also did away with the possibility of these surpluses being used to develop agricultural and artisanal production and engage in trade and further accumulation and so protected the environment from over exploitation (Rahul, 1997). This aversion to trade also meant that they eschewed the abstractions of literacy and numeracy and remained firmly down to earth and developed a rich oral animistic culture with nature at its centre.

Their habitats being vital to their existence the Bhils jealously guarded them from encroachment by others. There is historical evidence of the Bhils having defied the might of the Gupta emperors on the strength of their superb archery skills and retained their independence (Kosambi, 1956). The introduction of firearms into the subcontinent by the Muslims invading from the west, however, led to this independence being circumscribed. Initially the Rajputs who had been in ascendance over the northern and central parts of India took the help of the Bhils in their fight against the Muslim invaders. There is the famous example of the Rajput king of Mewar Rana Pratap having been helped by the Bhils in his struggles. But later as the Muslims consolidated their rule over the region the Rajputs had to move into the Bhils' territories. Thus started the exodus of the Bhils, which over the centuries has led to their dispersal to the areas that they now occupy. This process is described in interesting stories that are part of their folklore. Even though the Rajputs ruled over them, apart from having to do begaar or free labour and pay some nominal taxes, the Bhils largely remained free to pursue their nature-friendly subsistence lifestyles. So much so that they frequently used to waylay trade caravans on the route from the north of India to the west, not so much for looting but more to prevent what they considered to be trespass into their territory (Varma, 1978).

The rise of the Marathas from the mid seventeenth century onwards for the first time led to serious inroads into the Bhils' homelands in the Western Madhya Pradesh region. In order to develop trade and settled agriculture so as to boost their revenue they carried out sustained campaigns against the Bhils who refused to agree to this incursion into their lifestyles. Peasants and traders from Gujarat and Maharashtra were encouraged to settle in the Bhil regions and forests were cleared to bring land under the plough. Thousands of Bhils were massacred when they rose in revolt against this policy (Manohar, 2001). Thus a process was started through which the adivasis were systematically dispossessed of the fertile lands of the Malwa plateau and the Nimar plains flanking the Narmada river and pushed into the hills of the Vindhya and Satpura ranges.

The British came to power in the western and central Indian region after having subordinated the squabbling Marathas in the early nineteenth century and carried forward their policies with regard to the Bhils with even more gusto. Having decimated their own forests to fuel industrial development and international trade, the British began to exploit the forests of India from the early nineteenth century onwards (Gadgil & Guha, 1992). This exploitation increased with the laying of rail lines, which began in Western India in the 1850s. The extraction of timber reached altogether new levels requiring deep inroads into the densely forested adivasi territory and as elsewhere in India the domain of the Bhils too was encroached upon (Nath, 1960). The British also decided to fund this development and the accompanying administrative costs through enhanced land revenue collection and the commercialisation of agriculture. For this purpose throughout India they embarked on a policy of displacing the shifting agriculture practising adivasis and replacing them with more settled agricultural castes and substantially hiking the levels of land revenue charged. In the western Madhya Pradesh region the British followed the policy of the Marathas and brought in Kanbi Patidar and Jat farmers from Gujarat and Rajasthan respectively and settled them on the Bhil lands in the plains so as to both increase the earnings from land revenue and commercial agriculture and also to tame the militant Bhils. While some of the Bhils withdrew into the hills most others were converted into serfs or bonded labourers of these non-adivasi farmers (Luard, 1908).

The British introduced a new land settlement regime under which the earlier loose system of revenue calculation by the village heads was dispensed with and a centralised system was put in place with greatly enhanced levies on the farmers and the appointment of Malguzars or revenue collecting agents with free rein to collect as much commission as they could for themselves over and above the settlement. Taxes in the Central and Western Indian region increased to the level of about 65% of the production of the farmer from around 25% prevailing previously (Mishra, 1956). The British thus dismantled the older feudal system that, especially in adivasi areas, had allowed the village councils a fair level of independence and put in place a new one, also feudal, but with functionaries loyal to them that was considerably more exploitative. Even though these policies were implemented in the areas where the British ruled directly, they had a demonstration effect and the princely states too began acting in a similar manner goaded on by the British Residents stationed there for guidance and monitoring.

All this created a serious disruption in the traditional livelihoods of the adivasis of the western Indian region (Hardiman, 1987). The rail line connected the adivasi regions with the rest of the world through Mumbai. Grain and minor forest produce began to be exported. The British appointed the trader bania castes as agents for collecting excise revenue on a commission basis. This led to the increasing infiltration of these traders into interior areas using dishonest practices to defraud the adivasis of their produce. Thus the surpluses that the adivasis used to have to tide them over the occasional years of bad monsoons were available no more and famines became the order of the day. The insistence of the British on the payment of taxes regardless of the failure of the harvest resulted in indebtedness of the adivasis to these trader-moneylender sahuikars following as the night the day (Aurora, 1972). Displacement from their lands and the decimation of their forests only added to their misery. The foundations of adivasi indebtedness and the rule of the sahuikars over them, which continues to this day, were thus laid by the British.

The Bhils have quaint stories about the way they have been dispossessed. Once a bajariya, a non adivasi who lives in a bazar or market, came to their land and asked the king

for some land on which to do his business. He said that he wanted only so much land as could be covered by the hide of a buffalo which he had with him. The unsuspecting king readily granted him this wish. The bajariya promptly cut this hide into very thin strings of leather and tied them together to make a very long rope. He then used this rope to circumscribe the whole of the kingdom and so usurped all the Bhils' lands. There is also the story that the Bhil king, Motia, was called to a banquet by some thakurs or Rajput princes who had come to visit his kingdom. The legend was that Motia could not be killed as long as he had his pugree or headdress on. So the thakurs dined and wine the king very well and also gave him a sleeping potion. When he fell asleep they took off his pugree and cut off his head. There was also the legend that even if Motia's head was cut off it would find its body and get joined once again. So the thakurs cut his head, buried it immediately, took the body away across the River Narmada and threw it across the Satpura hill range. To this day the place where Motia's head supposedly lies is known as Mathwar or the place of the head and the place where the body was buried is known as Dhargaon or village of the body.

The situation deteriorated even further after independence as the independent Indian state built its edifice upon the colonial structure of governance that it had inherited from the British. The various Princely States of the region were parcelled out arbitrarily between the four states of Western India according to the whims and fancies of their rulers thus dividing the Bhil homeland. From 1949 onwards a process of land settlement was started with the aim of stopping shifting cultivation. With the formation of the state of Madhya Pradesh in 1956, The Indian Forest Act 1927 was extended to the adivasi areas of the former princely states and was strictly enforced totally stopping shifting cultivation. The forests began to be worked for fuel and timber for the continuing development of industrial and urban centres in Western India. Timber contractors in collusion with corrupt Forest Department staff began indiscriminately decimating the forests. This put the adivasis in a difficult position. They could not shift to newer locations any more as the fertility of the soils decreased and simultaneously the supplementary income and nourishment from minor forest produce also went down.

The aim of government social and economic development policies for the uplift of adivasis in Madhya Pradesh has been to integrate them into the modern market economy and culture and has downgraded the Bhils' own subsistence lifestyle. Thus the syllabi and teaching methods of the education system are totally alien to their culture and so for a long time very few Bhils did get educated. Those that did, mostly treated their own culture as something primitive and sub-human in accordance with the prevailing modernist assumptions and distanced themselves from it and their own community, with the exception of a few firebrands like Khemla. This resulted in the vast majority of Bhils remaining unequipped to participate effectively in the modern economy into which state policies were relentlessly pushing them (Rahul & Subhadra, 2001). This lack of a modern education has meant that the awareness of their rights and enabling laws has been low among the adivasis. So they have not only been unable to avail themselves of even the minimal services that have been provided to them but have also failed to protest against the unjust development policies of the state and suffered the pre-capitalist and illegal exploitation of the sahuks.

The Bhils have thus over the past two centuries been consistently deprived of their forest habitats, which are so important for their pre-modern subsistence livelihoods. Simultaneously they have been forcefully inducted against their wish into the modern market economy, which is dominated locally by sahuks and about the workings of which they have little clue. The whole region has become a chronically drought-prone area and the

people have no option other than migrating either seasonally or permanently in search of employment as casual unskilled labourers and living in perpetual debt bondage. Indeed this labour circulation and the consequent proletarianisation of the Bhils to serve as grist to the mill of capitalist development in industry and agriculture around the metropolitan centres in Western India is only the obverse side of the coin of modern development that has laid waste the subsistence economy of the adivasis (Bremen, 1985).

Nothing is more evocative of this dehumanisation of the Bhils than the meaning that the illiterate among them give to the term adivasi. They pronounce it as “adhavasi” and think of themselves as inferior and so half the human beings in comparison to the more well-heeled and educated “puravasi”. The latter refer to them with the pejorative term “mama”. So widespread is the phenomenon of migration among the Bhils of Jhabua and Ratlam districts that even during the busy monsoon kharif season there is always a rush of people travelling either way by the Vadodara-Kota passenger train that runs on the Delhi-Mumbai trunk rail route passing through these districts. Consequently this train has come to be called “mama gari”- the train of the mamas, by all and sundry!

But all this has not happened without a cheep from the adivasis. The Marathas and the British had come up against stiff resistance from the Bhils both spontaneous and organised in nature throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The British embarked on a policy of pacification after the initial wars in the early part of the nineteenth century so as to tame the militancy of the Bhils with a carrot and stick policy. They set up a Bhil Corp for military operations with adivasi soldiers. Apart from this a separate Bhil force was set up to provide security to the arterial Agra-Mumbai road passing through the Sendhwa region on which the Bhils regularly raided the trade convoys (WNG, 1970). However, taking advantage of the uncertainty created by the first war of independence of 1857, the Bhils, who were never very happy with the usurpation of their lands by the British, rose once again in revolt in what has come to be known as The Great Bhil Rebellion of 1857-60. Khajya Naik had been in the service of the British for twenty years from 1831 to 1851 and was engaged in guarding the Palasner ghat in the Satpura hills on the Agra-Mumbai road. He was sentenced and sent to prison in 1851 for having murdered a bandit after having taken him into custody. But taking his previous service into consideration he was released in 1855. This incarceration angered Khajya and immediately after his release he began plotting against the British. He found eager accomplices among the Bhils in the hills who had been nursing ill will against the British for having displaced them from their lands in the Nimar valley.

Khajya joined forces with Bheema and Mevashya Naik and provided help to Tatya Tope in 1857. The British mobilised their forces including the Bhil Corps to not only defeat the rebellious Bhils in battle at Rajpur and later Dhaba Baodi in Barwani district but also used the services of informers to capture Khajya and Bheema. Khajya was pardoned in 1858 and thereafter acted as an informer for the British in their efforts to quell the uprising, which was still going on. But in 1860 Khajya once again revolted claiming that the British had not compensated him enough for his services. Immediately the uprising gained momentum and under Khajya's leadership the Bhils once again began waylaying the caravans on the Agra-Mumbai road in the Satpura Hills. Finally the British summoned up forces from other areas in addition to the Bhil Corps and there was a fierce battle at Ambapani near the Agra-Mumbai road. Even though the British came out victors in this battle Khajya and Bheema Naik managed to escape. Traitors in their forces who were in the pay of the British later

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killed them both. The British used a combination of force and treachery to subdue this rebellion with great difficulty.

Another such revolt is that of the great Tantia Bhil (Bhand, 2001). Tantia was born in the present day Khandwa district in 1842. This region was at that time under the direct rule of the East India Company and was later made part of the Central Provinces after the reorganisation consequent to the war of 1857. Like elsewhere the British had introduced the zamindari system for collection of land revenue in this region too. Tantia's father was a small tenant farmer of a landlord and he passed away in 1860 leaving Tantia to fend for himself. In the decade of the eighteen sixties there was continuous monsoon failure for three years. The British refused to forego the collection of land revenue putting the tenant farmers in a difficult position. Most farmers had to take loans from sahuks to pay their rent to the landlords. Tantia refused to do so and instead beat up the landlord and his men when they insisted that he pay the rent. This being a serious act of indiscipline from the point of view of the British given the simmering discontent among the adivasis arising from famine conditions, the police immediately arrested Tantia and he was later sentenced to a year of imprisonment. After being released from jail he was harassed continuously by the landlords, sahuks and the police through false criminal cases.

Finally fed up with this endless harassment he beat up the landlords once again and fled to the jungles. There he slowly built up a team of armed men and began looting the landlords and attacking the police stations from 1872 onwards. He and his men were caught on many occasions but they managed to escape from jail. For as much as a decade and a half Tantia and his men defied the might of the British and their vassal landlords and sahuks and came close to establishing a parallel government. He became famous for his Robin Hood style of functioning of looting the rich landlords and distributing most of the loot among the poor. Bhil women would regard him as their saviour and brother and would tell their children of the exploits of their Tantia "Mama" or uncle. However, he was once again apprehended in 1888 through subterfuge and sentenced to death by hanging after a summary trial in Jabalpur.

Shortly after this in 1881 the Bhils of Alirajpur in Jhabua district revolted under the leadership of Chhitu Kirar (Luard Op. Cit). The year had been bad for the farmers and famine was rampant. The patwaris or revenue officials had extorted what little had been produced in the form of taxes. The sahuks in the haat villages and towns, however, had large stocks of hoarded cereals. Chhitu Kirar rounded up a force of men and attacked some of the haat villages. The grain stores of the sahuks were looted and the food distributed among the people. Subsequently Chhitu aligned with a discontented military officer and his band of men of the ruling princely family in Alirajpur and threatened the seat of power itself. The British acted swiftly and brought in armed forces and cavalry to put down the rebellion. In the battle fought in Sorwa village Chhitu and his men killed the British commander and routed his forces. This forced the British to send in more detachments and in the subsequent battle at Ali his forces were defeated and Chhitu had to flee to Gujarat. He was later apprehended with the help of informers and killed. Such was the prowess of Chhitu that even today he is considered a legendary figure and the people say that there were as many people in Chhitu's force as flowers in a field of flowering gram plants.

This antipathy of the colonial state towards the desperate plight of the adivasis resulting from its policies and its heavy-handed and treacherous character with regard to protests on their part unfortunately remained unchanged even after independence as demonstrated by the fate of the Lal Topi Andolan (Rahul, 1999). Inspired by the legendary

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freedom fighter Baleshwar Dayal Dikshit the adivasis of Banswara district in Rajasthan and Ratlam and Jhabua districts in Madhya Pradesh began organising against the feudal extortion of the princes and the sahuks from the 1930s onwards. Despite ups and downs and some severe repression this movement was very successful in freeing the Bhils from the bondage of the feudal lords and sahuks in the areas of its influence. He quit the Indian National Congress after independence along with Jayaprakash Narayan and others to form the Socialist party in 1950.

Thereafter the movement took on a pronounced leftist character with demands for land to the tiller, the abrogation of all debts to the sahuks and strict regulation of their activities by the administration and access to forests. The members of this movement used to wear red caps to distinguish themselves and so it came to be called the Lal Topi Andolan. So pervasive was its influence that its candidates won the elections for the Lok Sabha and the Vidhan Sabha throughout the decades of the 1950s and 1960s. Locally the corruption of the administration and the activities of the sahuks and feudal lords were curbed considerably. Unfortunately elsewhere in Madhya Pradesh and India the Socialist party failed miserably and so the radical demands being made by the movement could not be pursued at higher levels. This soon made those adivasi leaders of the movement elected as Members of Parliament (MP) and MLAs fall prey to the sops offered by the local non-adivasi leaders of the Congress party.

So by the early nineteen seventies these leaders began to quit the movement and join the Congress party along with a major section of their followers. This was made possible by the fact that there was a substantial increase in central government development funds flowing into adivasi areas about this time, the temptation of the use of which was used as a bribe to woo these leaders and their followers. Once the unity of the movement was broken severe repression was unleashed on those activists who refused to be bought and remained loyal to their ideals. The imposition of a plethora of false cases and severe beatings by the police after arrest made sure that these activists and their followers soon gave up their crusading work and the movement was crushed totally.

Khemla's father Chena had been an enthusiastic member of this movement and told me once about the number of times he had been to jail and received beatings from the police. He said that the police began dominating the region only after the Lal Topi Andolan was smashed. He remembered with a wistful smile how in his childhood and early youth the whole region was very peaceful and every one had land to till and food to eat and the only problem was the beggar or free labour that they had to put in on the king's fields. It was only after independence that with the beginning of the wholesale felling of trees by the contractors that serious problems had started. Later things had become worse and the people had begun fighting among themselves, looting and murdering each other. The police had encouraged the spread of this internecine fighting so as to reap benefits from it with the help of the dalals. He had a colourful term for these dalals, taplo chato or dish lickers. Whenever a policeman or forest guard came to a village he would lodge himself at the dalal's house and ask him to prepare a meal of chicken and rotis. The dalal would go out into the village and extort a chicken from some poor adivasi and then cook it and serve it in a taplo or dish to his guests. At the end of their meal the government staff would give the leftovers in the dish to the dalal and then he would finish them off and lick the dish in the end. That is how they came to be called dish lickers!

Pushpendra, our journalist friend in Alirajpur, told me of a unique modus operandi adopted by the police for dealing with the most serious offence of murder. Whenever a

murder took place the police would not prepare a First Information Report (FIR) and instead just record that a dead body had been found in the Roz Namcha or daily record of the police station and some space would be left for future filling. The post mortem report also would not be finalised by the doctor. Time would be given to the opposing parties to reach an agreement brokered by a dalal. If an agreement was reached and the appropriate amounts of money changed hands between the parties and the police then the latter would register the case as a suicide in the Roz Namcha instead of as a murder and the post mortem report also would be suitably prepared. The papers would then be submitted to the SDM for disposing of the case as per the provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code. Obviously all the concerned officials would have to be bribed to get such an elaborate charade through in a hush hush manner. Later on we learnt to our cost that the police regularly tamper with the Roz Namcha, which is supposed to be a check on the legality of the police's actions. Only if the aggrieved party did not agree to this would a proper FIR of murder be filed and the case proceeded with. Even then the conviction rate would be low because the murderer's kin would bribe the police to do a poor investigation and file a weak charge sheet. The accused would come out of jail and then someone from the aggrieved party would murder him one day and the vendetta would continue indefinitely, the police looking on in glee. Little wonder then that the once brave children of nature, the Bhils, had been totally cowed down and the dense forests of the region totally devastated through excessive logging by the state and its minions by the time Khemraj reached Alirajpur and met up with Khemla.

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Chapter 4 - Nature's Children's Revival

Khemraj came down to Alirajpur from Tilonia in 1982 searching for a canvas on which to paint his own dreams. He put up in a hotel and began asking educated adivasi people around about the conditions in which the villagers were residing. It soon became obvious to him that the prevailing state of affairs was a sorry one. One day he met a local journalist Pushpendra and began talking about the poor condition of the adivasis and the need to do something for them. Pushpendra himself had been a student union leader and taken part in a campaign against the highhandedness of the police on one occasion. He had heard of Khemla and told Khemraj that he should get in touch with him if he wanted to do anything concrete for the adivasis. Khemraj took a bus down to Umrli and then asked his way to Khemla's hut in Badi Vaigalgaon and so began an odyssey that is continuing to this day.

Khemraj told Khemla that there was a limit to what he could achieve with the kind of individual struggle he was waging. The adivasis had to be organised into a sangathan - a mass organisation, if any lasting and sustainable impact was to be made. This gelled with Khemla and he invited Khemraj to stay with him in his hut and help him build up a sangathan. Khemla and Khemraj began moving round the villages holding meetings trying to convince people that they should come together to fight for their rights. They met with resistance. The people were afraid of committing themselves, as they feared that there would be reprisals by the police. The village patels too were against them as they saw the formation of a sangathan as a threat to their power. There was also something else. The memories of the earlier repression unleashed by the administration to crush the Lal Topi Andolan still lingered in the minds of the people.

So for quite some time the duo made no headway whatsoever. Yet another renegade from mainstream society, Amit, joined them in early 1983. Amit had chucked up his studies as a student of the School of Planning and Architecture in Delhi to come to Tilonia to see if something more worthwhile could not be done with life. There he had met Khemraj who had gone there for one of his visits and been sufficiently impressed by what he had told him about the work in Jhabua to be enticed into joining him. So the now enhanced trio of activists began moving round the villages on a regular basis to find some issue around which the organisation process could begin.

Then it was announced that a big earthen dam would be built in Atthava village upstream of Badi Vaigalgaon on the big stream, which drained the watershed. The contract had been given to a non-adivasi sahuakar contractor in Alirajpur by the Government Irrigation Department. The activists decided to join the work as labourers. The contractor was paying the labourers a daily wage of Rs 3 only when the statutory minimum wage at that time in 1983 was Rs 7.50. The activists slowly began talking to the people about this hiatus and the need to do something about it. Their perseverance paid and one day all the labourers led by the trio struck work demanding payment of the minimum wage. This created a sensation as this was the first time that a strike had taken place in Jhabua. The Subdivisional Magistrate (SDM) at that time in Alirajpur was an Indian Administration Service (IAS) officer who was sympathetic to the problems of adivasis. He acted immediately and got the contractor to hike the wage rate to legal levels. The success of this action kicked off the sangathan process like nothing else could have done.

The news of the action spread far and wide and Gulab a resident of Badi Vaigalgaon who had gone away to live and farm in his wife's village in Attha in the nearby Mathwar

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Reserved Forest Range came to know of the deeds of the trio. He came to Khemla's hut one day and described in detail how the forest department staff were harassing the adivasis in the Mathwad Forest Range and beating them up and extorting cash and kind from them. He implored Khemla that he should come along with his two bajariya friends and provide help to them to counter the excesses of the forest department. So Khemraj and Amit set off with Gulab to his house in Attha for a preliminary survey of the state of affairs there while Khemla remained to continue with the organisational work in the Umralli region. They found the situation in the Mathwar Forest Range to be a classic case of adivasi deprivation amidst natural plenty that had become the order of the day all over India due to faulty development policies adopted after independence (Sharma, 2001).

Things could have been otherwise however. The Constitution of India in its Fifth Schedule has provisions that for areas notified under it like the district of Jhabua the Governor may, on the advice of the Tribal Advisory Council (TAC) comprised by a selection of adivasi MLAs, have special laws enacted for these areas and also direct that laws enacted by the parliament or the state legislature for the state as a whole should not apply to them. But like the British before them who first introduced similar measures in the Government of India Act of 1935, the rulers of independent India too thought nothing of disregarding during implementation grand provisions made on paper. Indeed, the British when introducing the first Government of India Act in 1858, subsequent to the quelling of the first war of independence, had guaranteed to the people of India inter alia that due regard would be paid to the ancient rights, usages and customs of India while framing new laws and that these laws would be administered equally and impartially for the benefit of the people (Paranjape, 1998). Almost immediately, however, these principles were breached. The Indian Penal Code (IPC) was enacted in 1860 and the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) in 1861. These laws have been codified in such a manner as to provide the administration with a handy means of suppressing organised public dissent. A more harmful law from the point of view of the adivasis was the enactment of the Indian Forest Act (IFA) in 1864. Applying the principle of *res nullius*, which means that a particular property has no owner unless there is documentary evidence in support of ownership, the British refused to recognise the customary community rights of the adivasis over the forests in which they resided. The forests were turned over to the Forest Department created for this purpose and we have seen how devastating it has been from the point of view of the adivasis of Jhabua. Yet another law that disinherited the adivasis from their main resource of land was the Land Acquisition Act (LAA) enacted in 1894, which using the principle of eminent domain empowered the government to dispossess the private owner of a piece of land for some public purpose in exchange for a paltry monetary compensation. These laws with minor modifications continue to be in force at present.

The British after having had to contend with organised and spontaneous adivasi militancy of a much more troublesome kind than they faced from mainstream Indian society throughout their rule in India had introduced the provisions, that were later to be incorporated in the Fifth Schedule and the Sixth Schedule which is applicable to some areas in the North East, so as to isolate the adivasi areas and contain their militancy by providing some sops and so drive a wedge between them and mainstream Indian society (Savyasachi, 1999). Some well-meaning European anthropologists like V Elwin, C V F Haimendorf and W V Grigson egged on the British in this whereas the nationalist freedom fighters opposed this move supported mainly by the Indian anthropologist G S Ghuriye. The British did some work in this respect because of the spin off they gained in terms of isolating the adivasi

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areas from the movement for independence during the crucial World War II years when the pressure of the freedom movement was extremely high on them.

The presence of articulate adivasi leaders like Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Jaipal Singh resulted in the debates in the Constituent Assembly reverberating with eulogies for the inherently democratic and non-exploitative nature of adivasi communities and the expression of concern about enabling them to negotiate the process of integration into the modern economy to their advantage (GOI, 1954). Nevertheless there was strong opposition to the provisions of the Fifth and Sixth Schedules. The day was carried finally because these provisions received the backing of the first Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru and were incorporated in the Constitution. These could easily have been used to prevent the application of the inimical laws like IPC, CrPC, IFA and LAA in adivasi areas after independence. This would have facilitated the seclusion of the adivasis from the onslaught of modern development and allowed them to gradually pick up the skills of negotiating a modern economy and polity and be integrated on equal terms with mainstream society. But as will become clear by and by Nehru's fascination with modern industrial development resulted in these provisions being given the go by in actual practice. In Madhya Pradesh the TAC was not constituted or was there only on paper for a considerable period of time and the Governors never used their special powers to intervene on behalf of the adivasis leading to massive land alienation due to development projects, deforestation and debt bondage. This is because these provisions are not binding on the Governor and only state that he "may" utilise them. So if the government does not implement these provisions it cannot be held responsible and taken to court for redressal. To cut a long story short the adivasis of Mathwar were in dire straits because of a severe failure of affirmative governance in post independence India.

Mathwar had been a small princely state before independence. The Raja was still around and lived in style in his palace in Bakhatgarh, which also happened to be the Range Headquarters. When Khemraj and Amit went to meet him in the course of their preliminary travels through the area he boasted in a perfect public school accent and a grand Selkirkian style that he was the "monarch of all that he surveyed". In reality, however, it was the forest and police department staff that held the real power there. In leftist circles in India there is a considerable amount of heat generated around the characterisation of the Indian state, with the Maoists, as mentioned earlier, saying it is semi-feudal and semi-colonial in nature while others argue that it has evolved into being a capitalist one. However, as far as the Bhil adivasis of Mathwar were concerned in the early nineteen eighties, the state was both totally feudal and totally colonial! They had no conception at all about India being a sovereign democratic republic in which they not only had some basic inalienable rights but also special affirmative provisions and laws to enable them to overcome centuries of isolation and domination by non-adivasis. Very few people at that time voted in the state assembly and the parliamentary elections.

The provisions of the Indian Forest Act 1927 are such that adivasis residing in a reserved forest area can be dubbed thieves as soon as they are born. The moment they step out of their fields they become trespassers in the forest in which they have lived for generations. Thus for even minor requirements like wood for fuel or fodder for their livestock they are at the mercy of the forest guard. The forest department staff had used this Act to unleash a reign of terror over the people in the Mathwar Range. They had to regularly contribute chicken, eggs, ghee, cereals and pulses to the forest guards and also pay bribes when they needed timber for making or repairing houses. The major problem,

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however, was about cultivating “newar” or encroached forestland. This was clearly against the law but was allowed by the forest department staff in exchange for huge bribes. Thus people had been cultivating forestland for years together and there was no official record of this. Some of this land had been initially taken away from them at the time of the settlement survey in 1949. Some had been cultivated when the logging contractors had cleared the land of trees. Most of this cultivation dated back to the late seventies. Given the tremendous pressure on land the adivasis had no option but to cultivate this land and the forest department staff was taking advantage of this by allowing them to do so in a totally unofficial manner. But a point had been reached when the bribes and the beatings were becoming too much of a burden for the adivasis.

Like in the Umralli area the whole problem was complicated by the fact that the village patels had been coopted by the forest department staff into facilitating the process of extortion. They used the power that they derived from their nexus with the forest department to keep the rest of the villagers in thrall and earn a commission from the bribes that were paid to their masters. Such was the power of the forest staff that the villagers had to bow down and wish them “Ram Ram” whenever they passed by and failure to do so meant being beaten up. The adivasis were considered to be untouchables and so special utensils were kept at the patel’s house where food used to be cooked specially for the forest department staff when they came there while they sat in royal style on charpais, wooden cots with ropes intertwined in them, laid out with soft mattresses. All this meant that organising the villagers to demand their rights was to prove a difficult proposition. When Khemraj and Amit went round the villages they would be lucky to find one or two people who would be prepared even to talk to them. None of them, however, were prepared to participate in bigger meetings. Word spread round that there were two odd bajariyas who spoke the Bhili language going from village to village who would eat whatever the villagers themselves were eating and would even sit crosslegged with them on the ground. There were also rumours that these people were really evil spirits who were adept at removing the desi roof tiles of the adivasis huts and insinuating themselves into their houses at night to do all kinds of harm!

Attha being the village of Gulab there was some response from the villagers there. Some people from the nearby villages of Chhoti Gendra and Mankhara too showed some interest. The patel of Chhoti Gendra proved to be an exception to the general run of patels and after some initial hesitation decided that the two activists meant well and warding off pressure from the forest department invited Khemraj and Amit to stay in one of the rooms of the government primary school in his village in the other of which the teacher stayed. The children of course used to study sitting in the verandah. Even though the teacher had been there for some ten years he had not been able to get even one student past the primary board examinations at the class five level. He had already heard of the kind of work that the activists had done and so was apprehensive about them staying close to him and creating problems. However, the sheer desire for Hindi speaking urban company in this back of beyond prodded him to agree to Khemraj and Amit staying with him in the school.

Weekly meetings began to be held in the three villages and a consensus evolved that the most urgent matter of recognition of the fact of cultivation of forestland would be raised with the higher-level authorities. It was decided that a delegation would go to meet the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) in Jhabua. Three people were chosen for this who would be accompanied by the activists. However, on the day the delegation was to set out all three backed out and the programme fell through. Time was running out. The monsoons of 1984

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were approaching and the forest guards had already sent out warnings that unless they were paid hefty bribes no one would be allowed to cultivate their nevar land. Lalia of Attha who had bled for three days from an internal haemorrhage the year before from the beatings that he had got and had to borrow money at an exorbitant interest to pay both the forest guard and the doctor's fees began crying in the meeting imploring the others to do something. There was clearly a sense of desperation, so eventually another delegation was put together and this one did manage to reach Jhabua and meet the DFO. The officer flatly refused to believe that there were so many encroachers on forestland as the records revealed that Mathwar Range had only two encroachers. He also refused to believe that his staff was behaving in an inhuman and wholly illegal manner with the adivasis. Then Khemraj told him that if he did not come to Attha and judge for himself the truth of their complaints then they would be forced to begin a demonstration and approach higher authorities.

This was a bluff as the people were not organised or brave enough to embark on an agitation at that stage. But the reputation gained from the strike of the labourers in the Atthava dam earlier had preceded Khemraj and so the DFO thought it more prudent to come to Mathwar and investigate matters rather than call his bluff. This proved to be the turning point. The adivasis who had gone for the parley with the DFO came back and related how they had sat on chairs face to face with the DFO and he had spoken very civilly with them and even offered them tea and biscuits. They said that the officers higher up were much better and it was only the staff in Mathwar who were beasts. Word spread round that the DFO was coming to Bakhatgarh the Range Headquarters for the express purpose of listening to the people's problems. Gulab went one step further and told the people that the names of all those cultivating nevar would be recorded on that day and so those that missed out on this meeting with the DFO would miss being registered for cultivation in future!

On the appointed day hundreds of people gathered at Bakhatgarh to press their claims regarding nevar and complain about the repressive and extortionate behaviour of the local forest department staff. Some of the patels who were against this kind of mobilisation had informed the MLA about the goings on and so he too arrived along with the DFO for the meeting. The MLA immediately began berating the people for having listened to the bajariya activists and not come to him with their problems. After all only he could solve them. The people retorted by asking him whether he had been sleeping all this while and whether it wasn't his responsibility to come and see if his electorate was doing alright or not. This initial altercation seemed to dismiss all hesitation and fear from the minds of the people and all the suffering and anger that had been dammed up all these years burst forth in a mass catharsis as person after person rose to castigate the forest department staff and relate the sordid history of dispossession and repression of the past few decades. The people were especially thrilled at the site of the forest guards whom they had thought to be the lords of the forest standing meekly with their hands folded behind their backs not being able to put a word in edgeways.

Eventually nothing concrete came out of the meeting. The DFO said that he could not allow encroachments to continue as it was against the law but he admitted that the malpractices of the forest guards would be stopped and no one would be beaten up in future or forced to pay a bribe. The people then put pressure on the MLA asking him to do something to legitimise their nevars as without them they could not possibly survive. The MLA hemmed, hawed, and gave a weak assurance that he would talk to the Minister of Forests about the problem. The success of the meeting lay in resoundingly breaking the culture of silence that had previously stifled the adivasis' powers of expression in the

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Mathwar area and thus kick starting the grassroots democratic process there. Since people from many more villages than the ones around Attha had come for the meeting they too saw the power of organisation and realised that Khemraj and Amit had not been talking through their hats. This proved to be the turning point and the two activists received many invitations for holding meetings in their villages from the people.

All was not hunky dory however. The forest department staff did not see these developments with a benevolent eye as was only to be expected. They began going round the villages threatening people with dire consequences if they attended the meetings or thought of cultivating their nevars in the coming monsoons. Nevertheless the people in the villages of Attha, Gendra, Mankhara and Mathwar did sow their newar lands with the onset of the monsoons forming teams so that the forest guards would not be able to intimidate them. Khemraj stayed on in Gendra while Amit went over to Mathwar to oversee the whole operation. Then one day news came in from the village of Gondwani that a team of forest officials had arrested some people there and brought them to the Range office in Attha. Khemraj and a few of the people from Attha went to the Range office to find out what charges had been framed against those arrested.

The forest officials told Khemraj to come into the office for discussion. No sooner had the unsuspecting Khemraj entered the office than the door was closed behind him and the forest officials began laying about Khemraj with lathis. He was given a thorough beating and cigarette burns and told to stop his “netagiri”, a pejorative term for people who try to organise protests against the establishment. The treatment he had received was an appetiser he was told and if he did not leave the area then he would be bumped off. They then called the adivasis waiting outside who had fearfully heard the screams of Khemraj being tortured inside and told them to take him away. Immediately word was sent to Amit and Khemla. Amit came in by the evening and it was decided that early in the morning the injured Khemraj would be taken to Alirajpur to lodge a complaint with the police there and also inform all the people outside as it was felt that Bakhatgarh was not a safe place to go to.

The next morning as the team of people set out from Gendra with the injured Khemraj being carried in an improvised stretcher the forest officials blocked the road at Attha saying that they would not let the team proceed any further. While an altercation was going on Khemla arrived from Umralli with a posse of his own men armed with bows and arrows. He pushed the forest officials off the road and escorted the team on its way to Alirajpur. Thereafter things moved fast. A police complaint was registered against the offending forest officials and news of their attack on Khemraj hit the headlines. The SWRC support network within and without the government became active. After almost a decade, since the demise of the Lal Topi Andolan, a rally was taken out by the adivasis in Alirajpur. The forest officials were suspended and the government ordered an enquiry to be conducted by the Conservator of Forests, Indore into the problems of the adivasis of the Mathwar Range.

This incident and its fallout provided a crucial boost to the organisation process in two important ways. It extended the liberal democratic space and the operation of the rights framework guaranteed in the Indian Constitution to the Mathwar region, which had previously been kept outside its pale, thus putting an effective check on the arbitrariness of the forest and police officials. More importantly it established in the minds of the adivasis that the activists were trustworthy and powerful people who could take on the might of the forest and police officials in the fight for their rights.

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Consequently after some initial hesitation the adivasis of Alirajpur once again began organising to fight for their rights as soon as they felt that the leadership being provided by the activists was of a credible and effective kind. The late sixties and the early seventies of the last century had seen the emergence of adivasi mass movements in Western India among the Bhils protesting against their alienation from their resource base and their marginalisation in the modern economy. The Bhoomi Sena in Thane district of Maharashtra and the Shramik Sangathana in the Dhule district of the same state are notable in this respect (Singh, 1983). The base of the latter was just across the river Narmada from the Mathwar Range. So Khemraj, Amit and Khemla along with some other adivasis decided to ford the river and climb the hills and go and meet the leaders of the Sangathana in Shahada where they had their office.

When they reached Shahada they were lucky to meet the great adivasi leader and poet Vaharu Sonawane. He received them with warmth and then greeted them with a raised clenched fist saying "Zindabad". No more "Ram Ram" he said to them since it was the greeting of the bajariyas and exploiters. The clenched fist was to symbolise the organised power of the adivasis as opposed to the hand folded in namaskar in which the fingers remained separate. The greeting was to convey to all and sundry that the adivasis were going to fight for a decent life as opposed to the moribund existence they were leading previously. He related to the visitors the great struggles they had fought against the landed non-adivasis who had not only seized their lands but also made them work as bonded labourers on them. In his inimitable way he danced and sang an inspiring song for them –

Nakedar ave kukri mange re (The forest guard comes asking for a chicken)

Vaghan vachhra aamu adivasi ra (We adivasis are the children of the tiger)

Hain juni apta ra, hain juni apta ra (Do not bend to the guard's demands anymore)

The visit proved an exhilarating one for all of them and they came back with renewed vigour to pursue the fight for justice in Alirajpur. The first thing they did on their return was to call a mass meeting and announce that from that day onwards they would greet each other "Zindabad". Many years later I asked Vaharu why they had chosen just zindabad instead of the more popular "inquilab zindabad" - long live the revolution, which is used by the communists. Vaharu replied that both the Bhoomi Sena and the Shramik Sangathana had begun as reactions to the mode of working of the CPI led peasant fronts, which did not respect the uniqueness of adivasi lifestyle and culture. So there was a suspicion in their minds regarding the relevance of Marxist theory and practice to their own situation and especially the concept of an armed revolution. As a result the contentious inquilab was dropped from the greeting.

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Chapter 4 - Nature's Children's Revival

Khemraj came down to Alirajpur from Tilonia in 1982 searching for a canvas on which to paint his own dreams. He put up in a hotel and began asking educated adivasi people around about the conditions in which the villagers were residing. It soon became obvious to him that the prevailing state of affairs was a sorry one. One day he met a local journalist Pushpendra and began talking about the poor condition of the adivasis and the need to do something for them. Pushpendra himself had been a student union leader and taken part in a campaign against the highhandedness of the police on one occasion. He had heard of Khemla and told Khemraj that he should get in touch with him if he wanted to do anything concrete for the adivasis. Khemraj took a bus down to Umrli and then asked his way to Khemla's hut in Badi Vaigalgaon and so began an odyssey that is continuing to this day.

Khemraj told Khemla that there was a limit to what he could achieve with the kind of individual struggle he was waging. The adivasis had to be organised into a sangathan - a mass organisation, if any lasting and sustainable impact was to be made. This gelled with Khemla and he invited Khemraj to stay with him in his hut and help him build up a sangathan. Khemla and Khemraj began moving round the villages holding meetings trying to convince people that they should come together to fight for their rights. They met with resistance. The people were afraid of committing themselves, as they feared that there would be reprisals by the police. The village patels too were against them as they saw the formation of a sangathan as a threat to their power. There was also something else. The memories of the earlier repression unleashed by the administration to crush the Lal Topi Andolan still lingered in the minds of the people.

So for quite some time the duo made no headway whatsoever. Yet another renegade from mainstream society, Amit, joined them in early 1983. Amit had chucked up his studies as a student of the School of Planning and Architecture in Delhi to come to Tilonia to see if something more worthwhile could not be done with life. There he had met Khemraj who had gone there for one of his visits and been sufficiently impressed by what he had told him about the work in Jhabua to be enticed into joining him. So the now enhanced trio of activists began moving round the villages on a regular basis to find some issue around which the organisation process could begin.

Then it was announced that a big earthen dam would be built in Atthava village upstream of Badi Vaigalgaon on the big stream, which drained the watershed. The contract had been given to a non-adivasi sahuakar contractor in Alirajpur by the Government Irrigation Department. The activists decided to join the work as labourers. The contractor was paying the labourers a daily wage of Rs 3 only when the statutory minimum wage at that time in 1983 was Rs 7.50. The activists slowly began talking to the people about this hiatus and the need to do something about it. Their perseverance paid and one day all the labourers led by the trio struck work demanding payment of the minimum wage. This created a sensation as this was the first time that a strike had taken place in Jhabua. The Subdivisional Magistrate (SDM) at that time in Alirajpur was an Indian Administration Service (IAS) officer who was sympathetic to the problems of adivasis. He acted immediately and got the contractor to hike the wage rate to legal levels. The success of this action kicked off the sangathan process like nothing else could have done.

The news of the action spread far and wide and Gulab a resident of Badi Vaigalgaon who had gone away to live and farm in his wife's village in Attha in the nearby Mathwar

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Reserved Forest Range came to know of the deeds of the trio. He came to Khemla's hut one day and described in detail how the forest department staff were harassing the adivasis in the Mathwad Forest Range and beating them up and extorting cash and kind from them. He implored Khemla that he should come along with his two bajariya friends and provide help to them to counter the excesses of the forest department. So Khemraj and Amit set off with Gulab to his house in Attha for a preliminary survey of the state of affairs there while Khemla remained to continue with the organisational work in the Umralli region. They found the situation in the Mathwar Forest Range to be a classic case of adivasi deprivation amidst natural plenty that had become the order of the day all over India due to faulty development policies adopted after independence (Sharma, 2001).

Things could have been otherwise however. The Constitution of India in its Fifth Schedule has provisions that for areas notified under it like the district of Jhabua the Governor may, on the advice of the Tribal Advisory Council (TAC) comprised by a selection of adivasi MLAs, have special laws enacted for these areas and also direct that laws enacted by the parliament or the state legislature for the state as a whole should not apply to them. But like the British before them who first introduced similar measures in the Government of India Act of 1935, the rulers of independent India too thought nothing of disregarding during implementation grand provisions made on paper. Indeed, the British when introducing the first Government of India Act in 1858, subsequent to the quelling of the first war of independence, had guaranteed to the people of India inter alia that due regard would be paid to the ancient rights, usages and customs of India while framing new laws and that these laws would be administered equally and impartially for the benefit of the people (Paranjape, 1998). Almost immediately, however, these principles were breached. The Indian Penal Code (IPC) was enacted in 1860 and the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) in 1861. These laws have been codified in such a manner as to provide the administration with a handy means of suppressing organised public dissent. A more harmful law from the point of view of the adivasis was the enactment of the Indian Forest Act (IFA) in 1864. Applying the principle of *res nullius*, which means that a particular property has no owner unless there is documentary evidence in support of ownership, the British refused to recognise the customary community rights of the adivasis over the forests in which they resided. The forests were turned over to the Forest Department created for this purpose and we have seen how devastating it has been from the point of view of the adivasis of Jhabua. Yet another law that disinherited the adivasis from their main resource of land was the Land Acquisition Act (LAA) enacted in 1894, which using the principle of eminent domain empowered the government to dispossess the private owner of a piece of land for some public purpose in exchange for a paltry monetary compensation. These laws with minor modifications continue to be in force at present.

The British after having had to contend with organised and spontaneous adivasi militancy of a much more troublesome kind than they faced from mainstream Indian society throughout their rule in India had introduced the provisions, that were later to be incorporated in the Fifth Schedule and the Sixth Schedule which is applicable to some areas in the North East, so as to isolate the adivasi areas and contain their militancy by providing some sops and so drive a wedge between them and mainstream Indian society (Savyasachi, 1999). Some well-meaning European anthropologists like V Elwin, C V F Haimendorf and W V Grigson egged on the British in this whereas the nationalist freedom fighters opposed this move supported mainly by the Indian anthropologist G S Ghuriye. The British did some work in this respect because of the spin off they gained in terms of isolating the adivasi

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areas from the movement for independence during the crucial World War II years when the pressure of the freedom movement was extremely high on them.

The presence of articulate adivasi leaders like Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Jaipal Singh resulted in the debates in the Constituent Assembly reverberating with eulogies for the inherently democratic and non-exploitative nature of adivasi communities and the expression of concern about enabling them to negotiate the process of integration into the modern economy to their advantage (GOI, 1954). Nevertheless there was strong opposition to the provisions of the Fifth and Sixth Schedules. The day was carried finally because these provisions received the backing of the first Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru and were incorporated in the Constitution. These could easily have been used to prevent the application of the inimical laws like IPC, CrPC, IFA and LAA in adivasi areas after independence. This would have facilitated the seclusion of the adivasis from the onslaught of modern development and allowed them to gradually pick up the skills of negotiating a modern economy and polity and be integrated on equal terms with mainstream society. But as will become clear by and by Nehru's fascination with modern industrial development resulted in these provisions being given the go by in actual practice. In Madhya Pradesh the TAC was not constituted or was there only on paper for a considerable period of time and the Governors never used their special powers to intervene on behalf of the adivasis leading to massive land alienation due to development projects, deforestation and debt bondage. This is because these provisions are not binding on the Governor and only state that he "may" utilise them. So if the government does not implement these provisions it cannot be held responsible and taken to court for redressal. To cut a long story short the adivasis of Mathwar were in dire straits because of a severe failure of affirmative governance in post independence India.

Mathwar had been a small princely state before independence. The Raja was still around and lived in style in his palace in Bakhatgarh, which also happened to be the Range Headquarters. When Khemraj and Amit went to meet him in the course of their preliminary travels through the area he boasted in a perfect public school accent and a grand Selkirkian style that he was the "monarch of all that he surveyed". In reality, however, it was the forest and police department staff that held the real power there. In leftist circles in India there is a considerable amount of heat generated around the characterisation of the Indian state, with the Maoists, as mentioned earlier, saying it is semi-feudal and semi-colonial in nature while others argue that it has evolved into being a capitalist one. However, as far as the Bhil adivasis of Mathwar were concerned in the early nineteen eighties, the state was both totally feudal and totally colonial! They had no conception at all about India being a sovereign democratic republic in which they not only had some basic inalienable rights but also special affirmative provisions and laws to enable them to overcome centuries of isolation and domination by non-adivasis. Very few people at that time voted in the state assembly and the parliamentary elections.

The provisions of the Indian Forest Act 1927 are such that adivasis residing in a reserved forest area can be dubbed thieves as soon as they are born. The moment they step out of their fields they become trespassers in the forest in which they have lived for generations. Thus for even minor requirements like wood for fuel or fodder for their livestock they are at the mercy of the forest guard. The forest department staff had used this Act to unleash a reign of terror over the people in the Mathwar Range. They had to regularly contribute chicken, eggs, ghee, cereals and pulses to the forest guards and also pay bribes when they needed timber for making or repairing houses. The major problem,

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however, was about cultivating “newar” or encroached forestland. This was clearly against the law but was allowed by the forest department staff in exchange for huge bribes. Thus people had been cultivating forestland for years together and there was no official record of this. Some of this land had been initially taken away from them at the time of the settlement survey in 1949. Some had been cultivated when the logging contractors had cleared the land of trees. Most of this cultivation dated back to the late seventies. Given the tremendous pressure on land the adivasis had no option but to cultivate this land and the forest department staff was taking advantage of this by allowing them to do so in a totally unofficial manner. But a point had been reached when the bribes and the beatings were becoming too much of a burden for the adivasis.

Like in the Umralli area the whole problem was complicated by the fact that the village patels had been coopted by the forest department staff into facilitating the process of extortion. They used the power that they derived from their nexus with the forest department to keep the rest of the villagers in thrall and earn a commission from the bribes that were paid to their masters. Such was the power of the forest staff that the villagers had to bow down and wish them “Ram Ram” whenever they passed by and failure to do so meant being beaten up. The adivasis were considered to be untouchables and so special utensils were kept at the patel’s house where food used to be cooked specially for the forest department staff when they came there while they sat in royal style on charpais, wooden cots with ropes intertwined in them, laid out with soft mattresses. All this meant that organising the villagers to demand their rights was to prove a difficult proposition. When Khemraj and Amit went round the villages they would be lucky to find one or two people who would be prepared even to talk to them. None of them, however, were prepared to participate in bigger meetings. Word spread round that there were two odd bajariyas who spoke the Bhili language going from village to village who would eat whatever the villagers themselves were eating and would even sit crosslegged with them on the ground. There were also rumours that these people were really evil spirits who were adept at removing the desi roof tiles of the adivasis huts and insinuating themselves into their houses at night to do all kinds of harm!

Attha being the village of Gulab there was some response from the villagers there. Some people from the nearby villages of Chhoti Gendra and Mankhara too showed some interest. The patel of Chhoti Gendra proved to be an exception to the general run of patels and after some initial hesitation decided that the two activists meant well and warding off pressure from the forest department invited Khemraj and Amit to stay in one of the rooms of the government primary school in his village in the other of which the teacher stayed. The children of course used to study sitting in the verandah. Even though the teacher had been there for some ten years he had not been able to get even one student past the primary board examinations at the class five level. He had already heard of the kind of work that the activists had done and so was apprehensive about them staying close to him and creating problems. However, the sheer desire for Hindi speaking urban company in this back of beyond prodded him to agree to Khemraj and Amit staying with him in the school.

Weekly meetings began to be held in the three villages and a consensus evolved that the most urgent matter of recognition of the fact of cultivation of forestland would be raised with the higher-level authorities. It was decided that a delegation would go to meet the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) in Jhabua. Three people were chosen for this who would be accompanied by the activists. However, on the day the delegation was to set out all three backed out and the programme fell through. Time was running out. The monsoons of 1984

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were approaching and the forest guards had already sent out warnings that unless they were paid hefty bribes no one would be allowed to cultivate their nevar land. Lalia of Attha who had bled for three days from an internal haemorrhage the year before from the beatings that he had got and had to borrow money at an exorbitant interest to pay both the forest guard and the doctor's fees began crying in the meeting imploring the others to do something. There was clearly a sense of desperation, so eventually another delegation was put together and this one did manage to reach Jhabua and meet the DFO. The officer flatly refused to believe that there were so many encroachers on forestland as the records revealed that Mathwar Range had only two encroachers. He also refused to believe that his staff was behaving in an inhuman and wholly illegal manner with the adivasis. Then Khemraj told him that if he did not come to Attha and judge for himself the truth of their complaints then they would be forced to begin a demonstration and approach higher authorities.

This was a bluff as the people were not organised or brave enough to embark on an agitation at that stage. But the reputation gained from the strike of the labourers in the Atthava dam earlier had preceded Khemraj and so the DFO thought it more prudent to come to Mathwar and investigate matters rather than call his bluff. This proved to be the turning point. The adivasis who had gone for the parley with the DFO came back and related how they had sat on chairs face to face with the DFO and he had spoken very civilly with them and even offered them tea and biscuits. They said that the officers higher up were much better and it was only the staff in Mathwar who were beasts. Word spread round that the DFO was coming to Bakhatgarh the Range Headquarters for the express purpose of listening to the people's problems. Gulab went one step further and told the people that the names of all those cultivating nevar would be recorded on that day and so those that missed out on this meeting with the DFO would miss being registered for cultivation in future!

On the appointed day hundreds of people gathered at Bakhatgarh to press their claims regarding nevar and complain about the repressive and extortionate behaviour of the local forest department staff. Some of the patels who were against this kind of mobilisation had informed the MLA about the goings on and so he too arrived along with the DFO for the meeting. The MLA immediately began berating the people for having listened to the bajariya activists and not come to him with their problems. After all only he could solve them. The people retorted by asking him whether he had been sleeping all this while and whether it wasn't his responsibility to come and see if his electorate was doing alright or not. This initial altercation seemed to dismiss all hesitation and fear from the minds of the people and all the suffering and anger that had been dammed up all these years burst forth in a mass catharsis as person after person rose to castigate the forest department staff and relate the sordid history of dispossession and repression of the past few decades. The people were especially thrilled at the site of the forest guards whom they had thought to be the lords of the forest standing meekly with their hands folded behind their backs not being able to put a word in edgeways.

Eventually nothing concrete came out of the meeting. The DFO said that he could not allow encroachments to continue as it was against the law but he admitted that the malpractices of the forest guards would be stopped and no one would be beaten up in future or forced to pay a bribe. The people then put pressure on the MLA asking him to do something to legitimise their nevars as without them they could not possibly survive. The MLA hemmed, hawed, and gave a weak assurance that he would talk to the Minister of Forests about the problem. The success of the meeting lay in resoundingly breaking the culture of silence that had previously stifled the adivasis' powers of expression in the

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Mathwar area and thus kick starting the grassroots democratic process there. Since people from many more villages than the ones around Attha had come for the meeting they too saw the power of organisation and realised that Khemraj and Amit had not been talking through their hats. This proved to be the turning point and the two activists received many invitations for holding meetings in their villages from the people.

All was not hunky dory however. The forest department staff did not see these developments with a benevolent eye as was only to be expected. They began going round the villages threatening people with dire consequences if they attended the meetings or thought of cultivating their nevars in the coming monsoons. Nevertheless the people in the villages of Attha, Gendra, Mankhara and Mathwar did sow their newar lands with the onset of the monsoons forming teams so that the forest guards would not be able to intimidate them. Khemraj stayed on in Gendra while Amit went over to Mathwar to oversee the whole operation. Then one day news came in from the village of Gondwani that a team of forest officials had arrested some people there and brought them to the Range office in Attha. Khemraj and a few of the people from Attha went to the Range office to find out what charges had been framed against those arrested.

The forest officials told Khemraj to come into the office for discussion. No sooner had the unsuspecting Khemraj entered the office than the door was closed behind him and the forest officials began laying about Khemraj with lathis. He was given a thorough beating and cigarette burns and told to stop his “netagiri”, a pejorative term for people who try to organise protests against the establishment. The treatment he had received was an appetiser he was told and if he did not leave the area then he would be bumped off. They then called the adivasis waiting outside who had fearfully heard the screams of Khemraj being tortured inside and told them to take him away. Immediately word was sent to Amit and Khemla. Amit came in by the evening and it was decided that early in the morning the injured Khemraj would be taken to Alirajpur to lodge a complaint with the police there and also inform all the people outside as it was felt that Bakhatgarh was not a safe place to go to.

The next morning as the team of people set out from Gendra with the injured Khemraj being carried in an improvised stretcher the forest officials blocked the road at Attha saying that they would not let the team proceed any further. While an altercation was going on Khemla arrived from Umralli with a posse of his own men armed with bows and arrows. He pushed the forest officials off the road and escorted the team on its way to Alirajpur. Thereafter things moved fast. A police complaint was registered against the offending forest officials and news of their attack on Khemraj hit the headlines. The SWRC support network within and without the government became active. After almost a decade, since the demise of the Lal Topi Andolan, a rally was taken out by the adivasis in Alirajpur. The forest officials were suspended and the government ordered an enquiry to be conducted by the Conservator of Forests, Indore into the problems of the adivasis of the Mathwar Range.

This incident and its fallout provided a crucial boost to the organisation process in two important ways. It extended the liberal democratic space and the operation of the rights framework guaranteed in the Indian Constitution to the Mathwar region, which had previously been kept outside its pale, thus putting an effective check on the arbitrariness of the forest and police officials. More importantly it established in the minds of the adivasis that the activists were trustworthy and powerful people who could take on the might of the forest and police officials in the fight for their rights.

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Consequently after some initial hesitation the adivasis of Alirajpur once again began organising to fight for their rights as soon as they felt that the leadership being provided by the activists was of a credible and effective kind. The late sixties and the early seventies of the last century had seen the emergence of adivasi mass movements in Western India among the Bhils protesting against their alienation from their resource base and their marginalisation in the modern economy. The Bhoomi Sena in Thane district of Maharashtra and the Shramik Sangathana in the Dhule district of the same state are notable in this respect (Singh, 1983). The base of the latter was just across the river Narmada from the Mathwar Range. So Khemraj, Amit and Khemla along with some other adivasis decided to ford the river and climb the hills and go and meet the leaders of the Sangathana in Shahada where they had their office.

When they reached Shahada they were lucky to meet the great adivasi leader and poet Vaharu Sonawane. He received them with warmth and then greeted them with a raised clenched fist saying "Zindabad". No more "Ram Ram" he said to them since it was the greeting of the bajariyas and exploiters. The clenched fist was to symbolise the organised power of the adivasis as opposed to the hand folded in namaskar in which the fingers remained separate. The greeting was to convey to all and sundry that the adivasis were going to fight for a decent life as opposed to the moribund existence they were leading previously. He related to the visitors the great struggles they had fought against the landed non-adivasis who had not only seized their lands but also made them work as bonded labourers on them. In his inimitable way he danced and sang an inspiring song for them –

Nakedar ave kukri mange re (The forest guard comes asking for a chicken)

Vaghan vachhra aamu adivasi ra (We adivasis are the children of the tiger)

Hain juni apta ra, hain juni apta ra (Do not bend to the guard's demands anymore)

The visit proved an exhilarating one for all of them and they came back with renewed vigour to pursue the fight for justice in Alirajpur. The first thing they did on their return was to call a mass meeting and announce that from that day onwards they would greet each other "Zindabad". Many years later I asked Vaharu why they had chosen just zindabad instead of the more popular "inquilab zindabad" - long live the revolution, which is used by the communists. Vaharu replied that both the Bhoomi Sena and the Shramik Sangathana had begun as reactions to the mode of working of the CPI led peasant fronts, which did not respect the uniqueness of adivasi lifestyle and culture. So there was a suspicion in their minds regarding the relevance of Marxist theory and practice to their own situation and especially the concept of an armed revolution. As a result the contentious inquilab was dropped from the greeting.

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Chapter 5 - A Paradise Lost

When I arrived in Gendra there was still no formal organisation of the people and neither any hierarchy, just a loose gathering across villages with the activists as the leaders referred to as the 'Sangath'. The people through donations contributed some amount of money but this had not been systematised. They fed the activists when they visited their villages and stayed the night to conduct meetings. The activists were affiliated to the SWRC as a sub-centre of it and some meagre funds used to be provided by the latter. Nobody took any salary. The expenses of local travel and food were taken care of and for the non-advasis it was advised that they make their own arrangements for fare for going home and for their clothes by begging from somewhere! The adivasi activists, especially Khemla who had a family, were provided with a small stipend. The rule was that the activists should spend the maximum time touring the villages as this served the double purpose of reducing the expenses on food and also resulted in more training of the people through increased contact. It was decided that I should go and live with an adivasi family in Attha to get a hang of their culture and also pick up the language fast. I would work with the family on their farm during the day and in the evening conduct an adult education class for the members of the Sangath.

So I went to stay with Avalsingh in Attha. He was a landless peasant totally dependent on the piece of forestland that he had encroached upon. He had a wife Khetli and two small children. The evening I went there for the first time they were having a gruel prepared by boiling jowar or sorghum flour with the dried flowers of amari, a vegetable, which was called 'phulaan khaata'. The next day for lunch we had fermented corn soup, which was called "rabri" but had no resemblance whatsoever to the non-advasi sweet dish of the same name in Hindi. Both khata and rabri saved on the amount of grains to be cooked in comparison to chapatties, or hand baked bread, at the cost of nutrition. The adivasis had got used to eating this kind of food during the monsoon months when they are short of cereals and cash and have to borrow from the sahkars and make do till the kharif harvest comes in. For me of course this was too much coming as it did at the end of a day's labour weeding in the fields. This is what 'declassing' is all about I had consoled myself. Matters were made worse by the fact that Khetli would get up at four o'clock in the morning and start grinding the flour at the stone grinding wheel, which would let off a continuous monotonous wail right next to my ears and wake me up. Thereafter I had to stay awake smelling the stench of the dung and urine of the cattle and goats, which were also tethered for the night inside the hut. Last but not the least there were bedbugs in the charpai that was given to me to sleep in. My cup of sorrow was indeed full!

Life was hard for those at Gendra too. Because there was no electricity there was no flour-milling machine in Attha. So wheat had to be bought, cleaned and milled in Umralli and brought by bus to Palvi and from there on foot to Gendra. Fifteen kilos of flour slung across the back in a sack improvised from a bed sheet. Sometimes the flour supply ran out and then the only alternative was to grind maize or jowar flour on the adivasis' hand operated grinding wheel. There were some small shops in Attha and Gendra but they did not have good provisions, which too had to be brought on foot from the weekly market village at Chhaktala some thirteen kilometres away. The food had to be cooked on a wooden fire. Lighting a wooden stove is a pain at any time but it becomes an odyssey during the monsoons when the wood is wet. Later on when my mother once learnt that I could cook maize flour rotis on a wooden chulha and did so quite regularly, she said that for the first time she had found something to respect me for!

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The vegetable dish to go with these rotis had to be cooked in a round earthen pan called a tavla, which had a lacquered finish on the inside. Despite this it would absorb some of the oil that was used to cook the dish. Since water had to be brought up hill from a stream half a kilometer away in a round earthen vessel perched precariously on the top of the head it was a precious commodity. So we rarely washed this tavla with water after a meal. Instead we would wipe it spotlessly clean with the last of the rotis to relish the concentrated taste of the spices and make it ready for cooking again absorbed oil and all. The next time we put the tavla on the fire the heat would make it release the oil it had absorbed earlier and we would singe the cut pieces of onion in this before putting in more oil for frying the rest of the spices thus saving on the amount of oil used also. After all cooking oil too had to be lugged from Chhaktala. So unlike the well heeled given to rolling their tongues around vintage wine we in Gendra used to freak out on food prepared in vintage cooking oil!

Salvation came soon as my stay at Avalsingh's was a shortlived one. With the coming of the monsoons every year the tensions regarding the cultivation of the nevar lands always hot up because despite all the negotiations the forest department invariably takes the position that it cannot officially allow nevar to exist. Thus I had to set out on tour along with the other activists to handle the situation. In one highhanded operation the forest department staff had beaten up and arrested some twenty-five people from villages close to the Narmada river which had just joined the Sangath and taken them away to Bakhatgarh. Amit and I set out in search of them with some other villagers when we got news of this. On reaching Bakhatgarh we found that the arrested people had been taken away to Alirajpur and the forest guards left there abused us for our pains. We lodged a complaint with the police about the forest guards having abducted the adivasis and abused us. Then we set off for Alirajpur. We had to spend the night on the way in Chhaktala village as there were no more buses available at that time. Next morning when we arrived in Alirajpur we were arrested along with a few adivasis on the false charge of having allegedly raided and ransacked the Forest Department Dak Bungalow in Bakhatgarh. It appeared that the forest department staff had broken up the furniture and windowpanes in the Dak Bungalow and lodged a false complaint against us after we had left.

The news of our arrest spread and immediately the rest of the members of the Sangath along with Khemla and Khemraj took out a rally in Alirajpur and sat on a dharna. By this time in 1985, the IAS officer who had been the SDM in Alirajpur during the previous action in 1983 with regard to the non-payment of minimum wages in the construction of the Athhava dam had returned as the District Collector of Jhabua. He rushed down to Alirajpur and assured the agitating adivasis that he would institute a magisterial enquiry into the whole incident and if the case of vandalism at Bakhatgarh was found to be false it would be withdrawn and in the meantime the arrested people would be released on personal bonds. He also said that those who had been cultivating encroached forestland for some time now would not be dispossessed and a survey would be conducted to determine the reality regarding the extent of encroachment in the Mathwar Range.

With this incident my long saga of fighting the state, which is continuing to this day, began with a bang. Soon we were to take up other issues like that of the extortion of the sahuikars, the corruption of the rural development functionaries, the human rights violations of the police and of course the struggle against the construction of the Sardar Sarovar dam being built on the river Narmada. And it was not only 'sangharsh' or struggle that we engaged in but also 'nirman' or constructive development as we experimented with joint forest management, watershed development, primary education in the Bhili language,

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primary health care through homoeopathy, formation of self help credit groups, running of cooperative societies and conservation of indigenous agricultural seeds and practices. Through a long and laborious process the Sangath was given a formal structure and registered as a trade union 'Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangath' (KMCS), Farmers and Labourers Consciousness Union, in 1991. As the fame of the 'Attha Group', as we were known in activist circles, spread, so also did the number of non-activists working within it swell and at one time in 1993 we were as many as eight of us working in Alirajpur. The KMCS had made an impact with its work right up to the national level in just a decade upto 1993 (Rahul, 1994).

Till 1994, when I left Alirajpur for Indore, I had a great time, the best I have ever had. Primarily because I got to live very simply, close to nature and close to people who have very few material desires other than to fill their stomachs, make love and make merry. Not that they have no intellectual pursuits. They have a rich oral culture, a religion respectful of nature and a well worked out ecologically sustainable agricultural practice. Their worldview was not an accumulative one that would lead them on to using their surpluses for trade and development but one, which acknowledged the fact that "nature had only enough for fulfilling human's needs and not their greed" (Gandhi, 1959). They left a lot in the hands of their Gods and did not worry much about the future, even in times of stress like the frequent droughts. I had a considerable amount of the modernist hubris in me when I first came to Jhabua not to speak of the revolutionary zeal to change society for the better. I had thought that my job would be initially to teach the adivasis how to pick up the skills of negotiating the modern economic and political systems. Later on I would have to show them how these systems are inherently tilted against them and so needed to be drastically changed. The ultimate aim would be to convince the adivasis to build up the power of their grassroots mass organisations vis-a-vis the state. Very soon, however, the critical tendencies in me got a boost from the easygoing worldview of the adivasis and I lost my modernist impatience and became a much more casual person content to let events unfold at their own pace providing only an occasional push here and there.

Paradoxical as it may seem the Bhils' worldview is a mix of both the opposing philosophies of stoicism and epicureanism. While in their merrymaking they are quintessential epicureans, in their work and in the fortitude with which they bear their travails they are first class stoics. Over and above this, given their propensity to live in small comparatively egalitarian, except in matters relating to their women, social units, closely knit together by customs of resource pooling in social and agricultural activities, they are also the original anarchists. In the sense that one common thread running through the many different schools of anarchist thought and action, that of the organisation of civil society in small units in opposition to the state and the centralised economic interests that determine its political direction (Horowitz, 1964), is also present in the traditional social organisation of the Bhils. So instead of I transforming the mindset of the adivasis of Alirajpur it was they who converted me to a form of anarchism, for which I have coined the term anarcho-environmentalism and fortified me with a kind of Stoicism that has enabled me to persist as an activist over such a long period of time in the face of heavy odds in my continuing fight against the state! However, what I cherish most from those years in Alirajpur is the tantalising flavour of the Bhils' unfettered Epicureanism.

There was a beautiful place in village Jalsindhi on the banks of the Narmada, which has now unfortunately been permanently submerged by the Sardar Sarovar dam reservoir. During winter when the rocks on the banks became exposed there was a patch where the

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rocks were dented in the shape of giant footprints called Dabaliya. Near to these there was a deep well like depression and next to it a tall slim rock. The adivasis said that this was the place where the Gods had had a great celebration. They had prepared 'ghat', a pounded maize preparation, by pounding the maize in the deep well like depression, which was the 'ukhal' or mortar, with the tall slim stone, which was the 'musal' or pestle. Then they had eaten and drunk mahua wine and danced and the dents in the rocks were their footprints. The Narmada used to become like a lake here because there was a deep depression in the riverbed also. So this place was frequently visited by the adivasis in winter and spring to fish in this big lake in their boats made from hollowed out trunks of trees and also to propitiate the Gods. I used to make it a point during my travels to spend a day there once every month swimming in the lake and catching grasshoppers and earthworms to use as bait for the fish and then laying out the fishing lines in the river during the day and cooking and eating the fish on wooden fires in the evening. The nights would be especially beautiful, as the adivasis would huddle around the bonfires to sing their lilting songs under the starlit sky to the accompaniment of the 'rantha' or horsehair violin and relate their myths and stories.

Once on my suggestion we had one of the monthly meetings of the central committee of the Sangath at this heavenly spot. After a great day of swimming and fishing and a lovely dinner we settled down to the serious business of the Sangath at night. The anti dam struggle was at its peak at the time and we were hotly discussing the strategy to be adopted for the future. Khemla, excitable as he always is, rose up in the middle of the meeting and stated that if the government could not provide for the poor adivasis then they would have no option but to blow up the dam. Before the rest of us could react to this bombastic announcement Khemla was greeted by a chorus of croaks which refused to abate. When we looked around for the source of this cacophony we found that a bevy of frogs had overturned the bamboo basket in which all the fishing lines had been kept ready for laying in the river in the morning and swallowed the grasshopper baits. These baits had naturally got stuck in their throats forcing them to essay resounding bugle calls in support of Khemla! The meeting had to be called off as all of us fell to laughing and the adivasis who find prolonged serious cogitations a pain at all times broke into their traditional song and dance around the bonfires. A paradise that has been lost forever.

The other reason for these years having been the best was that our group was a happy go lucky one. Very soon we realised that there was little chance of our succeeding in bringing about any substantive changes in state policies. What we could do at the most was increase the access of the adivasis to the state system and reduce the transaction costs somewhat. As one of our mentors once told us in the initial stages of the anti-dam struggle – “you are two and a half people and yet making so bold as to take on the Indian state and the World Bank at the same time”! Indeed without the support of well meaning bureaucrats in the early phases we would not have been able to put the Sangath together at all. For me initially this was a painful process being steeped as I was in the belief that a radical overthrow of a black anti-people state was absolutely essential. However, the realities of working with a set of people who were still in a pre-capitalist mode of economic and cultural production and the opportunities being offered for economic development and political organisation by the spaces provided by the liberal democratic and in some respects even socialistic and anarchistic Constitution of India, inevitably led me to reconcile myself to letting the idea of working within it influence my thought and action.

In that decade up to the early nineteen nineties we mostly tasted success in our actions given the fact that we were working among a people who had been severely

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deprived of the knowledge and fruits of the most basic economic and social rights and we had just begun challenging the deeper injustices of state policy. One action that I will always remember as one of the best I have ever instituted was a classical leftist "land to the tiller" operation. The former prince of the state of Mathwar who had initially boasted to us that he was the monarch of all he surveyed did in fact have that kind of an aura among his tenant adivasi farmers. These poor landless adivasis were scared stiff of him and not only tilled his lands for just one tenth of the share of the produce but even did beggar at his palace in Bakhatgarh. I continuously held meetings with them trying to convince them that times had changed and they and not the Raja could easily become the masters of all they surveyed. Perseverance paid and one fine day I got all of them together, took them to Alirajpur, and filed for landownership rights under the relevant provisions of the Madhya Pradesh Land Revenue Code. With the help of a pro-active dalit IAS officer who was the Subdivisional Magistrate in Alirajpur at that time we had the Raja of Bakhatgarh eating dust instead of the fruits of the toil of his tenants in no time whatsoever.

Moreover, in the same way as all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy so also does all ideology and no fun make activists into dogmatic dodos! Anyway living so closely among the adivasis we could not but imbibe their great love for fun and revelry. I used to say fondly that we were like Mac and his gang in the Nobel laureate author John Steinbeck's classic short novel Cannery Row (Steinbeck, 1986) with the only difference that we were not members of the lumpen proletariat like them but committed social activists. I remember once a researcher who was documenting the various kinds of social work organisations at work in India came down to our office in Alirajpur and we got down to arguing with her about the possibilities of lasting social transformation to a more egalitarian and sustainable developmental paradigm. During the course of the debate one of us said that we were nothing more than well meaning 'dalals' who acted as middle-men between the state and the adivasis and did not charge them a fee or extort money from them like the other dalals and so should relinquish all our romantic ideas about paradigmatic societal change. When the researcher indignantly asked this chap why he was wasting his time in Alirajpur if he had such a poor opinion of himself he promptly shot back –"because I have nothing better to do"!

Life is full of problems and good things never last, especially for those fighting for the poor. Khemraj was married and his activist wife Anita was pregnant at the time I met them for the first time in Tilonia. Anita had temporarily taken on work at the women's section in SWRC as it was not possible for her to stay in Gendra given her condition. But after her son had begun toddling she came down to Alirajpur in 1986. We had built a bigger house, which was to serve as the office-cum- residence for us in Attha by that time. But it was still not big enough to give Khemraj and Anita the privacy they needed. There was also the problem of expenses. The kind of funds we had were just not enough to allow Khemraj and Anita to bring up a family in even a simple middle class way. So after some time it became more and more difficult for Khemraj and Anita to continue in Attha. Anita applied for and got a job in Rajasthan as the coordinator of a Government Nehru Yuva Kendra and Khemraj left with her to take care of the child in 1987. Khemraj was a sad man when he left but he had to bow to the realities of life in the same way as later Amit and I have had to. Amit met and married Jayashree who came to the valley as part of the massive mobilisation of youth from Maharashtra by the Narmada Bachao Andolan in support of the anti-dam struggle in 1989. They too faced the same kind of problems that Khemraj and Anita had faced and had to alternate between Alirajpur and Delhi for quite some time. They would

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spend months in Delhi earning money and then come to Alirajpur and work there for some time. Then in 1995 they too had children and had to pull out of Alirajpur altogether. Some of the other activists pulled out for similar reasons and some others because they wanted to pursue other better paying options given the kind of dead end that mass organisational activism was leading to at that time.

Shankar also had got married in 1989 and had children. The non-activists could pull out of Alirajpur if they wished but this escape route was not available to the activists. So we had to sit together and work out some formula for them. It was decided that the activists would take a stipend big enough to be able to look after the needs of their families and the non-activists like myself would continue to work without pay as before. If not in society at large, within our group at least, we were able to implement the communist ideal of “from each according to his capacity and to each according to his needs”! This meant an increase in the money required to run the show in Alirajpur. Since SWRC was not prepared to foot the whole bill we had to begin looking round for other sources of funds. At this crucial juncture in 1990 Baba Amte added his considerable moral weight to the Narmada Bachao Andolan by coming and setting up residence in the submergence zone in the valley near Barwani. He is a very perceptive person and having known activists for a long time knew that their main problem is always that of the lack of funds. So he sent word one day that I should go and meet him. When I went to his hut by the riverside in Kasrawad village he told me that he wanted to help us from time to time with some funds if we were amenable to this proposition. This was an offer that I could hardly refuse.

Then SWRC threw a spanner in the works in 1993 by cutting off our funding altogether. This made the situation desperate, we had to look around for other sources and somehow we made ends meet for sometime through ad hoc measures. This is when the agency Society for Rural Urban and Tribal Initiative (SRUTI) came to our rescue. SRUTI had been already providing a fellowship to Khemla since 1987 but now they made a proposal to us to fund the organisation as a whole so as to provide it with some stability. SRUTI in fact has played a stellar role by funding many of the activists mass organisations in the Western Madhya Pradesh region and so ensuring that a widespread and sustained challenge in defence of activists rights could be mounted against the oppressive policies of the state and international funding agencies in the region, which has had a national and international impact.

Finally, much as I would have loved to continue my idyllic existence there, I too had to leave Alirajpur in 1994. I got married in 1993 to my colleague Subhadra Khaperde who was an activist working with the mass organisation Ekta Parishad in the neighbouring Dhar district. Subhadra insisted that I break with traditional patriarchal custom and leave my place of work to join her instead of vice versa. But her colleagues did not like the idea of my joining them and objected to our staying in their area of work. So we had to move to Indore instead in 1994 to work out our future life and work plans. Things were complicated by the fact that I had become a chronic sufferer of malaria which continually relapsed every two months or so. Doctors in Indore told me that Jhabua was a malaria endemic area and I had been deeply infected by the parasite. The only solution they said was that I take a complete anti-malarial treatment and abstain from fieldwork for at least a year or so.

There was something else too. The Activists Ekta Parishad (AEP), which is an organisation of activists spanning the four Western Indian states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra was formed about this time. The main thrust of the AEP

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was that the adivasis had had enough of being led by non-advansi activists in their struggles. In the poetic words of Vaharu Sonowane, who was the co-convener of this new movement -

We did not sit on the stage
We were not called to do so
We were shown our place on the ground
We were told to sit there
But they sat on the stage
And talked about our sorrows
Our sorrows remained ours
They never became theirs.

The AEP has subsequently prepared a full-fledged manifesto, which is the first conscious and methodical expression of the inherent anarchism of the Bhils. In it has been detailed the kind of society the AEP desires and the means for bringing it about (AEP, 1998). Shankar became an active member of this organisation in 1992. He and some other adivasi activists began to feel that it was time that they directed the affairs of the Sangathan in Alirajpur and this would be possible only if we non-advansi activists removed our overbearing presence from there. Fair enough we said and bowed out gracefully.

This change of scene led later to a new and more challenging phase of activism for Subhadra and myself further up the Narmada valley in Dewas and Khargone districts to the east of Indore. I became a background man and the people and Subhadra played the lead roles. Grassroots mobilisation by the adivasis and especially women reached such a high level that the state had to discard all pretence of being a liberal democratic one and crack down with illegal force as it always does in such circumstances. This culminated in a heroic but tragic climax of vintage anarchist rebellion in the classical Bhil tradition in the picturesquely named village of Mehendikhera in 2001.

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Chapter 6 - New Temples for Old

The six-year-old girl sat on her father's shoulder eating a guava and enjoying her self. She was thrilled at the great activity going on around her. Normally she used to go to the weekly market at Dhamtari town in Raipur district of Chhattisgarh from their home in village Dargahan in this way. Her exclusive mode of transport ensured that she could drink in the sights, occasionally dip into the pocket of her frock to extract delectable titbits stored in it, talk to her father all the while and yet remain fresh to explore the fascinating enticements of the market on arriving there. This time, however, it was not they alone but the whole village that was on the move. Bullock carts laden with all their household goods were creaking out escorted by the villagers. A fleet of jeeps and trucks carrying officials and police had come a week back and an official had announced that the time had come for them to vacate their homes and fields as the gates of the newly built Gangrel dam on the Mahanadi river downstream were to be closed soon. The vehicles and the officials went back but the police stayed on in camps to ensure compliance.

The little girl Subhadra was the only one who was in the best of spirits as the adults and older children were all weighed down by the sadness of having to leave their hearths and homes under duress in exchange for a paltry monetary compensation. Subhadra's family was slightly lucky in that they had land in a nearby village to which they could go. Her father Devnath in fact had been working as a "hali" or bonded labourer in Dargahan. His own small plot of land was in Jepra village, which was outside the submergence area. They were Mahars, the same caste as Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar the great leader of the dalits. The British had brought their forefathers here from Maharashtra. As mentioned earlier the British consistently transported people into the central Indian jungles from the nearest plains areas to increase the land under settled agriculture and buttress their earnings from land revenue. Like in the case of the Bhils in Western India the Gond adivasis of these heavily forested areas of what is now Chhattisgarh state, were averse to settled cultivation and like them vehemently opposed this intrusion and there were many fierce battles leading to their massacre. The most ferocious and well-organised struggle was that of the Gonds of Bastar under the leadership of Gundadhar called the Bhoomkal rebellion of 1910 (Shukla, 1985). This was a systematically organised uprising in which much pre-planning was done to cut communications by wire and road and the British were surrounded and forced to the point of surrender. However, they survived by treachery on the part of some of the Gonds and later the rebellion was ruthlessly put down. The British had earlier instituted a land revenue system in which malguzars, the Chhattisgarhi equivalent of the zamindars, acted as agents who had to pay a fixed tax to the British with freedom to collect as much as they wished from the tenants under them (Grant, 1870). This system was gradually extended to the Bastar region also.

The burden of this tax had become so much that it had become impossible for Subhadra's grandfather to pay it only from the cultivation of his small piece of land and increasing debts had made him put his younger son Devnath to work as a bonded labourer with his brother-in law who was a malguzar. After his father died leaving him still very young he continued as a bonded labourer and had to leave his share of the farmland fallow. Subhadra once heard from him a very interesting story of how her father had to go on foot to the palace of the Raja of Dhamtari to deposit the tax collected by his uncle. In those days there were no currency notes and only silver coins called kaldars. Devnath would carry on his head a big cloth bundle in which the kaldars would be bound up and he would be accompanied by guards armed with canes and guns. There would be a Daroga at

the palace to check that the full amount of the tax was being paid. He would toss up each kaldar and then listen carefully while it fell on the stone floor. A genuine kaldar would have a sweet metallic ring while counterfeit ones would sound flat. The Daroga always rejected a few kaldars even though they were all good ones and so extra kaldars had to be taken along to compensate for this. Devnath would faithfully bring back the rejected kaldars and deposit them with his uncle.

The land tax and the malguzari system were abolished after independence but Devnath had to continue to work as a bonded labourer to repay the earlier debts incurred. On the side he would also weave cloth on a handloom for the merchants in Dhamtari to augment his meagre income. Even though Devnath was not literate he had the foresight to see that education was the lifeline for his children to escape from the morass of poverty in which they were stuck. He took advantage of the expanding state subsidised education system after independence to send his children to school. His eldest son, however, ran away from school at a young age to work as a labourer and on coming of age married and went off to pursue a living with his in-laws instead. But the next son did pursue his studies upto high school and had a government job as a forest guard at the time of the displacement from Dargahan in 1973. Devnath afraid of frittering away the compensation amount of Rupees Three thousand that he received for his house in Dargahan decided to use the money to marry off this son who he thought would then take care of the rest of the family. This investment decision bombed as the urban daughter-in-law he chose forced his son immediately after marriage to remain immersed in their own family preventing him from lending a helping hand to his father who was in such dire straits.

Devnath and his family had then to toil on the land in Jepra to make ends meet. He still had a son and two daughters who were going to school. So he and his wife began work on their farm, which had lain fallow for years together, to make it suitable for cultivation. The cultivation of rice, which is the main crop in Chhattisgarh, requires a large amount of water. To ensure ponding of water in the fields the plots have to be dug out and the earth heaped on the boundaries to form water-retaining enclosures. Long years of disuse had flattened all the plot boundaries on the Khaperde farm. This meant that immense labour would have to be put in to rebuild these boundaries. The Khaperdes did not have any money so no hired labour could be employed. Thus began a gruelling time when even the children had to go and work in the field after coming back from school. Subhadra soon forgot her happy sojourns to Dhamtari on market day as the real import of the march out of Dargahan became clear to her and she too began doing her mite in the field at that tender age.

This desolation was visible in the whole region as not only the Khaperdes but also most other oustee families were suddenly faced with livelihood crises that spelt the doom of the rural wonder that was Chhattisgarh. Traditionally this region, even more than the rest of India, used to thrive in its villages. Even today the first thing that is bound to strike the eye of an outside visitor to a village in Chhattisgarh is the large number of tanks that dot the landscape. Sometimes numbering upto as many as a hundred and forty-seven, as in the village of Bastar which was the seat of the principedom of the same name, these tanks used to form the lynchpin of a socio-economic system that was amazingly sustainable in both economical and ecological terms. These tanks fulfilled the varied needs for water of the village ranging from drinking and washing to irrigation. The main purpose of course was the protective irrigation of the staple paddy crop of which more than seventeen

thousand varieties used to be grown resulting in Chhattisgarh being referred to as a "Dhan Ka Katora" or a bowl of rice (Verma, 2002).

These tanks and the agricultural system based on them were maintained through an elaborate communitarian culture. The celebration of the Agti festival in April every year used to mark the community expression of this sound ecological sense distilled from centuries of interaction with Mother Nature. With the start of the festival the whole village would turn out regularly every day till all the tanks were cleaned up and deepened. Yet another ritual of the festival was the exchange of seeds. All the farmers would pool their seeds in a common place. Then seeds of different varieties would be exchanged. Farmers from other villages too could come and exchange seeds. This exchange of seeds supplemented the continuous practice of selection and conservation carried out in the field. In this way a large genetic diversity was maintained and some part of the harvest would always survive come flood or drought. This community awareness and activity owed its existence to the unique medieval political history of Chhattisgarh.

Historically Chhattisgarh, "Chatar Raj" as it is popularly called, was the region of the upper Mahanadi river valley. It was ruled continuously for about eight centuries from roughly 1000 A.D. to 1757 A.D., when the Marathas overran it, by a single dynasty - the Haihays, ruling from Ratanpur. The Haihays organised their rule around thirty six garhs or forts and hence the name of the region as chhattis in Hindi means thirty six. Each garh was the centre of administration for a chourasi or unit of eighty-four villages. These chourasis in turn were made up of seven barwahs or units of twelve villages. Each village had as its head a gountiya who was responsible for revenue collection and general administration. The gountiya's powers, however, were not absolute being circumscribed by the decisions of the gram panchayat or village council (Shukla, 1988).

The Haihays were themselves not the conquering type of rulers and were not threatened by conquest by others and so military expenses were minimal. They were also not extravagant builders of palaces, monuments and temples like the Rajputs and Mughals. Consequently revenue extracted from farmers was comparatively low. Thus despite being the lowest rung of a feudal system the village panchayats had considerable autonomy and could even regulate the trade within their jurisdiction. This naturally gave the farmers a lot of incentives to develop a prosperous farming system. The long period of peaceful rule devoid of any wars led to the development of a fairly egalitarian system that was at the same time productive and ecologically sustainable. The demise of this system and the gradual eclipse of rural Chhattisgarh began with the downfall of the Haihays.

The Marathas sounded the first discordant note by substantially hiking the taxes. They ruled from Nagpur in the nearby Vidarbha region and so took away all the revenue without spending anything on the region apart from the bare minimum necessary for administration. The British colonialists conquered this region by defeating the Marathas in the first quarter of the nineteenth century and promptly began implementing their oppressive system of land revenue maximisation that has been described earlier. The Malguzari system of land revenue collection introduced by them effectively circumscribed the independence of the small farmer and also struck at the roots of the vibrant community partnership of the earlier era. Most of these Malguzars were non-cultivating upper castes brought in from north and central India who had no interest in the development of sustainable farming practices whatsoever. They were concerned only with the collection of revenue as also were their masters, the British. Moreover a new trade route was opened up to link the region with the imperial capital in Calcutta and so hasten the exploitation of the

rich natural resources of the region. In the new dispensation traders and moneylenders prospered at the expense of farmers. So much so that the traders of Raipur the capital city financially supported the British in their fight to suppress the first war of Indian independence in 1857 while the malguzar class provided it with moral and logistical support (Ghosh, 1985).

Independence in 1947 only aggravated the condition of the poor farmers. The formal abolition of the malguzari system was not accompanied by any far-reaching land reforms on the ground. The former malguzars, the most prominent among these became the new rulers, used a variety of stratagems to retain control of most of the land. In the nineteen sixties the green revolution was set rolling with the introduction of high-yielding varieties of rice and heavily irrigated, chemical fertilizer and pesticide based farming. A number of large and medium sized dams were built to improve irrigation facilities to meet the higher demand for water. Within a few years a primarily self-sustaining agricultural system was changed into one producing for the national and international markets with external inputs. Traders and rice millers reaped the benefits. The most infamous being the Jain brothers who made their millions initially by exporting rice but who later diversified into smuggling of foreign exchange and laundering of black money. They were subsequently implicated in a criminal case for having laundered black money for most of the important leaders of the major political parties in the country in a big scandal that shook the political firmament in the nineteen nineties, which like most such cases eventually came to nought for lack of sufficient evidence (Mahalingam, 1998)

Similar to the situation in the rest of India and especially in the state of Punjab (Shiva, 1991), the green revolution in Chhattisgarh too has only served to impoverish the small farmer in the long run and today with decreasing yields, proneness to pest attacks and increasing costs of inputs like chemical fertilizers, electricity and pesticides, it has become an albatross around his neck leading to a virtual epidemic of suicides by farmers laden with debt. A maverick agricultural scientist Dr R.H.Riccharia referred to his own field research to point out that there were indigenous rice varieties in Chhattisgarh, which were far higher yielding and pest resistant than the foreign hybrids that were being introduced (Richharia & Govindaswamy, 1990). However, his voice was a lonely and poor one, which got easily drowned out in the cacophony and heavy international funding in support of the green revolution. The introduction of the profit motive among farmers and the monetisation of the rural economy has been a blow to the community spirit and the traditional consensus based gram panchayats have lost their cohesiveness. The practices of voluntary labour to maintain the village tanks and the exchange of indigenous seeds during the Agti festival have gradually withered away leading to a decay of the tanks and a serious erosion of genetic diversity.

Nothing is more symbolic of this all round decay than the neglected condition of the once thriving village tanks which used to be the mainstay of the rural economy in yesteryears. Many tanks have dried up. The few that remain have as a result been subjected to heavier pressure than is healthy for them. Often humans and animals bathe in the same tank. Pesticide and fertilizer residues as well as human and animal wastes make their way into the tanks. Most deplorable, however, is the decrease in the protective irrigation potential of the tanks, which has meant that in years of less than normal rainfall, crops fail and drought results. One elder told me with a twinkle in his eye that in their childhood and youth they would go in teams during the summer from one tank to another cleaning them of their silt while singing songs all the time. It used to be a festival

atmosphere that they looked forward to. He lamented that these days the younger ones had become lazy and spent their time playing cricket in the dried up tanks instead - "aaj kal ke korhiya laika man sukkha tariya me kirket khelthe"!

Industrial development only added to the woes of the bucolic Chhattisgarhis. It all started with the setting up of the Bhilai Steel Plant by the government in the nineteen fifties (Srinivasan, 1984). This was soon followed by various other projects like aluminium extraction plants, thermal power stations, cement plants and the mining on a massive scale of iron ore, bauxite, coal and limestone to provide the raw materials. All this involved displacement of rural people without commensurate increase in employment for them. These industrial plants and mines required for their operation and management relatively high skilled people who had to be brought in from outside and the local Chhattisgarhis, especially the adivasis, mostly got low paid casual employment or were left out totally from this process. Apart from these basic industries there was little downstream industrialisation to utilise their products. Instead the steel, aluminium, coal, cement and power were exported to Bhopal, Indore, Kolkata and Mumbai for further processing. The iron-ore mined from Bailadila in south Bastar is not even made into steel but is shipped raw to Japan without processing. A stunted industrial growth took place without any significant forward and backward linkages within the region that could create employment opportunities for a large number of people.

Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was a great proponent of planned industrial development. While inaugurating the first chemical fertilizer plant of the country in 1954 in Sindri in Bihar he had hailed it as being a temple of modern India and had gone on to say that India needed many more such temples (Nehru, 1958). The first and most important such modern temple in Chhattisgarh was the Bhilai Steel Plant. To meet the huge water requirements of this plant and its colony, which after some time could not be met from local sources in Durg district anymore, another temple had to be built - the Gangrel dam on the river Mahanadi in Raipur district. India has a long history of religions competing with each other to build places of worship and often the rulers have taken part in this activity with gusto producing some of the most breathtaking architecture of the world with the surplus extracted from the toiling poor. There are many instances also of the kings of one religion destroying the existing places of worship of another religion and building their own temples, mosques or churches on them. The modern temple building of Nehru too has followed this timeworn retrograde tradition. Throughout India for a period of four decades after independence, till this iniquitous practice was challenged and brought into question in a substantive manner for the first time by the NBA, rural communities, their lands and their temples were laid waste at the altars of modern development with little or no compensation and no worthwhile planned rehabilitation and resettlement (Fernandes & Paranjpye, 1997).

It may be mentioned as a relevant aside here that Nehru is also responsible for condoning a different kind of religious monument bashing which too has had deleterious consequences on the Indian polity. He set in motion a process that eventually led to the destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh by the Hindu fundamentalist organisations under the umbrella of the Sangh Parivar in 1992. When some Hindus installed a set of idols of Rama, Lakshman and Sita in the mosque on the night of December 22nd in 1949 despite the presence of a police picket there, the District Magistrate of Faizabad instead of removing these idols just sealed the doors of the mosque which till then had been under the control of the Muslims. The then Chief Minister of

Uttar Pradesh Govind Ballabh Pant and Nehru blew hot over this outrage in public but did not take the necessary executive decision to remove the idols and restore the status quo. Thus a new turn was given to the legal dispute that had been going on between the Muslims and the Hindus since the late nineteenth century regarding the possession of the site with the Hindus alleging that the Mughal emperor Babur had destroyed an earlier temple situated there and built this mosque (Tripathi, 1990). The mosque remained sealed till in 1986 the then Prime Minister, Nehru's grandson, Rajeev Gandhi ordered the gates to be opened so that the Hindus could go and offer prayers to the idols. Later things came to a climax in 1992 when with the Sangh Parivar hordes on the verge of demolishing the mosque another Congress party Prime Minister Narsimha Rao looked the other way and it was razed to the ground. This last event and its consequences have over the past decade and a half or so rent the socio-political fabric of the nation asunder with repeated Hindu-Muslim riots of a virulent kind, the most gruesome being the Gujarat riots of 2002 (Communalism Combat, 2002). Thus, whether in building destructive modern temples with much fanfare or in surreptitiously providing a convenient symbolic peg in Ayodhya on which the baggage of Hindu fundamentalism could be hung, Nehru's legacy conceals a thorny stem below the rose bud that he used to stick in his coat buttonhole to enamour all and sundry.

The submergence zone of the Gangrel dam had been a highly productive and self-sustaining agricultural region centered round the weekly market village of Chavar. The people of the region got the fascinating and addictive taste of the modern market economy for the first time when the construction of the dam started. The people were initially very happy because they could sell their rice to the labourers and officers of the construction company at higher prices than obtainable in the local market at Chavar or even in Dhamtari. They could also buy the newer consumer products that became available on the demand of the urban officers and staff of the construction company. Thus money began to play a much more important role than before and people were very happy oblivious of the fact that one day they would lose all their land. When the end came most people were devastated as they spent the little monetary compensation they got in consumption of various things, primarily liquor and lost their sources of livelihood. There was a temple in Chavar to the local Goddess Angar Moti, which means literally the ember pearl. The Goddess was believed to be very powerful and able to fulfill the wishes of her devotees. People used to come from far and wide to worship her and ask her for boons. Nevertheless this rural Goddess lost out to the new God of modern development and her temple was sacrificed along with her devotees at the altar of this new God. Old Hindu superstition dictated that unless some human sacrifice was made to the God when a new temple was built it could not become functional. Nehru had no compunction in demanding and getting similar sacrifices from thousands of people for his own temple building spree.

The rural people in Chhattisgarh have found a way out of the havoc caused by lopsided and destructive development by either resorting to making bidis, which are handmade cigarettes, or migrating to other states in search of employment. So far and wide do they go in search of employment that some Chhattisgarhi labourers had the misfortune of being killed by armed separatists in the northern insurgency prone state of Kashmir in 1999. Bidis are made by rolling tobacco inside leaves of the tendu tree and tying them with string. This is a widespread cottage industry carried out through a system of putting out whereby makers, mostly women, are supplied with the tendu leaves, tobacco and string by contractors and get paid by piece rate for the bidis they make. The tendu

leaves are also collected during the summer season by the rural poor on a piece rate basis. The bidi makers are totally at the mercy of the agents who act as middlemen on behalf of the bidi factory and supply the raw materials to them, collect the finished bidis and make the payment. Despite this the reality is that after all this exploitation the money earned from making bidis is much higher than the daily wages that can be earned as agricultural labourers (Rahul, 1999b).

Normally exchanging old things and getting new ones is a profitable exercise leading to greater productivity and happiness but such has not been so in the new temples for old deal brokered by Nehru in the case of poor rural Chhattisgarhis. The general run of Chhattisgarhis and especially the adivasis have suffered displacement and loss of livelihoods on a gargantuan scale. Naturally people have not readily swallowed Nehru's exhortation to "suffer in the interest of the country" (Nehru, op cit). There have been innumerable clashes between the people and the state over the ill effects of this perverse temple building, in which both the industrial workers and the peasant masses have been ruthlessly crushed. Bastar itself has witnessed a large number of such atrocities, the most gruesome being the murder of the king of Bastar, Pravir Chandra Bhanjdeo, and his adivasi supporters in his palace in Jagdalpur by the police in 1966 in one of the worst cases of callous extra-judicial mass killing of adivasis by the independent Indian state.

The adivasis of Bastar had been having a raw time ever since the suppression of the Bhoomkal rebellion earlier in 1910 and this increased with the vastly greater influx of non-adivasis into the region for various developmental activities. This influx took place mainly due to the resettlement of Bengali refugees from the erstwhile East Pakistan after independence and the initiation of the iron-ore mining project in Bailadila. The king of Bastar was an eccentric person who was opposed to the new order that came into force after independence in which the princes were deprived of their earlier powers and began exhorting the adivasis to disobey the new government. He would hold a daily durbar or audience in his palace and distribute currency notes of various denominations to the adivasis who gathered there. Apart from this he used his considerable influence as the head priest of the Danteshwari temple whose Goddess Kali had a big hold over the adivasi population to propitiate the Goddess in their favour in times of agricultural crises through "yagnas" or fire sacrifices. He became extremely popular as a result. Naturally this brought him into disfavour with the leaders of the new government and their colonial minded bureaucrats who wanted to establish their own legitimacy in the minds of the adivasis (Sundar, 1999).

The Madhya Pradesh Government deprived him of his estate in 1953 for his anti-government activities with the excuse that he would whittle it away through debauchery and charity. This prompted Bhanjdeo to increase his efforts at channelising the discontent of the adivasis against the state through the formation of a mass organisation in 1955 - Adivasi Kisan Mazdoor Sangh. Initially the Congress party made a compromise and decided to support him and his supporters for election as MLAs in 1957 and they won overwhelmingly. However, since even after this his estate was not restored to him he resigned and continued with his organisation of the adivasis against the state now under the name Adivasi Seva Dal. Disregarding warnings from the government he set up a parallel administration right down to the village level which campaigned against the economic and political power of the non-adivasi people who had come from outside and dominated the Congress party, the higher echelons of the bureaucracy and trade and commerce. The year 1960 saw an increase in activities of the Adivasi Seva Dal in the form

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of forcible take over of the land of non-advasis and also of government land. In a bid to strike some fear into the advasis the government brought in reinforcements of special armed police and threatened Bhanjdeo with de-recognition as ex-ruler and so also the loss of the Privy Purse that he was being given annually by the state for having acceded to the Indian Union at the time of independence. This only aggravated the situation and Bhanjdeo went to meet the Home Minister in Delhi and warn him that state violence against them and his de-recognition would leave the advasis of Bastar in turn with no alternative but to de-recognise the Madhya Pradesh Government.

The King was arrested on the way while returning to Bastar from this meeting in February 1961 under preventive detention provisions and sent to jail. Immediately the Advasi Seva Dal launched an agitation for his release and began chasing traders away from the weekly markets leading to confrontation with the police. On March 31st 1961 there was a major confrontation in the market village of Lohandiguda in which thirteen people were killed in unwarranted police firing and scores of others arrested and indicted for charges of armed rioting and attempt to murder. The Additional Sessions Judge of Jagdalpur later dismissed the case against those arrested concluding that there was no cause for the wanton firing resorted to by the police. Even though the state went on appealing perversely against it the High and Supreme Courts too upheld the lower court's decision thus putting their seal on the culpability of the administration. The Lohandiguda incident was to set the ball rolling for the final tragic act of rebellion of the advasis of Bastar in the nineteen sixties before they began to mobilise again two decades later under the leadership of the Naxalites.

Bhanjdeo was released from jail in April in 1961 and was given a rousing reception on his arrival in Jagdalpur. Thereafter he became even more strident in his demand for justice for the advasis, especially for action to be taken against the officials responsible for the Lohandiguda massacre. In the 1962 general elections six members of his organisation were elected as MLAs and one as the only MP from Bastar completely routing the Congress party. This was the time when the whole country was going through a food crisis due to successive failure of monsoons and in Bastar too the price of rice the staple had begun to increase. Thus the advasis led by Bhanjdeo began agitating for provision of rice at subsidised prices in sufficient quantity and this intensified as the situation deteriorated from year to year. The Central Government at that time had to import grains to tide over the crisis, which had assumed nationwide proportions. However, since the distribution of these food grains was a time consuming process and a backward and huge state like Madhya Pradesh faced severe logistical problems in early 1966 the state government imposed a levy of rice on the cultivators with the intention of trying to procure as much as possible at the local level within the districts and obviate the need for allotments from the Central Government, which were hard to come by.

This was rightly felt to be unjust by the advasis of Bastar who were anyway in a deficit situation. A massive movement started for the repeal of this levy and Bhanjdeo himself launched into a prolonged fast in February 1966. In the villages and markets people refused to give the levy and fought with the police to prevent this procurement. A remarkable fact about this struggle was the tremendous participation of women in the mass actions to prevent the procurement of the levy. There were innumerable rallies and demonstrations throughout the district against this unfair order. The government instead of bowing to the legitimate demands of the people brought in additional police forces with the intent of crushing the agitation and so set up the scene for the tragic end to a militant

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mass movement of the adivasis of Bastar. On March 25th 1966 a massive rally was planned in Jagdalpur and the people began collecting on the palace grounds armed with bows and arrows disregarding the prohibitory orders against public assembly that had been clamped by the administration. The inevitable skirmish, given the tinderbox situation, started between the adivasis and the police in the afternoon and as had happened before in the Lohandiguda incident it ended with the massacre of twelve people including the king in police firing.

The devastation of nature and the decimation of populations living in harmony with it has been a singular feature of modern industrial development and was kicked off after the Europeans began subordinating the peoples of the other four continents to facilitate their own industrial development through colonial plunder. This retrograde process of unsustainable exploitation of natural and human resources began with the setting foot of Christopher Columbus in the Bahamas in the West Indies in 1492 and so can be termed to have been set in motion with the "Columbian Encounter" (Turner & Butzer, 1992). Indeed this tradeoff between nature and the working masses on one side and industrial development on the other is so basic a feature of centralised modern industrial development that it takes place regardless of whether this is occurring in a capitalist economy or a socialist one. The horrifying Gulag Archipelago of labour concentration camps (Solzhenitsyn, 2002) and pollution of rivers and lakes in the Soviet Union was necessitated by the need for it to catch up in modern development with the Americans. The latter had themselves created a few lesser Gulags of their own at about the same time to turn their country into an industrial power as so poignantly portrayed by Steinbeck in his great novel "The Grapes of Wrath" (Steinbeck, 1969). The wholesale rape of Latin America, that still continues, of course provided the main resources for American industrial development (Castro, 1999). The British refined this process into an art in India and according to an estimate the contribution of the Indian tribute to the British gross domestic capital formation was between twenty-five to thirty-three percent in the crucial four decades from 1765 to 1804 when the industrial revolution was getting off the blocks in England (Patnaik, 1986). Nehru and his brigade of technologists and administrators carried on from where the British left off and kicked off a process of internal colonialism to finance lopsided modern development.

Nehru in his midnight speech on the occasion of independence had pompously announced - "Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny and the time now comes to redeem that pledge..... the task should not be considered to be finished till each and every Indian does not breathe the air of freedom, till his misery has not ended and all sufferings done away with" (Nehru, op cit). But like many other promises he failed to keep, this one too was trashed soon in the frenzy of his temple building, which required that the masses be pushed even deeper in poverty than they already were. So the many millions of people who have been displaced and continue to be booted out of their habitats without so much as a by your leave, were doomed from the start because that was their tryst with destiny as they were too illiterate to read even the large print not to talk of the devious fine print!

Devnath and his wife were hardworking and so were able to recover from the body blow of involuntary displacement by redeveloping their land and making it productive once again. This in spite of the fact that the increasing spread of mill made synthetic cloth had put paid to the supplementary source of livelihood that Devnath had from his weaving. Relief was momentary, however, as things were once again upset when Subhadra lost her

mother to a heart attack when she was thirteen years old. Her mother was a strict disciplinarian and was feared by all the children and even her husband. She used to run the household in an efficient manner and was the main reason behind its swift recovery from disaster. Her loss led to a new set of problems. Subhadra's eldest brother who had been living separately all these years because he did not want to be disciplined by his mother came back and demanded that he be given his share of the land and the house. He even beat up Devnath and forced him to accede having little regard for the fact that his father still had the responsibility of bringing up his youngest brother and sister and marrying them off.

Immediately the household responsibilities of her mother fell on Subhadra and she lost her girlhood to become an adult woman prematurely. She had to cook, wash utensils, wipe the mud floor regularly with cow dung and also help with the agricultural operations and all this had to be done on a smaller income than before. Even though her father helped with the housework this sudden increase in the load of work resulted in Subhadra being able to devote less time for her studies and failing in her class eight examinations that year. Devnath, however, insisted that she continue with her studies despite this setback because this was the only lifeline available in the circumstances out of the sea of troubles in which they were immersed. This was easier said than done as doing the entire house and fieldwork meant that she could not study much at home. The government school education system in India is such that it is possible to pass examinations just by doing some rudimentary learning by rote with a clandestine helping hand from the teachers during the answering of the question papers. So despite the entire extra house work Subhadra managed to scrape through her higher secondary board examinations in 1986 and join the increasing force of educated and unemployed young Chhattisgarhis.

Subhadra's elder brother had got a job immediately after passing out of school in the nineteen seventies because the still expanding state system and the provision for reservations in government jobs had created a need for educated dalit and adivasi people far exceeding the supply. However, by the time Subhadra entered the job market in the late nineteen eighties the structural adjustment policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were in place because the Indian Government had taken a loan to tide over a payments crisis. So the reverse process of withdrawal of the state from direct participation in the social and economic spheres, which used to be a mandatory condition imposed by the IMF for advancing loans to governments (Goldstein, 2000), had begun, limiting government job opportunities in the face of a rising number of applicants coming out of the school system. The future seemed bleak for her.

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Chapter 7 - Gandhism as the last resort of the Hapless

Subhadra did not want to marry and spend the rest of her life only as a homemaker. Her elder sister had earlier given up studies after class nine saying she wanted to get married instead. This was at a time in the late nineteen seventies when high school educated dalit women in Bastar could get government jobs at the drop of a hat. She had been married off to an employee in the National Mineral Development Corporation mines in Bailadilla in South Bastar. It later turned out that this man was a drunkard who already had a wife and was a virulent wife beater. Subhadra's family did not do anything to help her sister and so she had continued in an oppressive relationship bearing children and digesting abuses and beatings. Subhadra was scared stiff of getting into a similar situation. She disliked being beaten up and this was what most women had to put up with from their husbands. She wanted to get a job and live independently. However, things had changed considerably over the past decade and it was not possible to get a government job without giving hefty bribes. Her father obviously did not have the money and lacked the necessary creditworthiness to take a loan for such a heavy amount without mortgaging the little land they had.

So Subhadra too like many others in her village began rolling bidis to earn money. The single harvest from the land was just enough to provide food. Money had to be earned to provide for other needs such as clothes and travel. Her elder brother was not employed regularly and even if he was he did not contribute any money to the household. So Subhadra had to earn money by making bidis. One day they had an altercation about bearing the household expenses equally and at the end of it her brother slapped Subhadra. This was too much for Subhadra. She packed a few clothes and left immediately for Kodogaon village some ten kilometres away where her cousins stayed without informing anyone at home. There she did not tell anyone why she had come and just began working in their fields and staying there and of course rolling bidis. After some time her father arrived there and pleaded with her to come back but she refused saying that she would not come back to the house until she had begun earning money independently.

In Kodogaon she learnt that one of her nieces, who was the same age as her, was working with a Gandhian NGO, Prayog, in Raipur district. It was not a government job but it was a small step towards independence. Then one day she met Suddhu Kunjam who was a Gond adivasi and resident of the nearby village of Kilepar. Suddhu was working with the sub-centre that Prayog had established in Bastar. He was touring the villages to find youth who would be ready to attend the training programmes that were being conducted by Prayog at its main centre in the village Tilda in Raipur district. Earlier Suddhu had taken Subhadra's niece to one such training after which she had been selected to work in the organisation. Even though she did not understand what the training was for, the fact that in the event of being selected she would get a job of two hundred rupees a month was enough reason for Subhadra to opt to go to Tilda.

Gandhi was made of different stuff from Nehru. He was of a spiritual bent of mind and his moral reference point was the Bhagvad Gita which he first read, when he was in England studying to be a lawyer, in the English translation "The Song Celestial" by Edwin Arnold (Arnold, 1900). The Gita, which is a part of the great epic Mahabharata, is a very short poem that in lyrically appealing verses exhorts human beings to battle on against material adversities regardless of rewards in the relentless quest for spiritual truth. However, for the initial formulation of his socio-economic and political programmes Gandhi took inspiration from the works of two westerners - "Unto This Last" by John

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Ruskin (Ruskin, 1985) and "The Kingdom of God is Within You" by Leo Tolstoy (Tolstoy, 1985). Ruskin was a critic of Victorian materialism and industrialism and relied on an evangelical interpretation of Christianity to press for a more humane social system, which would use the surpluses gained from modern development to pull up the people at the bottom of society and create a level playing field for them. As opposed to the classical economists like Ricardo and Malthus he refused to accept that resources were scarce and instead worked from the proposition that they were abundant but were being disproportionately and inappropriately used and advocated that if need be some of the new industrial and urban development should be jettisoned because it clashed with nature and human weal.

The book gets its name from a parable in the Bible in which daily labourers are put to work throughout the day as and when there is an opportunity for them. At the end of the day all are paid the same wage. When some of the workers who have worked from the beginning protest, it is argued that the last of the workers was prepared to work the whole day and it was not his fault that he got an opportunity only at the end and so he too deserved the same wage. This is uncannily close to Marx's definition of Communism but the crucial difference lies in the fact that while Marx was a materialist and a proponent of a violent overthrow of the capitalist system, Ruskin was a spiritualist and so pitched for winning over the hearts of the unbelievers rather than burning them on the stake. As regards the devastation of nature, Marx had the same views as Ruskin but unlike the latter the former was an out and out votary of modern industrial development and so he downplayed this aspect expressing the hope that once communism was established the relationship between man and nature would stabilise (Benton, 1989). Tolstoy in his book written after his conversion to Christianity deplores the violence that is rampant in society because of the greed of human beings and makes a moving impassioned plea, with an eloquence that only such a great writer could have displayed, that the way out of the sea of troubles in which human beings found themselves was to become completely non-violent.

Gandhi gave up his legal practice in South Africa where he was then leading the struggle of the Indians after reading these books and set up the Phoenix Ashram to evolve a new way of life. The word "Sarvodaya" or the rise of all was coined for the name of the Gujarati translation of Ruskin's book. After this in 1909 Gandhi went to England and had debates with various people on social organisation, economic development and political methods. The main points of contention at that time were regarding rural versus urban industrial development and non-violent as opposed to violent means of political action. The outcome was a book written in the form of a dialogue between a sceptic and the author on the voyage back to South Africa in which he set out for the first time his thoughts on development, society and politics - "Hind Swaraj" (Gandhi, 1959). Hailed as the "Sarvodaya Manifesto" this work first of all critiques modern industrialism for the prominence it has given to greed, making human beings slaves of machines. Then it inveighs against the resultant change in the education imparted which has turned students away from sustainable occupations and instead trained them for professions based on greed. At the socio-political level this has resulted in a centralised system of governance to facilitate the exploitation of human beings and nature. This system is democratic and participative only on paper while in reality being controlled by the powerful classes.

Then the book goes on to propose an economic alternative based mainly on rural industries, especially the charkha or spinning wheel and handlooms to produce khadi or hand spun and woven cloth that will gainfully employ labour and a minimum of modern

industries and a socio-political alternative based on totally participative and largely self sufficient and autonomous village republics or panchayats. A political programme based on non-violence is proposed for achieving this. It is argued that a truly just society has to be non-violent in nature and to achieve it the means to be employed must also be non-violent. Civil disobedience and passive resistance relying on spiritual power instead of arms are suggested as the modes of action and given the name "Satyagraha". The aim of the satyagrahi or passive resister should be to bear repression passively so as to impress on the oppressor the immorality of his deeds and so win his heart over. An important part of the satyagrahi's programme would be to resist unjust laws through civil disobedience or non-cooperation.

The day before he was assassinated on January 30th 1948 Gandhi had drafted a resolution for discussion in the forthcoming meeting of the All India Congress Committee, which has come to be known as his last will and testament (Dhadda, 1997). In this he had put forward the radical idea that since independence had been achieved the Congress party had served its purpose and it should be disbanded and instead all the members should devote themselves for the rejuvenation of rural India where the life of the masses was weighed down by the burden of oppressive forces that were internal to Indian society. Gandhi had been bothered by this internal oppression even during the freedom struggle and so had set up many ashrams throughout India to carry out rural empowerment and reconstruction work. The adoption of a nationwide Sarvodayi programme of action after independence would have meant micro planning from the village or even hamlet upwards with the macro planning of the country as a whole to be done so as to be able to provide resources at the central level for the fulfilment of the village level micro plans. Something that Gandhi called an Oceanic Circle to counter the image of a pyramid that top down planning conveys. In the ocean the water moves out in waves from an epicentre, which is the most powerful and so also the village republic was projected as being the most powerful in Gandhian social dynamics.

The majority of the members of the Congress party under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru did not pay any heed to this proposal and went on to build further on the centralised state apparatus bequeathed by the British. As we have seen he chose the path of centralised industrial development to cater to the needs of the urban elite with the rural populace being crucified in the process instead of the bottom up rural reconstruction advocated by Gandhi. So it was only those who had already been engaged in rural reconstruction work in the many ashrams set up by Gandhi that continued to work on Gandhian principles under the leadership of Vinoba Bhave. At his suggestion a central body to coordinate the activities of all the Gandhian institutions was formed in 1949 and named "Sarva Seva Sangh". Nehru in an effort to get some legitimacy for his developmental efforts from the Gandhians sent a member of the Planning Commission in 1951 with a draft of the First Five Year National Development Plan to Vinoba Bhave for his comments. After going through the draft Vinoba opined that in a poor and populous country like India any plan should have as its priority the utilisation of its vast and cheap human resources which would lead to both the eradication of poverty and high savings and capital formation and he did not see any of this in the draft before him. Vinoba is reported to have said, " I have found only one useful thing in this bulky document. It is the pin holding it together. So I am taking out that useful thing and consigning the rest to the waste paper basket!" (Dhadda op cit, pp 6).

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One such rural reconstruction organisation was the Gandhi Ashram in Morena district in Northern Madhya Pradesh, which had been set up by S.N. Subbarao. Subbaraoji had launched a national youth project under which he toured the whole country holding camps to enthuse the youth to take part in rural reconstruction work. The man behind Prayog, P. V. Rajagopal, popularly known as Rajaji, hailed from an upper middle class family in Kerala and had once attended such a youth camp when he was in his teens. He had been so impressed that he had decided to devote his life to social work and joined Subbaraoji's Ashram in Morena. After some time he had set up the NGO Prayog in Tilda in Chhattisgarh which was then eastern Madhya Pradesh. Initially Prayog was involved in the standard Gandhian rural development work producing khadi cloth and other handicrafts with grants and marketing support from the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC), which was a support organisation within the government set up by Nehru to aid the Gandhian organisations in expiation for his sin of renouncing Gandhi's philosophy of development.

Things changed one fateful day in the mid nineteen eighties when during a visit to a village Rajaji found that the kamiyas or landless labourers who worked on the fields of the aghariyas or large landlords were in fact bonded to them for generations together because of some small debt that their forefathers might have taken. Investigations revealed that there were thousands of kamiyas in Raipur district while the local administration denied that they were bonded labourers. Rajaji got in touch with the district administration and also approached the appropriate authorities at the state level but the administration was loathe to even recognise the problem let alone take any action to free these bonded labourers. He then got other NGOs too to conduct surveys in their areas and on the basis of this filed a petition in the Supreme Court. This did the trick as the Supreme Court after hearing all the parties took the Raipur district administration to task for having neglected its basic duties and directed not only that the labourers be freed but that they be also rehabilitated in new occupations (Kumar, 1988). Such was the impact of this action that many more such cases came to light and a veritable movement of freeing bonded labourers in agriculture and in stone quarries began. This experience made a profound impact on Rajaji and drove home to him the need for political mobilisation to free the poor from oppression. Rural development work alone would not do he realised without mobilisation of the masses against exploitative economic and social relations. This required the services of numerous village level animators who had to be trained in the Gandhian theory and programme of social and political action for the amelioration of exploitation and poverty. This was the genesis of the training programmes being conducted by Prayog. There was also another side to the training. Bonded labourers once freed had to be rehabilitated and their families and children taken care of. So a Grameen Vikas Pratishthan or Village Development Institute was set up to provide training in alternative income generating skills and the village animators were also imparted training in running anganwadis or child care centres.

Subhadra went through this three month training and after that she along with twenty other young women were sent off to work in the villages of Saraipali Tehsil on the border with Orissa to work as village animators and also as anganwadi workers. When they were boarding the bus in Raipur they paid the coolies to climb up and put their iron trunks on the roof of the bus. But when they reached Saraipali they found that it was not much more than a village and there were no coolies there. The women were all wearing saris and so were ashamed to climb up and so there was a stalemate with the bus conductor

shouting at them to hurry up. Then Subhadra decided to throw all shame to the winds and tying the pallu of her sari firmly round her waste climbed up onto the roof of the bus and began handing down the trunks to the other women who climbed up half way. This was an enjoyable spectacle for the men at the bus stand in Saraipali and they all gathered round and geeked at them and passed comments. They were even more surprised when the women then put the trunks on their heads and began walking towards the village that had been chosen for them to stay in for a day or two before fanning out to their respective appointed villages. They sang songs as they went. There was a tradition in Chhattisgarh of travelling entertainers or damchaghas who would go from village to village displaying there acrobatic, dancing and singing skills and be welcomed very heartily by the villagers as they were sought after entertainers in rural areas before the advent of television, which put paid to their art. All the children along the route followed the young women shouting and singing along with them, thinking that they were damchaghas!

When they reached the village the headman showed them their halting place for the night, which was a hall adjacent to a temple of the Goddess Kali. Instead of a full meal the villagers gave them popped rice and fried groundnuts to eat. That is what they had to make do with and sleep for the night. In the middle of the night Subhadra woke up as there was a lot of commotion. One of the women had been possessed by the spirit of Goddess Kali and was swaying her head and singing songs in a trance. The other women were pouring water on her and making her smell cowdung smoke to abate her trance. This continued till dawn when finally the woman came out of her trance and fell asleep. Next day Subhadra went off again with her trunk on her head to the village of Bagaijor where she was to stay.

Her job was to run an anganwadi centre there for the small children, playing with them and also preparing a light breakfast and feeding them. She also had to hold meetings in the villages nearby with the adivasis and find out cases of bonded labour so as to be able to free them. The first task she did with aplomb. The adivasis were so poor that they used to send their children to the anganwadis for the breakfast that they would get. The games and songs too were attractive to the children so they would come in large numbers. But in the matter of identifying bonded labourers she hit a roadblock. There were bonded labourers but this area was far removed from the area where Rajaji had initially started his movement. The people had not heard of the victories won by Rajaji. They were sceptical of what Subhadra told them and did not want to risk losing what little employment they had by rebelling against the landlords. The landlords too came to know of Subhadra's campaign and though they did not threaten her because the Tehsildar in Saraipali had sanctioned her stay in the village, they did their level best to discourage their labourers from meeting and talking to her.

In the afternoons Subhadra had to go out to the nearby villages to hold meetings and read out news of various actions taken by Prayog from the monthly magazine published for the purpose called "Gaon Mitaan". The usual practice was to get the children together and make them play games and sing and dance. When a curious crowd of elders gathered to see what was going on, Subhadra would take out her copy of Gaon Mitaan and start reading out from it and engaging the listeners in conversation. She became so popular with the children that whenever she entered a village the children would gather around her shouting "Mitaan awat he, Mitaan awat he" - Mitaan is coming, Mitaan is coming. While the children would stay with her and play the elders would drift away when she tried to talk to them on the issues written about in the magazine. This was not surprising given that this area had not witnessed any political movement or NGO work previously. In those

days in the late nineteen eighties there were no panchayats or elected village bodies too and so in the absence of grassroots democracy the village elders held sway. These elders were both sceptical and suspicious of this bevy of young women who had suddenly descended on them with unfavourable winds of change.

Subhadra and her comrades were working on a salary of just two hundred rupees a month at that time. She used to eat a heavy breakfast with the children and only eat again in the evening after coming back from her tour of the villages to save on both time and money. If possible she would eat her dinner also in some villager's house! All the other young women too followed a similar routine. Once every week they would all gather in the central village where they had first spent a night to collect all the rations which were distributed from there after being brought from Saraipali. On one occasion when they had so gathered they woke up in the morning to find that a dog had eaten some amount of the jaggery that had been bought the day before. Jaggery was an essential ingredient of tea and they had no money left to buy some more. So the women argued that since the jaggery was to be used in tea any germs that may be there in it from the dog would be killed when they boiled the jaggery properly in the tea. Since there was no alternative, as they did not have any money to buy new jaggery to replace the dog-defiled jaggery, the women decided to use it to make tea. On hearing this one of the landlords commented disdainfully, "kutta ka prasad khake tuman ka samaj seva karbe" - what social work will you do after eating the leftovers of a dog!

After Nehru's emissary went back and told him of Vinoba's comment regarding the draft plan Nehru sent a telegram to Vinoba asking him to come and meet the full Planning Commission and tell them his views. Vinoba replied that he would come but he would travel to Delhi on foot. He said that his views were not important but those of the rural poor were and so on his way to Delhi he would talk to them and get their opinion on what kind of development path should be adopted. The meeting with the Planning Commission did not result in any constructive outcomes as can well be imagined but the walk to Delhi opened up a new programme for Vinoba. Thereafter he walked non-stop for thirteen years upto 1964. Early on in the course of this walk he was confronted with the acute problem of concentration of agricultural land in the hands of a few which was the main obstacle to rural development. Land reform legislation had been enacted but was not being implemented on the ground because of the power of the landed classes in the rural milieu. He felt that unless the landless masses were given title to land all talk of rural reconstruction would remain just that. He began mulling over a non-violent means to solve this intractable problem.

On 18th April 1951 he entered Pochampalli village in Nalgonda district of Andhra Pradesh which had been one of the nerve centres of the Communist Party of India led Telengana uprising against landlords which had just been quelled by severe police action. The dalits in the village came to him and said that they required only two acres of land per family, one dry and one irrigated to break out of their poverty. Vinoba then held a meeting with the upper castes in the village and asked them what the solution could be to this demand of the dalits. One of the landlords who was sitting with Vinoba at this time suddenly got up and said that he would donate a hundred acres of his own land for this purpose without any prompting. Thus began a veritable movement of land donation by landlords as Vinoba cited this example and began appealing to the hearts of the landed gentry asking them to donate land for distribution among the landless. This was the

genesis of the Bhoodan or land donation movement which thereafter became the mainstay of Vinoba's long march.

The immediate post-independence period saw many stalwarts of the freedom movement opt out of mainstream politics to pursue Gandhi's vision of the establishment of Gram Swaraj or village self rule. The most notable among these was Jayaprakash Narayan who had started off by being a communist and then a socialist before finally converting to Gandhism to become a committed Sarvodayi in 1954 and devoting himself to Vinoba's Bhoodan movement. There was thus a great vibrancy in the work of the Sarva Seva Sangh and it attracted many young men and women to its fold to work as village animators. Many years later Subhadra and I met up with one such worker who was then the caretaker of the ashram in Machla where we had taken refuge after leaving Alirajpur. Radheshyam Bohre, then in his late fifties, spoke with a sparkle in his eyes about the first decade and a half of work he had put in as a village animator of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi. The high point in his working life was when he accompanied Vinoba Bhave on his Bhoodan Yatra in the Malwa region in the nineteen sixties to get the landed gentry to donate their ceiling surplus lands for the purpose of redistribution to the landless.

The Bhoodan movement and the larger Gandhian programme, exemplary as they were, could not realise even a small bit of their potential as they were gradually pushed more and more to the periphery of the centralised parliamentary system which stressed on the concentration of resources on modern industrial development. So the leaders and workers in the Gandhian organisations too began losing their effectiveness after some time. The slide began immediately after the Bhoodan Yatra was completed. According to Bohre most of the lands that were announced as donated were never really redistributed and the owners retained control over them. The various sarvodayi organisations began losing their urge for grassroots mobilisation and instead concentrated on producing and selling handicrafts and khadi with the subsidies and grants provided by the KVIC. Field workers like himself were not only looked down upon but also discouraged from going out into the field. He said that many times in the late nineteen fifties and early nineteen sixties he had been offered government jobs as a teacher and patwari or land record official but had refused because he felt that he had a mission to accomplish. But after the euphoria of the Bhoodan Yatra subsided he found that grassroots mobilisation work was at a discount. The leaders of the Sarvodaya movement in Madhya Pradesh not only did not show any interest in bringing in fresh blood in the form of committed youth but on the contrary directed their own children into the mainstream job market to earn a good living.

The rot that had set in was deep and things came to a head when Jayaprakash Narayan launched his Sampurna Kranti Andolan in Bihar in 1974 to challenge the Congress party head on in a vintage mass Gandhian mobilisation against the state. There was a split down the middle within the Sarvodaya movement with some people supporting Narayan while most others headed by Vinoba against him. Vinoba at that time had assumed a "maun vrat" and had stopped speaking. He communicated only if very necessary by writing. Indira Gandhi appealed to him to prevail upon Jayaprakash Narayan to withdraw his agitation. Vinoba tried but Jayaprakash was adamant saying that things had gone too far and no compromise other than the dissolution of the Bihar legislative assembly was acceptable and so the whole Sarvodaya movement split. The leaders of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi in Madhya Pradesh too decided to go against Jayaprakash Narayan.

Strict orders were given to Bohre not to take part in any mobilisation in support of the Bihar movement. Disillusioned with all this Bohre resigned from the Gandhi Smarak

Nidhi to go back to his ancestral land in Khategaon and live the life of an ordinary farmer in 1975 even before the internal emergency was declared. He said he could have returned to his area of work and gone to jail but felt that it was useless, as society had drifted far from the Gandhian dream and Narayan's final attempt to improve things would not succeed. Only later after the lifting of emergency, Mahendrabhai had requested him to come to Machla to look after the ashram, which was without any caretaker. Machla was where he had received his first training as a Gandhian worker and so he felt some nostalgia for it and came back to bide his time there in 1978. But he found that things had changed drastically in the intervening two decades. When he had first come there as a teenager in the early nineteen fifties the place was thriving with activity. The Ashram was not only a khadi and village industries training centre but also the spearhead of a farmer's cooperative movement in which landless dalit farmers had been given the right to till ceiling surplus land through the formation of a commune. There were many bright young men from all over India who used to reside and work there. Gramodyog Vidyalaya, as the ashram was known, was to be a beacon for ushering in Gram Swaraj.

Within a few years the bright young people all left, some going abroad, and the cooperative movement too fell flat and the land was instead distributed among the farmers to be tilled by them on their own. The Vidyalaya found it difficult to get students as well as trainers and so after some time its training programmes were abandoned. By the early nineteen seventies all work had stopped and its empty buildings were mute witnesses to the marginalisation of Gandhian thought and practice in independent India. Bohre said that he felt like the caretaker of a graveyard but yet had agreed to become one because it reminded him of the early years of promise when things had seemed so rosy. He lamented that while in his own youth Gandhian work was greatly sought after and many youth would give up lucrative career prospects to join the Sarvodaya movement now only those who had no other employment option chose to follow Gandhi's path like Subhadra had done. "Majboori ka naam Gandhi hai", he said, Gandhism is the last resort of the hapless.

This is why the revival of the Sarvodaya movement in Madhya Pradesh brought about by Rajaji, through his NGO Prayog, was acclaimed by many senior Gandhians across the country as a harking back to the halcyon days of old. The hundreds of young animators that he had trained including a whole host of women like Subhadra were fanning out all over rural Madhya Pradesh creating a new movement for rural reconstruction and empowerment. These youth had no idea of doing social work of any kind and it was only during the training programme that they learnt about this. The consequences were sometimes comical as we have seen and sometimes tragic as there was little security for the young women when they stayed alone in the villages trusting their hosts. In a few cases some young women were raped. Nevertheless, these young people did make some impact in the initial years as the lethargic administration had to sit up and take notice of the issues being raised by them.

Subhadra's sojourn in Saraipali was short lived and she had to leave soon. The Central Social Welfare Board of the Government of India, which had been funding the team of women of which Subhadra was a part, stopped doing so after one year and so they had to pack up their trunks, put them on their heads and once again wend their way back to Tilda. There most of the others were told to go back home but Subhadra and some others were told that they were to proceed to Durg district where work was being started anew in a different area.

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Chapter 8 - Mother Chhattisgarh is Calling

Subhadra took up residence in the house of a Gond adivasi in an interior village, Gotitola, in the Lohara Block of Durg district in the winter of 1989. She was part of a group of four young women who were to mobilise the villagers to get organised and fight for their rights. All these women used to live in separate villages and roam the jungles alone to visit the villages. It was difficult work walking through the dense jungles alone and then trying to convince people about the need to organise. During the training it had been explained to Subhadra through lectures and group work how people had to be made aware of their rights and then mobilised to launch mass actions to secure them. In reality, however, Subhadra found that the people already knew their rights but were apprehensive of the various problems that could arise due to the opposition of the oppressors in the event of a mass mobilisation to secure them. So they were extremely circumspect about launching anything that might involve confrontation with them and the state authorities and obviously did not have any faith in the ability of Subhadra to provide effective leadership. As we have seen this is the same problem of credibility that a much more seasoned activist like Khemraj had faced earlier. Thus even after spending four months the young women could not make any progress towards building up a mass movement.

Subhadra's village was about ten kilometers away from the town of Dalli, which was the nerve centre of the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha (CMM). The CMM had by then completed more than a decade of struggle and become a legend in the field of alternative social movements in India. Naturally Subhadra began attending the programmes of this organisation so as to learn something more about the techniques of mass organisation and also to gain inspiration from its success. The Morcha had had its beginnings in the fight against some more unholy acts done to set up the first modern temple of Chhattisgarh. It started as a trade union, Chhattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh in 1977 in the struggles of adivasi contract workers at the captive iron-ore mines of the Bhilai Steel Plant at Dalli demanding better working conditions and wages. The plant management, instead of employing regular workers and paying them decent wages had adopted the abhorrent practice of hiring labourers through contractors at a cheap rate. A decade long struggle was waged from the mid nineteen seventies till the mid nineteen eighties during which many workers laid down their lives in police firing and attacks by goons of labour contractors while taking part in strikes. Finally the workers got their rights acknowledged by the Bhilai Steel Plant management.

The unique feature of this struggle was that it broke out of the narrow confines of standard trade unionism and encompassed the whole lives of its members. Campaigns were carried out against the two most debilitating problems that beset poor labourers in India - alcoholism and debt bondage to usurious moneylenders. Women were mobilised both to stop the brewing and selling of liquor and to form micro-credit groups so as to alleviate these problems. They also began addressing the problems of patriarchal oppression. A hospital was set up with contributions from the members that apart from providing treatment also developed a community health programme to increase health awareness. On the cultural front, research was conducted to unearth instances of people's struggles in the history of Chhattisgarh that had been glossed over by the mainstream historians. New literature in the form of songs and plays was created and disseminated through repertory troupes to project a positive alternate image of Chhattisgarh that could stand up to the modern urban culture being continually propagated through the mainstream media. The Morcha inspired by its leader Shankar Guha Niyogi began to fan out among

the nearby villages and also the ancillary industrial units in and around Bhilai from the late nineteen eighties.

The Morcha was formed in 1982 when the prevailing forms of development and governance were pinpointed as the root causes of all the ills of the people of Chhattisgarh. Not only did these bypass the livelihood interests of the majority but was also destructive of the environment. The industrial area in Bhilai was marked as the local source of most of this mal-development. Thus it was realised that any movement for thoroughgoing change in the Chhattisgarh region could not succeed without involving the labouring masses there. A four-pronged strategy was worked out. The thrust in the industrial regions would have to be to try and get labour and environmental laws implemented. In the villages the stress would have to be on reviving the traditional community spirit and the environment friendly agricultural activities that went with it. Simultaneously steps would have to be taken to get a better deal for farmers in the agricultural input and product markets where traders were invariably cheating them. The third front would have to be against the corrupt and repressive bureaucracy which had been inherited from the British and which was totally insensitive to the needs of the people. Finally an ideological and cultural onslaught would have to be launched against modern industrial and agricultural development by involving the intelligentsia. An alternative vision of a free Chhattisgarh would have to be formulated that was radically different from that of the urban Indian elite. This last was extremely important, as the ideology of modern development had so hegemonised the masses that it was hard to initiate mass action to challenge it.

Niyogi also realised that it was impossible for the Morcha to fight the state in such a comprehensive manner on its own and so went out of his way to forge a broader front with other mass organisations. At that point of time in 1989 there were a number of people's movements underway in Madhya Pradesh. The various mass organisations of the affected people of the Bhopal gas tragedy had forced the government to make its welfare activities more transparent and responsive to the needs of the people. Medha Patkar and her colleagues of the Narmada Bachao Andolan were carrying out a militant struggle against the building of large dams on the Narmada River. Rajaji had set in motion the process of mobilisation of adivasis and peasants all over the state to demand their basic rights, which was to later evolve into the mass organisation Ekta Parishad of which Subhadra was a part. Finally the Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangath in Alirajpur and the Kisan Adivasi Sangathan in Hoshangabad had established themselves as forces to reckon with as adivasi mass organisations that had brought into focus the adivasis' right to a livelihood in accordance with their culturally and economically distinct lifestyles. The mood was very upbeat among all these organisations and together they did hold promise of better things to come at that point of time.

1989 in fact is a watershed year in the history of the environmental mass movements in India because on September 28th the first ever national rally and mass meeting against destructive development was held in the small town of Harsud in Madhya Pradesh which was attended by thousands of people and ended with the resolve to launch a broadbased nationwide mass movement for people centred development and governance. The next day an even bigger mobilisation was witnessed in Raipur under the aegis of the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha for the establishment of a dream Chhattisgarh state, which would secure the interests of its poor citizens. The struggles conducted by the CMM had served to strengthen their basic understanding that just the creation of a separate state of Chhattisgarh without a radical change in the form of development and governance was not

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going to bring about an improvement in the lives of most of the people. Given the prevalence of a mass consumerist culture popularised by television that had enamoured both urban middle and lower classes the environmentalist challenge perforce had to be mounted in rural areas. The peasants and not the industrial workers would have to be the vanguard of the environmentalist mass movements.

The Morcha had consequently intensified its participation in the politics of the village panchayats so as to strike at centralisation from below. These panchayats have lost their traditional character and have become a microcosm of the larger political arena that is beset by corruption and act as nurseries for the breeding of cadres for the mainstream political parties. The Morcha had begun a process of reversing this trend by reinvigorating the traditional consensus based panchayat as a preliminary stage in its battle against the present over-centralised system. Kautilya, the famous political analyst and statesman of ancient India, had advised Chandragupta, the first great all Indian emperor who set up the Maurya dynasty, who was despondent after having been defeated in battle by the powerful king Nanda early on in his career, that it was foolish to plunge one's hand into the centre of a bowl of hot rice and that he should instead pick the cooler grains on the side first (Sharmasastri, 1924). The Morcha had reaped rich dividends as a consequence of this sage strategy as its adivasi leader Janaklal Thakur had been able to win the Dondi-Lohara assembly seat of the Madhya Pradesh Legislature in 1985. The CMM was unique in that it combined "sangharsh" - economic and political struggles with "nirman" - developmental and cultural renewal activities, functioning democratically under a collective leadership which had a clear political vision of an alternative social set up and the means to achieve it (Sadgopal & Namra, 1993). Phaguram, a peasant leader of the Morcha and a folk singer who has created many revolutionary new songs, which have become extremely popular, reflected this bouyant mood of the time in his song -

"Chhattisgarh dai ke have ga gohaar

Sabho jan milke shoshan la tarbo"

"Mother Chhattisgarh is calling all her children,

Join together and overthrow the exploitative burden."

Subhadra drew a lot of inspiration from the CMM's struggles but her own attempt at setting up an organisation did not get anywhere. Moreover a new problem cropped up. Subhadra suggested to the man who was the supervisor of their group of women workers that they should be allowed to stay and work together in pairs as it was very difficult to work alone given the dense jungles in the area and the great distances which had to be covered either by foot or by bicycle. There was always the feeling of insecurity that follows young single women like a shadow in this highly patriarchal society of ours. Every now and then there would be the sad news that some woman activist of Prayog had been raped. If the people in the villages had listened to what she was saying at least there would have been some satisfaction. But in all the months of travelling from village to village she had not been able to convince anyone to attend meetings to decide on some course of action. When she came back in the evening there was no one she could share her frustrations with. The man not only vetoed this proposal but also warned Subhadra that she would not get her pay unless she covered a certain amount of villages every month.

She had to work very hard in order to fulfil this order and fell ill as a consequence from the physical effort and the mental tension. This is the perennial problem for activists working among people trying to mobilise them to fight for their rights. The people treat

these activists and their organisations as "bin pende ka lota" meaning a round vessel without a stand at the bottom to keep it straight in the event of a push from oppressors or the state. So used have people got to the system of patronage practised by mainstream political parties that they have lost faith in themselves and their own ability to fight. To expect them to follow the lead of a young twenty something girl in fighting the state and the local vested interests was a little too much. Subhadra thought that if things continued like this she would not survive let alone be in a position to earn any money and do any social work. So she gave up her job and went back to Jepra in the spring of 1990.

Jepra could not provide solace to Subhadra. Things had changed drastically in the year since she had left. Her father did not farm his land anymore as he was too old to work in the fields and her brother was not interested in doing so. So the land had been given out on rent to one of their kin. There was thus nothing to do in Jepra. Her brother was desperately trying to land some job or other, had failed to do so and was very despondent. He was also very ill and lacked the money to get himself treated. Her father pleaded with Subhadra that she should go out in search of employment once again as there was no future in the village. He felt helpless that he could not do anything to help her but expressed the belief that she had it in her to make it good in the outside world and should not lose heart so quickly in the face of initial difficulties.

Subhadra set off once again after a month or so for Tilda to meet Rajaji and see if she could start working again in some other area. Rajaji was effusive in his welcome and scolded her for having gone back to her home without even meeting him. He told her that the organisational work was to be begun anew in the western Madhya Pradesh region and if she liked Subhadra could go and start the work there. She would have a free hand he said and there would not be any problems arising from somebody else bossing over her. This was a very good offer and she immediately accepted it despite having some inner misgivings about having to go to an unknown area and shoulder the immense responsibility of setting up the organisation there.

So in the hot dry summer of 1990 Subhadra too hit the oft trodden migrant's trail out of Chhattisgarh and took the Chhattisgarh Express train to head for Bhopal. There she met for the first time one of the stalwart Gandhian workers of Madhya Pradesh Ramchandra Bhargava. Little did she know then that one day he and his wife Rukmani would act as her surrogate parents for the purpose of her court marriage with me. Bhargavji was in charge of the Gandhi Bhavan in Bhopal and also some other NGOs. Though he or his organisations do not take part in any agitational activities he always keeps his doors open for activists and organisations that do. That is why the Gandhi Bhavan in Bhopal has been the venue for many important national and state level meetings of the environmentalists. Since it is located very close to the legislative assembly, the Chief Minister's residence and the Governor's residence it is a convenient assembly point for launching agitations in Bhopal. When Rajaji had expressed a desire to expand his organisational work to the western Madhya Pradesh region to Bhargavji, he had enthusiastically agreed to help. He consulted Mahendrabhai and organised a meeting of Gandhians working in the region in the Ashram of the Sarvodaya Shikshan Samiti in Machla.

There for the first time Subhadra met two other Gandhian stalwarts Mahendra Jain known popularly as Mahendrabhai who was the president of the the NGO that ran the ashram at Machla and Kashinath Trivedi. Mahehdrabhai had joined the Gandhian Sarvodaya movement when in his teens and decided to devote his life to people oriented

journalism. He had set up the Sarvodaya Press Service and through it he disseminated articles dealing with poor people's concerns to hundreds of magazines and newspapers. He was jailed for eighteen months during the emergency declared by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975 to stifle Jayaprakash Narayan's Sampurna Kranti Andolan. His office cum residence in Indore had become a hub for the various mass movements afoot in the region. Kashinathji was a veteran Gandhian who had fought valiantly during the freedom struggle and been to jail many times. He had devoted his time after independence to developing an alternative education system for the rural poor and especially the adivasis. He had set up an ashram in village Tavlai in Dhar district where a residential school for adivasi children was being run.

It was decided in the meeting that work would be started in the Dahi Block of Dhar district, which had remained relatively untouched by both the Gandhians and also the new breed of NGOs and social movements. This block was ideally situated because in the adjacent blocks of Sondwa in Jhabua district and Kukshi in Dhar district the Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangath and the Narmada Bachao Andolan were very active and would be able to provide Subhadra good support. She went to the ashram in Tavlai. There were children in the school from Dahi block and it was felt that they would be the right people to introduce Subhadra to the area and the people. So Subhadra accompanied by a few teenaged adivasi students then went to the villages of Dahi block. Everything had been so hectic and exciting over the past few days that she had not had the time earlier to notice the change in the natural ambience. But walking in the blistering heat of summer through the countryside she was suddenly confronted by the drastic difference. The Nimar region had become heavily denuded over the years and there were barren hills all around which increased the heat. This was in stark contrast to Chhattisgarh, which because of its tanks and irrigation canals and still extant forests remained green even in summer. The other change was in the food. Subhadra had been used to eating rice all her life. But here she had to eat thick maize rotis. The maize was of a hybrid variety and white in colour as against the yellow indigenous maize that was available in Chhattisgarh and also tasted bland.

One thing put her off very much. The approach road to the villages was invariably flanked by human excreta and stank like anything. Instead of going to the fields the people would defecate on the sides of the roads. On top of this she learned that the Bhilala adivasis do not wash themselves with water after defecation and instead use stones to wipe their anuses clean. She learnt that the Bhilalas traditionally believed that washing their anuses was equivalent to washing their fortunes, however inconsequential they may be, away with the stools! The Bhilalas also bathed on an average once a week given the great shortage of water. So both defecating and bathing were challenging activities for her. She had to spend some time searching around for a can in which to take water for washing before she could go to relieve herself. Similarly, bathing became an elaborate ritual, as water had to be fetched from a handpump or a dugwell, which might be as much as a kilometre away. Chhattisgarhis always take a bath before having their lunch by taking a dip in the nearest pond. She learnt the hard way like I had done earlier that living and working among the Bhils meant renouncing the transient pleasure of regular bathing.

The block was populated mostly by Bhilala adivasis. Only some of the villages like the market village of Dahi from which the block got its name had a substantial number of non-adivasis. The preliminary survey revealed to Subhadra a much higher level of illiteracy and lack of awareness than in Chhattisgarh but also a greater willingness to listen

to what she had to say about battling corruption through organised mass actions. She toured the whole block and secured the acquiescence of twenty households, which were to host the field workers who would come later. She was very happy because at last she seemed to be making some headway. There is the story of an activist having gone to a village to address a meeting only to find that there were just two people there. Undaunted the activist launched into his speech and in the end thanked the two listeners for having attended the meeting and listened to him so eagerly. The two people said that they had perforce to be present there because the carpet on which the activist had stood and given his speech belonged to them and they could not go away with it until he had finished! Great happiness warms the heart of an activist, therefore, when people assemble in good numbers in meetings to listen to what is being said. So despite the alien climate, culture and food, Subhadra spent a very satisfying fortnight in Dahi and went back to Tilda after having arranged everything for the start of organisational work.

A training and selection camp had been organised in Tilda for the recruitment of activists to work in the various new areas in which mass organisations were to be set up including Dahi. Subhadra was now senior enough to be one of the trainers and selectors. Twenty people were selected and they came along with Subhadra to Dahi and took up their residence in the villages that had been pinpointed earlier. Soon these young people were able to garner support among the local adivasis and people began to approach local authorities making various demands. Like in the neighbouring Sondwa block here too there was a nexus between the traditional village patels, mainstream political party functionaries and the bureaucracy, that ensured that corruption reigned supreme. Since people had already heard of the exploits of the KMCS and NBA in challenging this oppressive nexus in nearby areas they associated these new activists in their areas with these organisations and began responding to their exhortations. They were not "bin pende ke lote" anymore. Complaints were filed against officials who had taken bribes from the adivasis. Rajaji on hearing of the positive response decided to hold one of his training camps for the local people.

This was an honour for Subhadra. Nowhere else had a local training camp been held so soon after the launching of operations because normally the people would be late in responding to the overtures of the new activists. A training camp takes a lot of organising. But in this case there was an added problem that had to be taken care of. One of the basic tenets of Gandhian social work is that of inculcating cleanliness, especially the awareness of sanitation, among the people. This arose from the fact that in traditional Hindu society the responsibility for cleaning the latrines was that of a particular caste which was branded as untouchable. Gandhi in an attempt to free these castes called them Harijans or the children of God and made it compulsory for his followers to clean latrines in villages. In this way Gandhi hoped that he would be able to bring moral pressure on the upper castes to either clean the latrines themselves or install hygienic water washed latrines and waste disposal systems like septic tanks. So there would be periodic campaigns in which Sarvodayis would go around cleaning latrines for a week instead of the traditional untouchable castes.

Thus the existence of a clean and hygienic village ambience was the acid test of successful Gandhian mobilisation. And the first thing Rajaji would notice on coming to the village where the camp was to be organised would be the excreta and its stench on the side of the road and he would conclude that the activists had failed in one of their basic responsibilities. Since the people of the village were hardly bothered about this and were

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unlikely to participate in a cleaning drive so soon after their induction into Gandhism, the burden of cleaning the road fell on the activists. So Subhadra and her team set about with shovels and baskets and towels tied round their faces cleaning all the excreta on the morning the camp was to begin after the village people had duly relieved themselves. When Rajaji arrived the village was spic and span and every one was smiling from ear to ear and breathing stench free air.

The camp went off successfully with attendance not only by local people but also by people and activists from the neighbouring districts associated with the NBA and the KMCS. A whole new enthusiastic cadre of adivasi youth was inspired to work for their community. However, before work could be begun in earnest in Dahi Block a much more crucial battle was about to begin in the struggle to save the Narmada which had to be supported first. The construction of the Sardar Sarovar dam had reached the bed level with the foundation work having been completed. So it was imperative for the NBA to force the stoppage of the work at this stage permanently before construction began on the superstructure of the dam. A massive long march from Barwani in Nimar in Madhya Pradesh to the dam site at Kevadia in Gujarat ending in an indefinite sit in there was planned with the intention of forcing the government to scrap the dam altogether. This required massive mobilisation of people and the NBA requested Rajaji to spare his Dahi team of activists for a month to help in this mobilisation. So it was that Subhadra and her co-workers went off to Nimar to mobilise people for the "Sangharsh Yatra" or struggle march of the NBA.

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Chapter 9 - Once Turbulent Flowed the Narmada

There used to be a place in Sirkhiri village on the banks of the Narmada in Alirajpur tehsil, before it got submerged by the Sardar Sarovar dam, where the river used to flow through a gorge that was just twenty metres or so wide between 30 metre high escarpments on both sides. The adivasis had a beautiful name for it - Helkaria. Easily the most majestic sight I have witnessed of the might of mother nature is that of the river in spate during the monsoons thundering through this gorge, the water tossing up in huge scary waves as it buffeted from escarpment to escarpment. A turbulent image that could humble even the most arrogant of persons. That is how the place got its Bhili name Helkaria meaning tossing from side to side. Today all is calm signifying that this mighty river has been tamed. But for about a decade from the late nineteen eighties to the late nineteen nineties the NBA fought hard to retain the Narmada's pristine glory in a struggle that despite its later inevitable dissipation has created many landmarks in the history of mass environmentalism in this country and worldwide.

When I first came to Alirajpur the construction of the main part of the Sardar Sarovar dam on the riverbed was in limbo held up by the lack of a clearance from the Ministry of Environment and Forests of the Government of India. Indeed the whole history of the dam is replete with delays due to such bizarre happenings that it can verily be said that too many engineering cooks spoil the natural broth of a river. When Nehru, the obsessive modern temple builder, laid the foundation stone of the dam in 1961 at Navagam in the state of Gujarat the plan was to build the dam in two stages. The first stage was to have a Full Reservoir Level of 162 feet that would submerge only villages in the states of Gujarat and Maharashtra but not those upstream in the state of Madhya Pradesh (Paranjpye, 1990). However, later, prodded on by its engineers, the Gujarat Government envisioned a much more grandiose dam with a Full Reservoir Level of 425 feet that would enable it to utilise the flows of the river more fully and irrigate dry areas as far as Kutch in the north of Gujarat. But this increase in the height of the Navagam dam, as it was known at the time, meant that it would affect the operation of a dam that the Madhya Pradesh Government proposed to build at Jalsindhi and also submerge villages and land in Madhya Pradesh. Urged on by the engineers on both sides disputes arose between the two states and to resolve these the Central Government constituted an expert committee, which was directed to take the whole Narmada basin into consideration for deciding on the structures required to utilise its waters. This committee submitted its report in 1965 suggesting the construction of a number of dams on the river and its tributaries and giving their tentative heights including the one at Navagam. While the Gujarat Government accepted the committee's recommendations the Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra Governments, once again at the behest of their engineers, did not. There were many parleys and meetings for two years after this but the differences could not be resolved. Ultimately in 1968 the Gujarat Government invoked the provisions of the Inter-State Water Disputes Act 1956 and moved the Government of India to appoint a tribunal to resolve matters. In the meantime the state of Rajasthan, not to be left out of the sweepstakes, had also staked a claim to the waters of the Narmada even though it was not a basin state. So in 1969 The Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal (NWDT) was constituted to go into all the contentions of the four states regarding the use of the waters of the Narmada.

The NWDT came out with an initial order in 1971 in which it fixed the utilisable flow of the river at seventy five per cent dependability to be 22.22 million acre-feet and directed that it should be apportioned between the states of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh while the state of Rajasthan not being a basin state should not get any benefits. The

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Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh Governments were dissatisfied with this judgment on various counts and so they moved the Supreme Court against it and got the proceedings of the NWDT stayed. Once again parleys and meetings began and finally in 1974 an agreement was reached that the utilisable flow in the Narmada at seventy five per cent dependability would be 28 million acre-feet of which Maharashtra would get 0.5 million acre-feet and Rajasthan 0.25 million acre-feet. The NWDT would have to decide on the allocation of the remaining 27.25 million acre-feet between Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, the height of the Navagam dam in Gujarat and the height of the irrigation off take canal. After much bickering for nearly four years, mainly arising from the fact that the states inflated their claims regarding the irrigation and power benefits that should accrue to them and deflated the costs that they would have to bear, the NWDT came out with its final award in 1978. Gujarat was apportioned 9 million acre-feet of the flow while Madhya Pradesh got the remaining 18.25. The height of the Navagam dam, which had by then come to be named the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) was fixed at 455 feet and the height of the off take canal at 300 feet. The costs and benefits of the power to be generated also were apportioned between the three states.

In a peculiar topsy-turvy denouement this resulted in the planning of the use of Narmada waters having to be done from downstream upwards instead of vice versa, as environmental logic would have suggested. The height of 455 feet for the SSP had to be fixed to allow Gujarat to draw its allotment of 9 million acre-feet of water. Since the reservoir to be created by the SSP was not capable of storing the whole of this water another mega dam, 860 feet in height, was planned upstream at Punasa, which later came to be called the Indira Sagar Project (ISP). This dam, which has now been completed, has the biggest reservoir in the country. Water was to be released from this dam and then stored in between in two more dams at Omkareshwar and Maheshwar on its way to the SSP. Another dam was to be built at Bargi to take advantage of the flow upstream of the Punasa dam. The heights of all these other dams were also calculated so as to be able to use the 18.25 million acre-feet that had been allotted to Madhya Pradesh. In reality the estimation of the flow of a river is a dicey game based on the river run-off that is recorded every year at various measuring stations on the river. Different experts generally come out with different estimates based on the same set of data. This is what has happened with the Narmada also. The value of 28 million acre-feet finally decided on in 1974 was more a political decision than a technical one. Current estimates put the actual flow at seventy five per cent dependability at 22.69 million acre-feet, which is closer to the value that the NWDT had arrived at in 1971. The extra flow value was necessitated to accommodate the exaggerated irrigation and power demands that were projected by the engineers involved and has led to an over design of all the dams. The Bhakra dam on the river Sutlej in Himachal Pradesh, another and perhaps the most famous of Nehru's modern temples, also suffers from a similar over design as in that case there were not just the states within the country that were quarrelling but the two nations of India and Pakistan (Dharmadhikary, 2005). Invariably this kind of over design based on inflated demands for the waters of a river, more than its actual available flow, leads on later to more disputes between states as has now become rampant between Punjab, Delhi and Haryana over the waters of the Jamuna, Sutlej, Ravi and Beas rivers and between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu over the waters of the Cauvery river. One can thus safely assume that the same fate will befall the Narmada too in a few years time.

The proper way to go about managing the surface and sub-surface water flows in a river basin is to start from the ridges of the topmost micro-watersheds that constitute the catchment of the river and then work down to the river itself. It is economically much cheaper and environmentally much safer to do this and big dams should only be built to

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service the needs that cannot be met through in situ water conservation and extraction. However, since this decentralised water management requires very simple technology that has been around for thousands of years from the time of the ancient Harappan civilisation (Agrawal & Narain, 1997) it does not appeal to the engineers and people like Nehru who like to think big and spend big even if on borrowed money. "Rhinang krittang ghritang pibet" - borrow and drink clarified butter as the ancient Indian saying goes. Such hugely over designed dams create serious problems of submergence of forests rich in bio-diversity and communities rich in cultural diversity. There is no money left after building the dams, canals and powerhouses to compensate for these environmental and social costs and these have to be borne by the people displaced. No wonder then that Nehru had to repeatedly use his rhetorical abilities in urging the oustees to suffer in the interests of the country. Shrewd as he was, he cleverly used the religious symbolism of temples and sacrifices to delude a populace that was deeply bound in religious superstition, regardless of its religion, caste and class, into blindly following the path of destructive modern development. Even today all public projects start with a religious "bhoomi puja" ceremony to propitiate the Gods despite the Indian state constitutionally being a secular one.

Nevertheless, the great thing about the NWDT award is that it has detailed and very good provisions for the rehabilitation and resettlement of the oustees of the dam on the principle of land for land as compensation, a first for this country because in earlier dams like the one at Bhakra over the Sutlej river in Himachal Pradesh (Dharmadhikary, op cit) the oustees had been given short monetary shrift and mostly left to their own devices, as has been borne out by Subhadra's own fate. Thus it went beyond the limited framework of the Land Acquisition Act, which only provides for monetary compensation in accordance with prevailing market rates of land in a particular area. Typically in adivasi areas the market rates for land do not reflect the immense value that it has for the adivasis' livelihoods and so they get palmed off with pittances and become destitutes. So the only positive outcome of the dogfight that had ensued between the states over the apportioning of the costs and benefits of the SSP was the recognition of the important legal principle of land for land as compensation.

The Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra Governments fought for and won exemplary rehabilitation provisions, the costs of which were to be borne by the Gujarat Government. Each adult son was to get a minimum of two hectares of irrigated land and villages were to be resettled together in one place as a community with all civic amenities like parks, roads, electricity and drinking water. All people who were to lose more than twenty five per cent of their land were to be so compensated and the determination of this submergence would have to be according to the backwater level which increases with distance upstream from the dam. There were some drawbacks like no provision for landless and encroacher families and the unique nature of the adivasis' relationship to their natural habitat but overall it was vastly better than anything that had existed previously (NWDT, 1978). Later on when the NBA went to the Supreme Court then it was these solid legal provisions more than all the arguments and facts marshalled by the NBA regarding the negative environmental and economic fallout that formed the core on which the construction of the dam could be stayed and delayed for over a decade.

The World Bank sent a review team in 1978 to assess the application for a loan for the SSP made by the Government of Gujarat immediately after the NWDT award. The review team made suggestions for the conduct of various environmental and technical studies and also sanctioned a preliminary loan to the Gujarat Government for preparing a detailed project plan. Finally in 1985 an agreement was reached between the World Bank and the Gujarat

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Government for the sanction of the loan. The novel feature of this agreement again like the NWDT award was its stress on proper rehabilitation. It even went one step further and stipulated that even landless and encroacher oustees would have to be provided land as compensation. A separate loan was sanctioned for the rehabilitation component to make sure that the rehabilitation of the oustees was not sacrificed on the plea of lack of funds. Finally there was a conditionality that was to prove crucial later on in the struggle to stop the World Bank funding - the withholding of funding if the rehabilitation pre-conditions were not fulfilled according to schedule (World Bank, 1985). The Japanese Government too riding piggyback on the World Bank's approval sanctioned a tied loan for the purchase of the hydroelectric power generating turbines from Sumitomo Corporation.

In 1980 the Forest Conservation Act was enacted by the Central Government to control the rampant destruction of forests that was taking place and had led to the forest cover coming down to just about eleven percent of the land mass of the country as was revealed by satellite imagery (Agrawal & Narain, 1982). Under this it was mandatory for all development projects to have environmental impact studies done and on the basis of these get approval from the newly constituted Ministry of Environment and Forests. So the SSP and also the ISP had to get this crucial clearance before work could be started on it. As late as 1986 the Ministry of Environment and Forests circulated a note that was critical of both the projects stating that their environmental impact assessments had not been completed and that the environmental problems arising out of these projects would be of a severe nature. It also said that a strong case could be made out for reducing the heights of both the dams (MoEF, 1986). Just about this time the kickback scandal in the purchase of the Bofors military field guns by the Government of India became public considerably embarrassing the then Prime Minister Rajeev Gandhi who was the grandson of Nehru (Muralidharan, 2004). His earlier unassailable position as the Congress party's supreme leader came to be jeopardised and so in an effort to muster political support within his party he had to bend to the demands of his party members from Gujarat and order the Ministry of Environment and Forests to give conditional permission in June 1987 to both the SSP and the NSP despite the lack of environmental impact studies, compensatory afforestation plans and catchment treatment programmes. What had been an obsession for the grandfather became a compulsion for the grandson. With finances and permissions under their belt the authorities in Gujarat began construction of the dam with gusto.

Meanwhile an NGO in Gujarat, Arch-Vahini, had begun to organise the oustees there to demand proper rehabilitation and resettlement in accordance with the NWDT award, as some preliminary displacement around the damsite had already taken place. This NGO got in touch with us to start the same process in Madhya Pradesh and gave us the relevant documents. So in 1985 we began holding meetings in the villages that were going to be submerged. About this time we got a letter from Vasudha Dhagamvar of a Delhi based NGO named MARG, who also wanted to do some work on this issue. Vasudha said that she would be touring the affected villages on the Maharashtra side and that we should team up to launch a joint campaign for proper rehabilitation of the oustees. So I arranged for a meeting at my favourite bivouac spot on the banks of the river in Jalsindhi in December 1985. Due to some logistical problems this meeting eventually took place in the temple village of Hapeshwar instead just across the border from Madhya Pradesh in Gujarat. Medha Patkar had accompanied Vasudha on this their maiden tour of the Maharashtra villages and so the three of us sat down over a dinner generously provided by the Mahant or head priest of the temple to discuss future plans. This was the humble beginning of the struggle, which was to rock the valley and the world so significantly later on.

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We started off in sedate fashion by making the simple demand for proper rehabilitation for all the oustees. We said that the government must prepare a comprehensive plan that provided for alternative land and habitation sites for the oustees of the nearly three hundred villages to be submerged by the dam before it began construction of the dam itself. Medha Patkar who had earlier been working with another NGO in Gujarat started working full time on this campaign and she soon unearthed a mine of information regarding not only the problems with the rehabilitation of the oustees but the overall cost-benefit analysis of the dam itself. As various people unearthed more and more information, it became clear that during the design of the dam and its distribution network wild and baseless assumptions had been made to either reduce or externalise the costs and inflate the benefits (Ram, 1993). Nevertheless we pursued with our efforts to get the government to prepare and then begin implementing an acceptable rehabilitation and resettlement plan prior to and not *pari passu* with the construction of the dam.

Within one year's time by the end of 1986 we realised that the government had no intention of rehabilitating all the oustees in accordance with the NWDT award. After this the Government of Gujarat began construction on the riverbed of the dam from 1987 onwards and this put pressure on the diverse mass organisations fighting for the rehabilitation of the oustees in the three states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat to step up their efforts to get a better deal for the oustees. These organisations had in the mean time been able to garner respectable mass followings and had organised large demonstrations sometimes on their own and sometimes jointly to press their demands. They decided to get their act together and constitute a joint front having sufficient critical mass and geographical spread so as to have greater impact on the government and the public at large. Dissatisfied with the response of the state governments as well as the central government these organisations decided to oppose the construction of the dam in toto in 1988. Thus the Narmada Bachao Andolan was born. Medha Patkar with her indefatigable energy and mobilising powers managed to involve other mass organisations, NGOs and individuals in India and abroad who were not directly concerned with the struggle in the valley to form support groups for lobbying, publicity and fundraising on a scale hitherto not seen in environmental mass movements in India. Medha composed the very popular theme song, which started in this way -

Narmada ki ghati mein ab ladai jari hai (The struggle is now on in the Narmada valley)

Chalo uttho, chalo uttho, rokna vinash hai (Rise up, Rise up and stop this destruction)

Throughout 1987 and 1988 there were many mass actions against the dam in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat and even in Delhi in which the people repeatedly courted arrest breaking prohibitory orders clamped around the high security areas near the seats of power. The first major action of the NBA to try and actually physically stop the work on the dam was a mass march in February 1989. Initially it was planned that there would be a two-pronged move towards the dam site. The adivasis from Maharashtra and Alirajpur would walk down the riverbanks to reach the dam site. The people from Nimar in Madhya Pradesh would go by trucks via the highways and the people from Gujarat would join them. I argued that since this would be well publicised there was no way in which the government of Gujarat would let these two masses of people reach the dam site and we would only be arrested at a distance far from the dam site wherever the police decided to stop us. So I put forth the plan that we have a third unpublicised phalanx of equal strength which would go secretly by a route through the hills and reach the dam site at the break of dawn to surround the massive concrete mixer and stop it from working thus actually stopping work on the dam. This proposal did not find favour with anyone else and was summarily shot down.

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Now we in the KMCS were a riotous unruly lot beholden to no one - an anarchic group of headstrong individuals that operated with just the bare minimum of discipline and cohesion necessary to keep the group together. Moreover apart from one person who later distanced herself from our happy go lucky ways and joined the NBA, none of us had any illusions that we would be able to eventually stop the dam. Nevertheless we participated wholeheartedly in the mass actions of the NBA because they provided the thrill and fun of fighting the state and the World Bank on a much larger scale than would have been possible with the KMCS alone. I was not going to let such a golden opportunity of enjoying myself to the hilt go by so easily and in a meeting of our own we decided to go ahead with my plan. What was the point in symbolically courting arrest like we had done so many times before without actually stopping the work of the dam we felt.

We surveyed a route through the hills that would take us to the concrete mixer without anyone getting to know about it. We picked a spot about two hours walk from the dam site where we would camp on the night before and then make the sally to the dam site in the wee hours so as to reach the concrete mixer just when dawn was breaking. I made it clear to everyone that we should not have any weapons or canes whatsoever as armed conflict would lead to criminal cases being registered against us which would prove painful and expensive later on when we would have to repeatedly go to attend the court hearings in Gujarat. So all we were to do was entwine our hands, surround the concrete mixer shouting slogans, and wait for the police. This way we would be arrested under preventive laws, which do not require court attendance later on as the offences are compounded immediately by the executive magistrates.

On the appointed day some three hundred of us set off as planned and everything went like clockwork. While the two main phalanxes were stopped many kilometres away from the dam site we managed to reach the concrete mixer and surround it at the break of dawn and stop work on the dam. Immediately there was a furore as the workers and officers of the construction company all gathered round. All the police had been deployed to tackle the two main phalanxes and so none were available to deal with us. We had the time of our life for all of two hours shouting slogans and singing songs, keeping the concrete mixer inoperative. "Koi nahin hatega, baandh nahin banega" - no one will move, the dam will not be built, the most famous slogan of the NBA would rend the air frequently interspersed with the song, "Narmada ni ghati ma amri larai chalu chhe" - In the valley of the Narmada our struggle continues, a Bhili adaptation of the NBA theme song. The whole labour force of around five hundred people and all the trucks came to a standstill. Finally a small force of ten policemen and a sub-inspector arrived with buses offering to take us to talk to the district collector about our demands. Bava of Jalsindhi, who was later to become very famous for writing a classical deep ecological letter to the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh in defence of his right to lead his natural lifestyle (Mahariya, 1999), rose up in regal style and said that the collector did not have the answers to our problems and that the Prime Minister of India should come to talk to us and till then we would not budge an inch! He was greeted with a roar of approval from the rest of us, which reverberated sonorously around the surrounding hills.

Things went on in this grand fashion till after some time two truckloads more of policemen arrived. Then began a tug-of war with the police trying to forcibly load us into the buses and we spreading ourselves out on the road entwined with each other. Finally the police had to resort to baton charging and kicking us to drive some sense and fear into our heads. The concrete mixer and the work of the dam began again after having been stopped for

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all of four hours. This was the only time that the work on the dam was stopped by mass action before being stopped later by a stay order of the Supreme Court during the pendency of a petition filed before it by the NBA. We were taken away to a stadium and kept there for two hours given snacks for our troubles and then allowed to go free with a warning not to return again! We hired three buses and returned to Alirajpur with the satisfaction of having done a good job.

Another such memorable action took place in the spring of 1990. The construction of the dam had reached a stage where there was the possibility of submergence of land in the first village in Maharashtra in the coming monsoons. Medha Patkar and three other people launched into one of the many hunger strikes by the NBA in Mumbai with the principal demand that the Maharashtra Government press for the stoppage of work on the dam as rehabilitation of the oustees had not been completed. Some of our people and activists too were there in support. It was decided in Mumbai that support demonstrations would have to be held in the Narmada valley to build up pressure. So the activists came back and said that a rally and rasta roko andolan - blocking of traffic on a highway, would have to be organised in Alirajpur. I said that this was all right with me only if it was agreed that the rasta roko would not be lifted under any circumstances thus forcing the police to take action against us. Moreover since this time we were on home turf we were not to balk at giving back to the police in their own coin when they did finally resort to force to remove us! I had in the meantime already been implicated falsely by the police in Maharashtra in a case of murder and had just been released from jail on bail and so it was decided that I would be spared another sojourn in jail and left to handle things from behind the scenes while the actual agitation would be conducted by the rest of the gang.

I went to meet the subdivisional police officer and give him the notice that we would be demonstrating in front of the office of the Narmada Valley Development Authority (NVDA) in Alirajpur on a particular day. Given our reputation for disruptive activity he immediately asked me apprehensively whether we were going to organise a peaceful law abiding demonstration or not and I assured him with a straight face that it would not cause him any trouble at all! On the day of the agitation a rally was taken out through the streets of Alirajpur and then the whole two hundred or so people went into the office of the NVDA and told the officers and staff to get out as they were henceforth going to be staying there. Very soon the office was cleared of its staff and the KMCS ruled in it. Immediately the SDO Police came with police reinforcements and was given a charter of demands by the agitators. Once again Bava, who had perfected his style by now, demanded that the Prime Minister of India should come and satisfy him and only then would he and his people vacate the premises. So the people spent the night in the office shouting slogans and singing songs.

Early next morning all the people came on to the Indore - Vadodara highway that ran in front of the office and the rasta roko andolan began. In next to no time traffic began piling up on both sides. The SDO Police had to jump out of his bed and come rushing to the spot with truckloads of policemen. He pleaded with the agitating people that he had already sent their charter of demands to the higher authorities and that they should desist from causing public inconvenience. At this Bava launched into a tirade on the inconvenience that the government was causing to thousands like him which was of no concern to it as it was preoccupied only with the inconvenience of city people. He ended grandiloquently with his standard refrain about the summoning of the Prime Minister of India.

Obviously things could not continue for long in this fashion and suddenly a company of Mounted Police was called up and they and the police charged the people sitting and

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shouting slogans on the road. As planned the people too let the police have it and a free for all ensued which was naturally won by the police. The activists were arrested and the rest of the people dispersed. Watching from a hidden location I saw a grand sight, which will forever remain etched in my memory. Khemla's father Chena by then a venerable old man of over seventy years of age was also among the protesters sitting on the road. As soon as the police action began he stood up, a lean figure dressed only in a dhoti tied around his waist covering the traditional "kushta" or loin cloth and a pugree round his head, and started beating his chest with his fist and shouting abuses at the police to come and kill them the louts as there seemed to be no place in this country for the adivasis. "Bomgola nakhin mari nakh tuhri ***** " he shouted repeatedly as if in a trance - " Bomb us to extinction you *****". It was an awesome sight and it must have had some effect on the police also because they did not touch him and he went on in this fashion while all hell was being let loose around him. Finally he walked off in a dignified manner after the activists including Khemla's wife had been arrested and the rest dispersed. Chena is no more now but that one act of insouciant defiance capping his earlier career of rebellion in his youth has made him immortal for me.

Khemla and I had been given the responsibility of managing things after the dispersal and so we had already planned that the people should regroup at a location on the outskirts of the town where we would cook and eat a meal and then take out yet another rally protesting the police action. We had also arranged for photographers earlier to take pictures of everything that happened that day from hidden locations so that we would have a good story for the press. While the food was being cooked I saw yet another example of the insouciance of the Bhil adivasis that indeed made my day for me. One of the men was stretched out on the ground under the searing summer sun in his kushta covered from top to toe with his dhoti taking forty winks. Here were we taken to the cleaners by the police and with every possibility of being beaten up once again when we went back into the town with a rally in a few hours and yet this man thought it more prudent to catch up on lost sleep than worry about the police! The repeat rally after this passed off peacefully mainly due to the fact that the IAS officer who was the SDM was a decent fellow at heart and had given strict orders to the police that unless we created any law and order problem once again no action should be taken against us. The next day the papers were full of our story and as a result the Inspector General of Police had to come down from Indore to assess the illegality of the actions of the administration.

So the whole exercise turned out to be a roaring success from our limited local point of view as it was yet another feather in the cap of the KMCS. But this demonstration, a similar one in Barwani on that day led by no less a personality than Baba Amte, the great man, despite his spinal disability, heroically standing for seven hours with his arms locked round the gate of the SDM's office which had been padlocked by the NBA and the hunger strike in Mumbai did not in the end result in the stoppage of work on the dam. Medha Patkar and others withdrew their hunger strike after a few days on being given an assurance by the Government of Maharashtra that no one would be allowed to be submerged without proper rehabilitation. But the Government of Maharashtra later reneged on its assurance and refused to seek the stoppage of work on the dam.

The hunger strike is the ultimate strategic action of the satyagrahi in Gandhian political action. It is a do or die action and leads on either to victory or the death of the hunger striker. A crucial requirement for its success is that there should be a massive mobilisation of people in support of it to put sufficient moral pressure on the state. As we shall see later even with mass support the hunger strike has been successful in getting its

demands fulfilled on a few occasions only. Thus this strategy should never have been adopted at that early stage when such a mass support was not available. The hunger strike is an additional action that complements and gives point to the mass mobilisation process and cannot be a substitute for it. This adoption at the very outset, as a substitute for a process of building up of a wider and stronger mass movement, of what should have been the ultimate strategy, underlined the weakness of the anti-dam movement vis-a-vis the state. This was to set a trend for the NBA later on, with the further reduction of strength, of numerous hunger strikes and jal samarpan or drowning in the river agitations, which were always either withdrawn on some assurance or other or the participants arrested by the state.

Before this on September 28th 1989 the first ever India level mass rally against destructive development had been held in Harsud a town that has since been submerged by the ISP. This marked a watershed in the history of the environmental movement in this country. Before this there had not been any country wide mass mobilisation on environmental issues. Whether it was the Chipko movement (Guha, 1989) to save the forests in the Gahrwal Himalayas of Uttaranchal or the campaign to save the rich biodiversity of Silent Valley in Kerala from being submerged by a dam (Martin, 2004), these had all been single-issue agitations, which did not try to build up a comprehensive nationwide opposition to destructive modern development. This was the first time that thousands of people from all over the country had gathered together at one place to declare their resolve to fight for the initiation of people centred governance and development that was environmentally sustainable as against the prevalent paradigm in which the vast majority of the people and the environment had both been devastated.

The whole proceedings were raised to a higher moral ground by the presence of Baba Amte. Baba Amte is a modern sage who has straddled the spheres of charitable service, constructive rural development work and mass agitational work in India like a colossus. He declared at the Harsud meeting that he had spent all his life fighting for the physically disabled leprosy patients but found that the adivasis while being physically able were in an even worse state disabled by their innocence of the devious ways of the modern state and market. So he had taken up the cause of justice for the adivasis in the twilight years of his life and decided to come and reside in the Narmada valley and take part in the struggles of the NBA. Shivarama Karanth the noted novelist from Karnataka was also present at this rally as was the noted film actress and social activist Shabana Azmi.

Fittingly Baba Amte himself set the independent tone for this new mobilisation. When two senior national leaders of a political party too came to the Harsud meeting uninvited and straight away proceeded to take their place on the stage, Baba Amte immediately objected saying that they were welcome to participate but as per the decision of the organising committee only those selected to speak from various organisations could sit on the stage and requested these leaders to get down and sit on the ground with the masses instead and they had to do so. This was thus at that point of time a genuine attempt to evolve a new kind of mass based politics hitherto not seen in this country. It was also an indication that Madhya Pradesh, which is one of the most backward states in the country, had become the epicentre of this new movement by virtue of the various struggles being waged so valiantly in its different parts. In a follow up meeting of activists at night after the mass meeting it was decided to hold a two-day convention in Bhopal in early December 1989 to coincide with the public meeting that is held every year by the Bhopal Gas Peedith Mahila Udyog Sangathan on 3rd December to commemorate the people who died in the fatal gas leak from the Union Carbide factory on that day in 1984.

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Chapter 10 - Following the Heart

Bhopal is a lovely city. There is the original old world town in the middle with the laid back ambience of the Nawabs in between the two lakes that had been presciently built by them to cleverly harvest the rainfall in the nearby hilly catchment for the needs of the town. Then there is the new modern planned city to accommodate the netas - political leaders and the babus - bureaucrats of the post-independence dispensation, which has been built on the undulating hills adjacent to the old town. Bhopal, despite being a very small town at the time of independence, the only claim to fame being the cricketing prowess of its princes who captained India in tests, was made the capital city of Madhya Pradesh as a compromise, as the competing political leaders of the cities of Indore, Gwalior and Jabalpur could not countenance any one of these becoming the capital ahead of the others. Madhya Pradesh itself was formed by default by clubbing together the vast area in the middle of India that remained unclaimed by other more articulate linguistic and cultural sub-nationalities bordering it, once the states reorganisation process began in the mid nineteen fifties.

The original Madhya Pradesh consisting of the present Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh states was a heterogeneous state with little similarity between its different parts except for the highly feudal nature of its socio-economic structure and the deeply colonial attitude of its bureaucracy. It is also rich in natural resources like forests and minerals, which are in areas mainly inhabited by the adivasis. Very soon the state began providing these resources at subsidised prices to the business magnates as raw materials for their plants and in return the latter contributed generously to the finances of the mainstream political parties, especially the Congress which ruled without a break till 1977. So within a few years the nascent national capitalist class became the newest and most powerful player in the political economy of the state in tune with a similar development taking place all over India (Gadgil, 1962). The adivasis, as mentioned earlier, had perforce to begin sinking further and further into a dreary abyss of poverty and neglect. The political geography of Bhopal, not surprisingly, reflects the socio-economic power distribution in the state. The highest point on the highest hill in the middle of the city is occupied by a temple built by the Birlas, the largest corporate house in India at that time till its later division after the demise of its founder Ghanashyamdas Birla, on land given them free for the purpose by the government, called the Birla Temple. Just below this is the Secretariat building housing the offices of the senior bureaucrats and the ministers, the largely feudal political leaders and much much lower down the hill is the hostel, which houses the ordinary representatives of the people, the members of the legislative assembly. The legislative assembly itself used to be situated at the bottom of the hill till the new one was built next to the Birla temple a few years ago. The poor adivasis of course have to live in makeshift shelters on the roadsides when they come to Bhopal to work as construction labourers.

Initially in the nineteen fifties there were vibrant anti-feudal peasant and labour movements of the Communist Party of India and the Socialist Party of India in the state. They were strong enough in some districts to send representatives both to the parliament and to the state legislature. However, in tune with the strategy adopted all over India by the Congress party after independence, heavy police repression was let loose on these movements and their leaders and active workers were frequently jailed under preventive detention laws or were implicated in false criminal cases (SPI, 1959). The British policy of carrot and stick was followed diligently by the new rulers with the help of the bureaucrats

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who had become past masters at it under British tutelage prior to independence. So by the mid nineteen sixties these movements were marginalised and most of their leaders absorbed into the mainstream political process being run by the Congress party. The peasant movements were crushed and the trade unions lost their political character remaining content to agitate desultorily around wage demands.

In the nineteen seventies there was another spurt of radical activity in the state challenging the centralised and top down models of development, education and health services. The Vidushak Karkhana in Shahdol district and Kishore Bharati in Hoshangabad district began experimenting with bottom up approaches to the solution of problems arising from the sad marriage between feudalism, modern industrial development and a colonial bureaucratic culture. These two organisations broke out of the centralised party based models of social and political action followed by the Communists and Socialists and instead began a participatory educative process with the oppressed sections with whom they worked. The Vidushak Karkhana began by trying to initiate a process of formulation of a "People's Plan" by the masses involved in production. The role of the activists was to be one of only facilitating the process by which the people themselves could formulate and then implement their own plan (Roy et al, 1982). Kishore Bharati was more involved with reforming the education and health sectors through a similar process of involvement of the people in formulation of their own systems with help from the activists. In both instances highly qualified scientists and technologists from elite institutions in India and abroad moved into remote rural areas in an attempt to bring cutting edge science to bear on the problems of the people residing in those areas. Unfortunately both these experiments could not muster enough mass support to tackle the entrenched power structures and so got dissipated without making much of a local impact. However, the theoretical output of these organisations has enriched the environmental movements in this country in various ways, forming an important part of the sprawling ideology of mass environmentalism in this country.

This was when the city of Bhopal and so also the state of Madhya Pradesh made their debut on the international media scene with a dubious bang in 1984 when a lethal gas leaked out in the middle of the night on December 3rd from a pesticide factory of the American multinational corporation (MNC) Union Carbide Corporation (UCC) situated on its outskirts, killing thousands of people. The then Chief Minister on learning of this is rumoured to have immediately taken himself off from his official residence which was in the line of the wind blowing the gas to his palatial bungalow overlooking the Kerva dam about twenty kilometers away and directed damage control operations over wireless from there (Lapierre & Moro, 2001). The first orders he gave the Superintendent of Police were to position his men so as to push back the masses of the people, who too were trying to flee like himself, so as to downplay the seriousness of the crisis. So strong were these rumours and their indictment of his lack of responsibility that his secretariat had to issue a press note denying them in toto after a few days (Navbharat, 1984).

The next thing he did perhaps to amend for his initial callousness was to arrest the chairman of UCC Warren Anderson when he came to visit the site immediately after the disaster. The Government of India in its wisdom, however, decided to release him after a few hours on a measly bail of just Rupees twenty thousand. Anderson seized the opportunity provided to wing back to the US and has since been absconding from the hearings of the criminal cases that were filed and which are still pending even after twenty years have gone by. Given the fact that the government has not been able to extradite

relatively less powerful people from the underworld like Dawood Ibrahim, there is little possibility of its being able to bring Anderson to book. The government showing even greater wisdom enacted an Act in parliament delegating to itself the responsibility of filing the tort case for damages against UCC in the US on behalf of all the affected people. Then it proceeded to file a claim of 3.3 billion US dollars only and made a hash of its legal representations before the US trial court, which finally directed that the case should be heard in India itself and the decision by the Indian court would be binding on the UCC. In this way the Americans cleverly let themselves out of the enormous costs that they would have had to bear in the form of the bankruptcy and liquidation of a star MNC like UCC, had the case been decided in the US (Kurzman, 1987).

In the event in an infamous deal the Government of India in 1989 settled for a paltry compensation of just US dollars Four hundred and seventy million, which was just one seventh of the amount that it had originally asked for. Third World lives after all count for little in the global market place. The Bhopal disaster was a sudden explosive eye opener to the fact that the MNCs of the developed world regularly transfer hazardous wastes and hazardous manufacturing processes to the third world countries (Brigden et al, 2005). Indeed some years later the Chief Economist of the World Bank was to say in a note circulated among some of his colleagues - " Just between you and me, shouldn't the World Bank be encouraging more migration of the dirty industries to the less developed countries?" (Ray, 1992 pp 111). The reasons advanced in support of this argument were that the costs of losses due to pollution in the Third World were low because the wages there were low and that since their environments were cleaner than the First World they could absorb more pollutants. The Economist magazine which exposed this note supported this argument stating that since third world governments wanted to develop their economies and there was no way to do so without polluting their environments, they might as well take those industries that could not be economically run in the first world anymore due to stringent environmental regulations (Ray, op cit). This is exactly the logic that had earlier resulted in the UCC plant being set up in Bhopal and run with far lower safety standards than the one that the corporation was running in the US. All this reflects very poorly on the Indian Government, which has failed to protect the lives and entitlements of its poor citizens, so as to be able to provide benefits to the Indian capitalist class, which latter sees its profit in playing second fiddle to the MNCs, since the costs are to be borne by the masses.

The civil society response to the gas disaster, on the contrary, has been one of the high water marks of environmentalist political action in India and it set off a series of new, more militant and effective mass environmental mobilisations throughout the country. The activists of Kishore Bharati immediately came down to Bhopal and joined hands with the trade unions to form the Zahreeli Gas Kand Sangharsh Morcha. This organisation began agitating for the provision of proper relief to the affected persons and for taking adequate legal steps to pin down the responsibility on UCC. Since the government was clearly bent on abdicating its responsibility of cornering UCC, this organisation built up links with civil rights organisations in the US to put pressure on the government there and also to take up legal action in the courts. Later the Morcha along with a few other organisations set up a clinic to provide proper treatment to the survivors. One of the blackest acts of the government in the early days after the gas leak was to obfuscate with regard to the nature of the gas that leaked from the tanks of the factory. This was at the behest of UCC because the graveness of its culpability depended on how lethal the gas was. The less lethal the gas and its effects on the people the less the culpability of the UCC and so there was a

continuous effort to deny that the gas that leaked was methyl iso-cyanate which is extremely lethal. The treatment for those exposed to the gas would naturally also vary according to the nature of the gas. Since the government was denying that the gas that leaked was methyl iso-cyanate so the treatment being provided by the government hospitals also was not suitable. The Morcha clinic, however, began providing treatment in accordance with the assumption that the gas was indeed methyl iso-cyanate and so the results were also very good. The government responded by closing down this clinic and arresting its doctors. Small wonder that the results of the epidemiological studies conducted for over a decade by the ICMR before being abruptly stopped have not been made public.

Faced with repression and apathy from the government and beset with internal problems leading to a split in the Morcha it gradually lost its mass power. Once the settlement was reached with the UCC in 1989 the payment of claims too began and so the people slowly got involved in this process and lost the urge to agitate further. However, a splinter organisation named Bhopal Gas Peedith Mahila Udyog Sangathan continued to fight for a better deal in the courts in this country and abroad and also in the streets. The indefatigable efforts of two affected ladies from Bhopal - Rameeza Bee and Champa Devi are exemplary of the fighting spirit that lies hidden in our masses. They not only kept their struggle and the memory of the mass murder alive by organising a rally and a meeting on the anniversary of the gas leak every year but also led their organisation to participate in all the other mass environmental struggles that were taking place in the country and played a stellar role in putting up a joint front against the destructive and iniquitous development policies of the government ably supported by activists both Indian and American. One particularly valiant ongoing effort of theirs has been the "Jharoo Maro Abhiyan" - broom and sweep clean campaign. They have consistently gone to various fora in the world with their brooms as symbols of their demand that the UCC and now Dow Chemicals, which bought it and made it into its subsidiary later, clean up the environmental mess around the factory in Bhopal and pay a proper enhanced compensation to the victims.

These ladies had the crucial last laugh when they put one over the government in a telling manner eventually two decades after the actual disaster. Used to cheating the masses at will the central government had disbursed paltry amounts as compensation to the affected people from the money given by the UCC as compensation. In the meantime the remaining corpus kept with the Reserve Bank of India in a dollar denominated account had accumulated compound interest as well as appreciated in rupee terms and become a whopping Rupees fifteen hundred odd crores. Despite repeated representations that this money should be disbursed in full to the affected people the government refused to do so. The ladies through their organisation petitioned the Supreme Court demanding that the whole of the amount be disbursed to the affected people. To create public opinion during the pendency of the case they held several sit-ins and hunger strikes in Delhi and Bhopal. The Supreme Court in one of the most important judgments it has ever delivered allowed this petition in 2004 (Venkatesh, 2004) and so the government has had to backtrack and begin giving the people their due.

What is more this judgment put its imprimatur on the findings of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy Relief and Rehabilitation Department that the number of deaths due to the gas leak have been 15,310 and the other casualties 5,54,895. Whereas the settlement with the UCC in 1989 had been on the tentative estimate of 3000 deaths and 1,02,000 other casualties only. A fivefold increase in casualties has taken place thus giving a strong legal

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basis to the demand that Dow Chemicals pay more compensation. The significance of this victory resulting from the doggedness with which the two ladies have pursued this struggle sunk in to me the other day when my neighbour's wife in Indore said that she was going to Bhopal to receive her second instalment of compensation as an affected person of the gas leak. She had been a teenaged girl residing in Bhopal when the gas leak took place and had been registered as an affected person and got some token compensation earlier. Now because of the Supreme Court's order she was getting another instalment. She was extremely happy and was all praise for the government for being so considerate as to pay her this huge sum of money! Rashida Bee and Champa Devi have been jointly awarded the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize in 2004 for their tenacious battle for environmental justice. Earlier in 1992 it was awarded to Medha Patkar for her battle to save the Narmada.

This then was Bhopal, the heart of the country and the home to one of its best and longest surviving environmental movements, where we were to congregate for drawing up a blueprint for a countrywide movement against destructive development. We couldn't do better than follow the heart could we when its people had fought so valiantly against the worst manmade environmental disaster the world has ever witnessed? The meeting went off well being very well attended by NGOs and mass organisations from across the country. At its conclusion the first nationwide environmental movement, Jan Vikas Andolan, was launched, its executive committee elected and a programme of action was decided upon. There was a lot of euphoria at the time but the Jan Vikas Andolan failed later to fulfil its initial promise as too many anarcho-environmentalist cooks spoilt its socio-political broth! The day the meeting was ending there came news that a World Bank team had come to Bhopal and was to have meetings with the Government of Madhya Pradesh regarding its application for a loan to fund the construction of the Indira Sagar Dam at Punasa. A secret conclave was called and it was decided that this team would be surrounded by a select group of activists the next morning as it left its hotel in a car to attend its meeting.

Early next morning we were all at the hotel. One of the activists in our group knew the Indian member in the World Bank team so he and I went in to the hotel while the rest of the group waited outside the gates. I stationed myself near the car reserved for the World Bank team by finding out discretely from the drivers as to which one it was. The person who knew the World Bank team member went inside and had a desultory conversation with him to ascertain the time the team would be leaving and then went back to wait with the rest of our group outside the gates. As soon as the World Bank team got into their car and the car eased its way out of the porch I began waving my sweater as a pre-determined signal to those at the gate that our prey was on its way. The car had just crossed the gates where it had to slow down to negotiate the cattle trap when our group of people shouting slogans of "World Bank Go Back" surrounded it. I too sprinted behind the car and jumped on to its roof to do a jig so as not to be left out of the shindig! Within twenty minutes the police were there in force and we were all packed into a bus and taken to Bhopal jail. Normally such arrests are a formality and the arrested people are let off soon. However, the administration did not want to take any chances and so we were locked up for the whole three days of the World Bank team's stay in Bhopal.

This outing in the Bhopal Central Jail proved to be a very entertaining and educative one. We were around thirty people from all over India all activists of various mass movements. Medha Patkar was the only woman and so she was locked up alone in

the women's ward. A special barrack was opened for the rest of us. We had hardly settled down when we got the news that Medha had gone on a hunger strike and so we too decided to follow suit and did not take the lunch that was offered us. With so many headstrong and quirky individuals, who did not know each other very well, cooped up together in one room, fireworks were inevitable sooner or later. The first serious altercation ensued in the afternoon when a regular inmate of the jail came with a big cauldron full of hot steaming tea. The cup that warms but does not inebriate was particularly desirable in the biting cold within a prison surrounded by dank walls. But a debate at once began raging as to whether tea was allowed during a hunger strike or not. Now ours was a hodgepodge combination of people holding allegiance to various ideologies including hardcore Gandhism in which the hunger strike is a potent action of satyagraha and except for water everything else is forbidden. So while the Gandhians insisted that tea could not be taken, others argued that only solid food was prohibited in a hunger strike and tea was allowed.

There seemed to be no signs of either side giving up and the debate went on and on. The tea grew cold but the heat of the debate would not subside. Then suddenly the jail inmate who had brought the tea and then gone away as the debate ensued came back and intervened to say that drinking tea was allowed in a hunger strike. At once those in favour of tea gave a shout of victory and said that even this ordinary jail inmate knew the basic fact that tea was allowed in a hunger strike and so the Gandhians should relent. But the latter were not going to give up so easily and so they asked the jail inmate as to who his source of knowledge was in such a weighty matter. The jail inmate said that he had gone to inform the jailer about the debate going on lest the latter begin suspecting that he was dilly-dallying in his work and on learning of the problem the jailer had told him to inform us that in his opinion drinking of tea was all right in a hunger strike. At this the Gandhians preened themselves, looked at those in favour of drinking tea with contemptuous glances and said that if they wanted to follow the jailer's advice they were welcome to. This finally brought the debate to an end and the tea drinkers had to do without.

One of our friends, who was a died in the red Marxist and had little respect for such Gandhian niceties had poured himself out his glass of tea immediately on its arrival but had had to stay from sipping it due to the debate that was raging. He very reluctantly poured the tea back into the cauldron and barked at the jail inmate to get lost as soon as he could. He later during that stay in jail confided to me that tea and liquor were indispensable for him. He said tongue in cheek that since Marxists being materialists could not fall back on God for seeking solace in times of trouble, they had perforce to rely on things more material like drinks, of the inebriating kind or otherwise, to drown their sorrows, which in the absence of the Indian Revolution were many! But following something akin to Marxist party discipline he had had to bow to the group decision not to take tea, which along with the forced abstinence from liquor meant a great sacrifice for him. I asked him how despite his ideological leanings he had got involved with the environmental movements. He made the most perceptive comment that the CPI in India, unlike the way the CPC had done for Chinese society, had not been able to analyse Indian society properly and had consequently failed to formulate an appropriate mass revolutionary programme of action in the crucial decade of the nineteen thirties. This had contributed to its becoming marginalised with time especially in a highly feudal state like Madhya Pradesh. Fed up with the dead end that the CPI had reached he had resigned from it and begun seeking some action in the environmental movements instead.

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As chance would have it members of both the factions of the Bhopal gas movement were there in the jail with us. They would direct searing glances at each other and keep a distance between themselves. Passing time in jail was a problem and so we would all be talking to each other all the time about various matters. In private conversations with me each of these two groups of activists told me how the other had sabotaged the movement by collaborating with the state. I was young and enthusiastic then and found this kind of backbiting rather disconcerting. But later experience and a little study of history have proved that this kind of splitting of mass political movements is a common feature in India. The Socialists were the first to split in the nineteen fifties, followed by the Communists and then the Congress in the nineteen sixties. The Naxalites one would have thought would have known better but they too succumbed to this retrogressive tendency and outdid everyone else by splitting so profusely that even the amoeba would be put to shame. The first environmental movement in independent India - the Chipko movement, also split after some time. Later the NBA too followed this gory tradition though by then the splitting factions had learnt some lessons and had the sense to keep a joint public face so as to maximise the advantages of the goodwill generated by the movement.

Interestingly an ex-member of the by then moribund Vidushak Karkhana, a farmer and veteran Gandhian grassroots activist from Shahdol, was there with us in the jail on that occasion. He too got into conversation with me and talked bitterly of the way in which the middle class activists had begun having differences with each other and leaving one by one once it became clear that the forces that they were fighting were too tough for them and he alone had been left holding the aborted baby of their much vaunted people's plan. Similarly one member from the defunct Kishore Bharati, which had also split up inter alia because of factional fights was inside with us while another was outside. The one outside was part of the team that used to come every day to talk to us and exchange information. We had chosen a committee of three senior activists from among ourselves, not without causing heartburn among some other seniors who perforce had to be over looked, to act as negotiators and leaders for the duration of our stay in jail and the one inside was one of them. So these two sworn enemies came face to face across the bars of the jail gate and were forced to exchange cordialities every time they met! The one outside later asked me with considerable chagrin after we came out as to how the one inside had wangled his way to glory by managing to go to jail along with us! We were nincompoops he said to have chosen him our leader.

The second serious altercation with regard to the hunger strike arose on the third and final day of our stay. Our supporters outside unaware that we had gone on hunger strike had sent in fruits and very tasty snacks on the second day which were routed to us by the jail administration. These fruits and snacks were given for safekeeping to the negotiating committee of seniors we had chosen so that no one should breach the hunger strike. The committee in turn had secretly decided to keep the tempting foodstuff under the surveillance of a senior leader from the movement against the Indira Sagar Dam at Punasa. Now this gentleman was a Congress politician who had joined the environmental bandwagon just because vast stretches of his lands were slated for submergence by the dam and did not have much faith in Gandhian methods. By the night of the second day this plump amiable person began finding the gnawing in his rotund stomach too much to bear and so he roped in some others of a like disposition and began slyly polishing off the booty entrusted to him.

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This group got bolder still the next morning and began inviting others into their small circle. However, in their bid to gain more legitimacy by recruiting as many people as was possible they made the mistake of offering some bananas to one of the younger lot of activists. This activist was dressed in jeans and tee shirt unlike the rest of us young firebrands who were in pajamas and kurtas and so had seemed to the eaters to be amenable to their tempting. But he too was a hardcore Gandhian as far as maintaining the sanctity of political actions went and he rose up in righteous indignation berating the eaters for having sullied the reputation of the whole group and roundly denounced them in front of everyone. There was a furore and once again a verbal tussle ensued with our Marxist friend, who, to do him justice, had refused the food offered him but had not squealed on the eaters, castigating the decision to go on hunger strike just because Medha had done so as an arbitrary and wholly spiritualist act. Things might have got out of hand with some people heated up enough to be on the verge of exchanging blows when the jailer came to announce that we were to be released. He was greeted with raucous slogan shouting and soon we were crowding out of our barracks in a happy mood!

My friend Jacob Nellithanam and I had put down our home addresses as that of Anandwan in Chandrapur district of Maharashtra, where Baba Amte resides, when we had been put into the jail. The rule is that when a prisoner is released the jail authorities should provide him with travel fare to his place of residence. Normal prisoners are too ignorant or timid to demand this but we were political prisoners so we would get this benefit. Jacob and I had planned beforehand that we were to go to meet Baba Amte after our caper in jail and being short of funds as we mostly were in those heady days, had hit on this stratagem to go there on government money. So after taking leave of our co-prisoners we made a beeline for the railway station and then had a good filling non-vegetarian meal. So much for Gandhian political action! The events of those three days in jail, in which almost all the leading lights of the environmental mass movements of the country were together, on later reflection, seem to me to have borne the seeds of the present marginalisation of these movements. We are so many different people pulling the whipping stick in so many different anarchistic directions that there seems little chance of our being able to churn up the immortal nectar of a sustainable future from the sea of destructive development around us as the Gods had done in Hindu mythology.

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Chapter 11 - Grand Old Men of the Anarcho-environmentalist Fringe

A trip to Anandwan is a pilgrimage, undertaken by madcaps like Jacob and myself, apostates from the false religion of modern development. The living God of Anandwan, Baba Amte, began to work there with his wife Sadhana Tai in the middle of the jungle in the early nineteen fifties to treat leprosy patients. This work later blossomed into a full-fledged rehabilitation programme for these patients and they built up a productive community in Anandwan out of its barren wastes through organic agriculture and village industry. Baba's motto is people do not have disabilities but only different abilities. This is the motto that led him later to set up two more centres in Somnath and Hemalkasa deep in the jungles of Chandrapur and Gadchiroli districts among the Gond adivasis. None have suffered more in modern India due to Nehru's perverse penchant for modern temple building than the quintessentially differently able adivasis. Baba Amte's work with the leprosy patients has brought him many national and international awards and the status of a saint but the work he took up for the adivasis at an age at which other lesser people would have been happy to call it a day after having got so much of recognition has not got him the same recognition. On the contrary the continuing injustice against them has in fact led him to return some of the awards that the Indian state had earlier conferred on him.

Tongue in cheek he talks of himself as being a spineless man. An injury to his spine had necessitated the removal of some vertebrae to be replaced by those of some animal. In his characteristic jocular style he jokes that the replacement bones must have been those of an ox because he felt stronger after they were put in. When in reality this operation had physically incapacitated him in such a manner that he could not sit anymore and had to either lie down on a bed or stand bolt upright. Later he had to have a pacemaker also inserted because his heart started malfunctioning. But despite all this he undertook two strenuous north south and east west Bharat Jodo or Knit India yatras accompanied by a host of youth in an effort to kindle a new movement of social renewal that could draw the youth of this country to work for the betterment of its hordes of underprivileged citizens. Perhaps this stubborn commitment not to rest till the last breath was breathed was what he had in mind when he referred to himself as an ox, which is even today the mainstay of Indian agriculture.

Baba Amte is a great nurturer of youth who are socially wayward in a positive sense. A great number of people who have in later life made significant contributions as activists in leftist, socialist and environmentalist movements not to speak of voluntary work of the garden variety have spent time working out their initial ideas and plans in the fields and jungles of Somnath and Hemalkasa. Till he became seriously ill a few years ago he used to be in constant touch with all these people and so was always very well informed about them and through them about other promising young activists who may not have been fortunate enough to be acquainted with him personally. This is something I learnt only much later. So when I met him for the first time in Harsud and introduced myself imagine my surprise when he gave a hearty laugh from his supine position and said, "you look so frail and innocent to be a murderer; the police must have made a mistake". I later learnt that he had come to know of my arrest on the charge of murder immediately and then phoned people to ensure that I got released on bail as soon as possible. That is the level of concern that this great man shows for activist youth who he feels are the torchbearers of a more humane society than the one we live in at present. He laid his hand on my shoulder in that first meeting and said, " from now on I shall call you my 'badmash dost' - mischievous friend". True to his word he always mentions me to others as being his badmash dost!

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A dam was planned to be built on the river Godavari in Andhra Pradesh in the early nineteen eighties, which would inundate most of the jungles and adivasi villages in Gadchiroli. Baba Amte gave a clarion call to the adivasis to rise up in protest and thousands of them gathered together on the banks of the river in response. The then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi heard of this and ordered the project to be shelved like she had done with the Silent Valley dam in Kerala earlier. But that did not make Baba rest on his oars. He decided to take up the issue of the large-scale wanton destruction of nature and the involuntary displacement of its children, the adivasis, by dams in general all over the country. By this time the movement against the Sardar Sarovar dam had begun to pick up momentum and it attracted his attention. So he called a meeting of environmentalists from all over the country in Anandwan to search for alternatives to big dam building in 1988. This was the first such meeting and it came up with comprehensive recommendations regarding a more people friendly water resource utilisation policy than the one that was being pursued by the government in the Narmada Valley. This was how he came to be associated with the struggle in the Narmada valley in particular and the more widespread struggle against destructive development in general.

Baba and Sadhana Tai came to the Narmada valley in 1990 and set up a centre on a piece of barren land on the banks of the river in village Kasrawad in Barwani district which was at that time the nerve centre of the NBA. They stayed there for more than a decade upto 2001 after which their deteriorating health forced them to go back to Anandwan. It was a turbulent decade by any standards during which once their hut was surrounded by the swirling waters of the Narmada and yet they refused to evacuate. It is a testament to the will and spirit of these two modern greats that they risked so much for a cause despite their failing and aging bodies. Baba's stay in the valley was personally very beneficial to me. I had never had any illusions about the longevity of both the work we were doing in Alirajpur through the KMCS and the struggle against the dam through the NBA as standalone movements. However, I had felt, especially after the formation of the Jan Vikas Andolan in Bhopal, that the nation wide movement against destructive development would gradually gain in strength and so all the small isolated struggles that were taking place would combine to posit a viable challenge to the dominant paradigm. But from 1993 onwards this gradually became an unattainable mirage and I began feeling the urge to seek out some more challenging kind of work to do. I visited Kasrawad about this time just after Sankranti and while Sadhana Tai offered me the traditional sweet made out of sesame seeds and jaggery, Baba and I got talking about the happenings in the field. He must have sensed from my words the turmoil going on in my mind and my sense of boredom with the work I was doing because he suddenly admonished me in his inimitable style, "tum janmei ho badmashi karne ke liye aur jab tak jinda rahoge tumko badmashi karte hi rahena hoga - you have been born to do mischief and so as long as you are alive you have to go on doing mischief!" A simple inspiring exhortation to never say die as he himself hadn't.

In India there is a great tradition of apprenticeship of students to teachers called the "guru-shishya parampara" by the Hindus and "ustad-shagird rivayat" by the Muslims in which the skills of one generation are passed on to the next free of cost to the student so as to keep a particular art alive. I was lucky to have had many such gurus and Baba was not the only one I could look up to for inspiration and guidance in pursuing my mission in life. There were other unique personalities in western Madhya Pradesh at that time. One venerable personality who had dominated the political firmament of Western Madhya Pradesh for over half a century was Mama Baleshwar Dayal Dixit. He started his political career in his

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hometown of Etawah in Uttar Pradesh, at the young age of sixteen in 1923, by beating up his British schoolteacher who had spoken ill of Gandhi. He was rusticated and fearing the wrath of his father ran away to his maternal uncle's place in Khachrod near Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh. Once again he fell into trouble when inspired by Gandhi's satyagraha to get admission for dalits into the Guruvayur temple in Kerala, he had prasada distributed by dalits after a religious ceremony in a local temple. He had to leave again and was invited by the great freedom fighter Chandrashekhara Azad's mother to run a school in his hometown in Bhabra in Jhabua district. Later he became the principal of a school in nearby Thandla. The Bhil homeland in those days was carved up between a number of principalities of feudal lords who extracted *begar* from the Bhils. The adivasis were also being exploited by the *sahukars*. So from the beginning of the decade of the nineteen thirties he launched an unique struggle for freeing the Bhils from this exploitation which held sway over the region for over four decades upto the early nineteen seventies as mentioned earlier. He became so much of a nuisance for the princes and the British that he would spend most of his time in jail. However he found a novel way to circumvent this problem. He would carry out a mass action in the area of jurisdiction of one prince and then nip across the border to the area of jurisdiction of another prince to get some reprieve!

The first time I met Mamaji in 1987 in his Bhil Ashram in Bamnia village in Jhabua district he related, amidst guffaws of laughter, an instance of the unorthodox ways in which he went about fighting the princes. Finding that agitations alone were not being effective enough in abolishing *begar* he sought a quaint new way to solve this problem. Mamaji found that there was a rule in the princely states that *kshatriyas* and *brahmins* could not be made to do *begar*. So Mamaji wrote to and got the sanction of the Shankaracharya of Puri to hold a massive religious congregation in Bamnia in which the Bhils performed "*shuddhi*" or purification in large numbers and wore the "*janeyu*" or sacred thread to become *kshatriyas*. This proved very effective as the hold of religion on the princes was very deep and they could not possibly defy the Shankaracharya and not recognise the Bhils after this as being *kshatriyas*. Vast numbers of Bhils were freed from serfdom and this raised the movement to a higher mass level altogether.

Immediately after independence Mamaji began a movement for the abolition of the feudal rights of the princes and their *jagirdars*. He found that the leadership of the Congress party in the Madhya Bharat region of which Jhabua was a part did not want to take any action in this direction. So he dashed off an angry letter to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru accusing him of reneging on the promises he had made earlier. He had to cool his heels for eight months in Tonk jail in Rajasthan as a result. He was released only after the then Governor General Rajagopalachari intervened on his behalf. Mamaji came into contact with the towering leaders of the Indian socialist movement like Rammanohar Lohia and Acharya Narendra Dev. Unlike these intellectual stalwarts, however, even after embracing socialism he remained rooted to the Bhil homeland and continued to give leadership to one of the most sustained and unique but little publicised of peasant movements that this country has witnessed - the Lal Topi Andolan. As mentioned earlier the Lal Topi Andolan finally perished and its marginalisation has a lot of lessons for those engaged in grass roots battles for the emancipation of the oppressed. Bowing to the wishes of the national leaders of the Socialist Party, Mamaji began to devote more time to electoral politics than in building up a formal, ideologically committed and cadre based structure for the Lal Topi Andolan that could sustain it over a long period. So with the waning of the influence of the Socialist Party at the national level and its many splits the local leaders in Jhabua soon became prey to the

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temptations proffered by the Congress Party and defected to it. The corrupt form of centralised electoral politics that is practised in India just does not allow the ethical political practice of grass roots organisations mobilising around livelihood issues of the poor to succeed at the hustings. We will see why a little later on.

Mamaji consistently refused to be drawn into national politics and only reluctantly accepted the presidentship of the All India Socialist Party in 1962 for a year after being pressurised by Lohia. Again after the nineteen-month incarceration during the emergency period between 1975 and 1977, Jayaprakash Narayan forced him into becoming a member of the Rajya Sabha in 1978. He used to term the proceedings in the Rajya Sabha a farce. He was particularly peeved that the right to work had not been made a fundamental right in the Constitution. He once related to me in hilarious detail how he had tried his level best during his six years in parliament to try and get this done and how members of his own party had not responded and had in the later stages begun avoiding meeting him altogether to escape from his persistent harangues. He found himself sitting alone in parliament, as by that time the Janata Party had split and his fellow MPs were all busy defecting from one party to another.

Yet inexplicably despite his commitment to grassroots organisation and his scepticism about the effectiveness of the legislatures and parliament in bringing about radical change, he used to throw himself with vigour into election campaigns for candidates, who he must have known were going to lose, even when he was well past the age of eighty. Just after his comic diatribe against the parliamentarians the 1989 elections for the Lok Sabha were announced and in the course of canvassing for the Janata Dal candidate he came down to Attha and began exhorting us to spare no effort whatsoever. I was tempted to remind him of his recent barbs against parliamentarians but at the sight of his intense, sweat streaked and venerable visage, suddenly the two famous lines from the Bhagvad Gita exhorting one to work diligently without hankering for any reward flashed across my mind and I took a deep breath and kept respectfully quiet.

Mamaji was a simple man till the last day of his life. He had declined a freedom fighter's pension and privileges saying that it was absurd to accept monetary compensation for patriotic deeds. His Bhil Ashram in Bamnia was a small hut situated on a small plot of agricultural land that had been made by soil deposits resulting from blocking a gully with stones at a point where it took a wide turn. His meagre personal needs were met from the produce of this small farm. When he became seriously ill due to progressive organ failure two years prior to his death in 1998, George Fernandes, then a Minister of the Central Government and other erstwhile Socialist leaders pleaded with him to be taken to Delhi for treatment at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences. But Mamaji refused saying that he would not avail of any facilities that a common Bhil adivasi could not get and finally passed away in his own hut in Bamnia. He will forever remain a beacon for all those who believe in fighting for lost causes.

I came to Indore for the first time in 1987 to attend a meeting of the Madhya Pradesh chapter of the People's Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL). The PUCL is one of the offshoots of the first human rights organisation in this country set up by Jayaprakash Narayan in 1976 in the aftermath of the imposition of emergency in 1975 The People's Union of Civil Liberties and Democratic Rights. Later in 1980 this organisation split into the PUCL and the People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) and both are at the forefront of the human rights movement in this country. I met yet another great persona Om Prakash Raval in this PUCL meeting in Indore. When I was introduced to him and told that I was an engineer from IIT who had opted for grassroots political activism among the Bhil adivasis he clapped my back

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and said, "Well done my young man, the sight of you warms the cockles of my old heart." Like Mamaji, Ravalji too was an erstwhile Socialist. He had been elected a member of the Madhya Pradesh Vidhan Sabha in the elections following the emergency in 1978 and had been the Education Minister in the Janata Party government before the party split and the legislature was dissolved. Thereafter he had been extremely saddened by the repeated splits and opportunistic floor crossings by his comrades and had resigned from mainstream party politics to work with environmental and human rights movements. He had involved himself with the Bhopal Gas Andolan and then when the movement against the Narmada started he became its mainstay in Indore.

Ravalji had started his adult career as a teacher in a private school in Indore in the pre-independence days. In those days teachers were very badly paid and had abominable working conditions. So very soon he started a trade union of teachers and began agitating for their rights. The result was that he was sacked from his job. However, he continued with the agitation and finally not only was he reinstated but also the teachers began to get a much better deal. He continued with his crusades for the teachers even after independence. The chance came for a government job as a teacher but he spurned this so as to be free to pursue his political struggles, which had in the meantime broadened into addressing the problems of agricultural labourers and factory workers. He joined the Socialist party when it was formed in 1951 and became one of its most promising young activists in Madhya Pradesh. On one occasion he went to the town of Barnagar near Ujjain and along with the local activist of the party there went out with a hand cart and a battery powered public address system. He went round the town announcing that in the evening there would be a mass meeting of the Socialist party to be addressed by its young leader from Indore - Om Prakash Raval!

Naturally he went to jail many times the last time being during the emergency when he spent nineteen months in the special jail made for political detainees in Indore along with all the other opposition politicians of the Malwa region. After coming out he had a brief flirtation with power when he was not only elected as an MLA from Indore but also became the Minister for Education in the Janata Party Government in 1978. He told me once with a mischievous smile that he knew that his days as a minister were to be numbered so he wasted no time in pushing through a legislation giving various benefits and security to the teachers in private schools and colleges that were being run with government funds. He said that all his life he had fought for the limitation of the dictatorial powers of the managements of private schools but had failed to achieve much but as a minister he had made amends for that in a jiffy. The inevitable inner party bickerings began and within a year and a quarter he was out of the ministerial hot seat and in another three or four months back on the streets as a common man as the legislature was dissolved for fresh elections. That was when he decided to part ways with the Socialist party and begin seeking out a new mode of politics.

He came into his own as a major supporter of the NBA. He would take part in its rallies visit the villages in the interior for grassroots meetings, garner support in Indore and write in the press. Later when, after the Harsud rally, the Jan Vikas Andolan was formed in Bhopal he became a member of its national executive. On one occasion we were returning from a meeting of the JVA in Bangalore by train. He was the oldest member in the group and in his mid-sixties then but he participated in our revelry as if he was the same age as us. We were singing Hindi film songs. Someone began singing the song - aa chal ke tujhe le jata hun main ek aisi gagan ke tale, jahan gam bhi na ho aansu bhi na ho bas pyar hi pyar pale - come let me take you down to that heaven where there are no sorrow and tears and only love prevails. He also joined in and then when the song was sung he said with a mischievous smile

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that true love and sorrow are inseparable so how can there be pyar without gam. This was as utopian as our own dreams and plans for a better India that we had just worked out in Bangalore he said! We lost him in 1993 to a sudden heart attack just at the time when we needed him most. A considerate and honest man like I have never seen before and his memory has served to keep me going in the face of severe odds.

The PUCL meeting in Indore in 1987 was also the occasion when I met Mahendrabhai Jain. He was a died in the wool Gandhian of the old school. He joined the Sarvodaya movement when Vinoba Bhave passed through the Malwa Nimar region as part of his Bhoodan Yatra. Vinoba told him that it was important to choose a mission in life and stick to it throughout no matter what may come. So he chose to start a press service devoted to publishing news and features related to Gandhian values - Sarvodaya Press Service in addition to his work as an activist of the Gandhi Peace Foundation. At that time there wasn't any press service exclusively devoted to the propagation of Gandhism and the mainstream press did not have much place for such stuff. Yet Mahendrabhai laboured on urging people to write and then pressing editors and journalists to carry the articles he sent out. He worked on a shoestring budget doing everything from editing to typing and then cyclostyling the press notes by himself. Eventually he succeeded in establishing the Sarvodaya Press Service as an internationally renowned supplier of quality articles and news on environment and alternative development issues. He achieved this solely on his own meagre salary as an activist of the GPF and the resources generated by the payments made for his press notes by newspapers and magazines, without accepting any external funds. Many years later when the international news agency for environmental issues PANOS decided to collaborate with him to publish its handouts in Hindi in India, a person came from that agency to meet Mahendrabhai to work out the modalities. Coming from a heavily funded agency working out of a modern office equipped with computers, scanners and printers, he was floored by the sight of Mahendrabhai sitting in a small twelve-foot by ten-foot room labouring over a typewriter and a cyclostyling machine surrounded with piles of books, magazines and papers.

Despite being an acolyte of Vinoba Bhave his conscience had not allowed him to support his stand on the emergency and he had begun sending out articles revealing the atrocities being perpetrated under the cover of draconian provisions. So he too was soon incarcerated along with Ravalji. This brought about a distinct change in him and after coming out of jail he was one of the prime movers behind the formation of the Madhya Pradesh chapter of the PUCL. He felt that the neglect of confrontational grassroots politics by the vast majority of Gandhians had been a major faux pas. Since his responsibilities with the press service prevented him from actively participating in grassroots movements he decided to help them as much as possible by providing support service. Thus it was that Mahendrabhai's residence became the clearinghouse for information about the various movements going on in the Malwa region. Especially benefited was the NBA, which had to rely heavily on instant communications of its actions or the repressive actions of the state to the outside world. In those days in the late nineteen eighties and early nineteen nineties the Internet was non-existent in our part of the world. So desperate phone calls would be made from some remote place in the interior and Mahendrabhai would take down impromptu notes. Based on these he would type out a press note and circulate it all over the world! The coordination of the movements of various people coming from outside to the valley would also be done through this efficient one-man exchange.

Subhadra and I will ever remain indebted to him for allowing us to drop anchor in the ashram at Machla at a time when we were penniless and I was seriously ill. We spent nearly a

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decade in the serene, natural and tree clad environs of Machla and were frequently in touch with Mahendrabhai during this time. Every time we met he would relate some joke or other cleverly playing on the words he used. Once he chuckled and said "tum aur ham jaise *a-sarkari* kshetra ke log isliye sarkar ki aankh ki kirkiri bane hue hai kyunki ham unse jyada *asar-kari* hain! - people like you and me in the non-governmental sector are detested by the government because we are more effective". A play on the words *a-sarkari* and *asar-kari*, which have the same pronunciation but different meanings. Like Mamaji and Ravalji he was a self-effacing man and so people took the enormous contribution that he was making to our movements for granted. Unfortunately he became afflicted with a form of cancer and passed away in 2003. Only then did we all realise what a great pillar of support he had been while alive. When I was in jail after the Mehendikhera confrontation in 2001 he went to meet the Divisional Commissioner in Ujjain and tell her that I had been wrongly labelled as a Naxalite out to overthrow the state. The Commissioner complained that I conducted my meetings at night and that is what had led the administration to believe that I was up to no good. Mahendrabhai told her that in rural India meetings had necessarily to be held at night as the people were all away during the day earning their living. "Aap log raat aur din ka antar nahin samajhte hain isliye aap aur hamare beech raat aur din ka antar hai - you do not understand the difference between day and night and so there is a day and night difference between us!"

Yet another Gandhian who has played a stellar support role for the movements in this region is Ramchandra Bhargava. Bhargavaji is positioned in an enviable place as the Coordinator of the Gandhi Bhavan in Bhopal. The Bhavan is so centrally located that it is always rented by various organisations for holding seminars and conventions. Nevertheless this venue located at a prime location has always been available to the grassroots movements free of cost for the holding of their meetings and conventions. So much so that there have been occasions when commercial bookings by outside people have been cancelled to accommodate some last minute convention to be held by the movements. On many occasions rallies to block traffic in the high security area of Bhopal just next door from the Gandhi Bhavan have been planned and begun there and yet Bhargavaji has not flinched under pressure and always welcomed people like us with open arms.

Bhargavaji came into his own during the Bharatiya Janata Party government under the Chief Ministership of Sunderlal Patwa from 1990 to 1992. The BJP government took it into its head to crush the burgeoning social movements in the state and so there were continuous protest rallies or meetings in Bhopal. These were all organised and planned at the Gandhi Bhavan. Despite pressure from the government not only did Bhargavaji not relent but was able to convince the Chief Minister to at least agree to meeting and talking to the activists of the social movements instead of unleashing repressive action unilaterally.

When Subhadra and I decided to get married we chose Bhopal as the place to tie the nuptials. The Indian Marriages Act stipulates that at least one of the two people applying for registration of marriage under it in a certain court must be a resident of the area of jurisdiction of the court. Moreover we had to provide proofs of our ages, which we did not have as we had both misplaced our school leaving certificates. So we approached Bhargavaji to help us out. He immediately got up and embraced us saying that he and his wife Rukmini devi had no children and so it would be a great pleasure for them to stand in as Subhadra's parents. Things moved like clockwork after that, all the affidavits and certificates were in place in no time and we were happily married after the mandatory one-month interval. We were penniless in those days so all the expenses of the marriage too, minimal though they

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were, were borne by Bhargavji, the surrogate father of the bride, in the traditional Hindu style!

We were holding a meeting of people from all the submergence villages in Alirajpur in the village of Anjanbara on the banks of the Narmada in the searing heat of a summer afternoon in 1986. Suddenly we saw a towering old man, dressed in a dhoti and kurta, huffing and puffing his way to our meeting spot, barely able to walk, supported by two men. This was Dr Brahmadev Sharma who was at the time the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes of the Government of India, a constitutionally mandated post for the protection of the rights of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, which has since been replaced by the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. He had heard that this meeting was to be held and had made his way to it walking up hill and down dale for the last five kilometers where there were no motorable roads. Sharmaji is a legend and has done much to ensure that activists like me retain some relevance in a milieu that is becoming increasingly hostile to the mass mobilisation of adivasis for the control of their habitats. After obtaining a Phd in mathematics he joined the Indian Administrative Service in 1956 and soon made a name for himself for his strict actions as the District Magistrate against the government functionaries and traders who were exploiting the adivasis of Bastar. His tenure in government service up to 1981, when he resigned due to differences with the government over the way in which the welfare of adivasis should be ensured, was a single-minded pursuit of justice for the children of nature.

Following a five-year stint after this as the Vice Chancellor of the North Eastern Hill University in Shillong in the State of Meghalaya he had assumed the post of Commissioner Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in 1986 and at once done away with all protocol to hit the dusty trails in his insatiable quest for justice for the adivasis. His activist outlook resulted in his producing scathing critiques of government policy regarding the adivasis in his statutory reports to the President of India (CSCST, 1990). Dissatisfied with the disregard shown by the government and the parliament to the sordid facts revealed and recommendations made in these reports Sharmaji filed a petition in the Supreme Court to demand action from the government and got it to acknowledge that all was not well with its tribal development policies and programmes. After retiring from his post in 1991 he went back to the villages of Bastar from where he had begun his crusade for the adivasis to start a grassroots movement of the people there for village self rule. This is the phase in which he came up with the famous anarchist slogan - "Hamara gaon mein hamara raj" - our rule in our village which has now become common currency in adivasi areas. It was at this time that there was the proposal for setting up a steel plant in the villages in which he was working and so he launched a movement against this. The result was that he was stripped by goons of the company proposing to set up the steel plant and paraded in the streets of Jagdalpur creating a furore all over the country.

My association with Sharmaji, which began with that meeting in Anjanbara continued well after that and throughout his term as Commissioner he continually helped the KMCS and the NBA in their mass actions by mediating with the administration to adopt a more positive approach. Afterwards as a free individual bereft of state privileges he was the prime mover behind the formation of the Bharat Jan Andolan, a forum of mass movements fighting for a just and sustainable form of development and governance. He has not only led this forum from the front but also written copiously on the problems of rural and especially adivasi development and their solution. He too like our other mentors realised the great value of young activists like myself fighting for the rights of the poor and downtrodden and was

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equally aware of the problems that we faced. So he set in place a fairly efficient system for the mobilisation of resources from society at large to help out young activists in their work and struggles called "Sahayog" or assistance.

After the passing of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in 1992 making Panchayati Raj or village self rule mandatory as the third tier of democratic politics in the country he busied himself with ensuring that the Act for the setting up of a special panchayati system to accord with adivasi specificities in the scheduled adivasi areas as provided for in the Constitutional Amendment was also enacted. As a member of the Parliamentary Committee set up to draft the bill for this purpose under the Chairmanship of the then MP from Jhabua Shri Dilip Singh Bhuria he was instrumental in bringing out a set of radical recommendations for the establishment of true democratic control by adivasis of their lives and habitats (GOI, 1995). Later it was through his persistent efforts as the Chairman of the Bharat Jan Andolan that finally the Panchayat Provisions Extension to Scheduled Areas Act (PESA) was passed in 1996. Even though in its final form the provisions have been diluted as compared to the recommendations of the Bhuria Committee, nevertheless this Act is a very powerful instrument for assertion of adivasi supremacy in Scheduled Areas. Unlike the equally commendable provisions of the Fifth Schedule whose implementation is left to the discretion of the State Governments this Act gives the adivasis themselves powers to act and secure their rights and entitlements. As we shall see later in the case of the Mehendikhera confrontation, mobilisation by adivasis around the implementation of this Act can only be crushed by the state through the adoption of wholly illegal repressive measures. He came to meet me after the incident when I was in jail on the usual false charges trumped up by the police and commended me on having so purposefully fleshed out on the ground what he had conceived on paper. When I asked him about whether Subhadra and our small seven month old child were safe because there was a possibility of her being arrested too he said - "Fikr mat karo, kuch dinon ki hi to baat hai, ham tumhare saath hai - don't worry, its just a matter of a few days, we are with you."

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Chapter 12 - Things Fall Apart

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Chapter 13 - Love is all you need

In a way the journalist's question was not out of place because the Bhil adivasis are among the most romantic of people and they start falling in love very early in life. Indeed in independent India the Bhils' primary claim to cultural fame is their colourful Bhagoria festival, which takes place just before the Hindu festival of Holi in spring and is celebrated by turns in the market villages or towns on the market day of that particular market village or town. Filmmakers from India and abroad have filmed this festival any number of times. The festival is a celebration of the harvests as by this time all the work related to the kharif agricultural season is complete. Along with this main thrust there is also a custom of young teenaged boys and girls eloping together from the festival to lead a married life. However, marriage for the Bhils remains a loose arrangement to bring up progeny and there are umpteen pre marital affairs as boys and girls and later on in life extra marital affairs as men and women to add spice to their humdrum family life. Indeed as long as people do not get caught in the act every one winks an eye at this side current of free sex that laces Bhili marital life. But once such liaisons become known then Bhili society has to do something about it in order to keep some semblance of order and what they do provides them with great entertainment. Apart from this there are the forcible capture of girls and even married women by boys or men for marriage; cases of rape are rare because there is so much opportunity for free sex. Finally there are the inevitable divorces. One of the enduring aspects of Bhili society that has survived the ravages of modern development is the sitting of the traditional community panchayat to resolve all kinds of disputes involving man-woman relationships.

All the parties involved, two in case it is just a matter of resolving the elopement of a couple and three if it is a case of an extra marital affair or the carrying off of a betrothed or married woman or the desertion of one man by a woman for another or vice versa, get together to sort out the matter and normally sit at a distance from each other, communicating through messengers who are called "vatars". This is a safety device to prevent direct confrontation between the opposing parties, which could become murderous considering that often people come armed with bows and arrows and guns to these panchayats. But this means that the vatars have to bear the brunt of the abuses and taunts when they go from one side to the other with proposals for a solution, which are wild to begin with before they reach more realistic levels through bargaining. That is why there is a saying in Bhilali that the behinds of buffaloes and vatars regularly get taken!

The Bhils also have a system of arranged marriages to keep the youth under control and prevent the onset of unbridled sexual and marital anarchy. So though the custom of a girl running away with a boy to get married is quite common and has social sanction, nevertheless in such a case the boy's family has to pay a premium over the prevailing rate of bride price. The bride prices themselves are negotiable and go on increasing with time. In case of extra and pre marital affairs the boy or man has to pay a fine, which again is negotiable depending on the seriousness of the offence and the prestige of the offended family. So the whole business of settling romantic disputes is an extremely entertaining affair, what with all the people hearing the colourful evidence, the hyperbolic demands for money and the choice epithets that are traded back and forth and sometimes may require quite a few sittings. There is also a kind of "politics of honour" (Baviskar, 1995) involved and so sometimes these disputes take on major political overtones between sets of villages. Often people not owing allegiance to the KMCS would use these disputes to try and put one over the villagers who were members of the KMCS. So we activists frequently had to sit through these panchayats

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to ensure that the KMCS villagers did not lose face. Nevertheless, I at least used to enjoy the proceedings to the hilt, irrespective of whether our villagers came up tops or not.

For a while these panchayats assumed an overt political character in the early nineteen nineties when the KMCS decided to do something to limit the ever increasing bride price levels. A massive meeting was held and after putting the whole process of fixing the bride price under the scanner the amount of the bride price and the accompanying gifts were decided on. The more difficult task was to get people to agree to this reduced bride price. The villagers outside the ambit of the KMCS naturally refused to see the logic behind this move and tried wholeheartedly to sabotage this initiative. There were many instances in which we would come away from the panchayats refusing to pay anything more than the bride price and this led inevitably to the matter going into the hands of the police and the dalals. These latter led by the MLA were only too happy to put a spanner in the works and so despite a sustained effort eventually this campaign fell through after a few years. Indeed the bride prices that are paid have now reached proportions in some areas where marrying has become an extremely expensive proposition for the boys and sometimes leads to them having to mortgage off their land and become migrant labourers.

There was one village in Alirajpur where extra marital affairs were the rule rather than the exception. Almost every week the people of the village could be seen sitting down to resolve these disputes, which invariably ended in someone or the other being made to pay a nominal fine. Now the person who had been cuckolded was not satisfied with just this paltry fine and so he would look out for an opportunity to have an affair with the offending person's wife or unmarried sister. He would finally succeed and so again there would be a panchayat in which it would be now his turn to be fined. It would carry on like this in a form of sexual vendetta. Appetite whetted these fellows would try to have affairs with the wives or unmarried sisters of other men and so the whole village was involved in this sleazy game of cuckold my neighbour. And old age was no bar. There was one guy in his fifties who had continuously had affairs with other women in the village and been regularly fined but his wife had always remained true to him not even once falling prey to the numerous advances that must have been made to her. Then his Sati Savitri wife died and this man married a second time. His second wife was young and easy prey for the other men who had always been on the lookout to take their revenge. Despite all that the old fellow could do to prevent it one enterprising man soon cuckolded him. To ensure that the old fellow was well and truly floored, this man nicked his own neck with a dharia, a kind of machete and then lodged a false complaint in the police station along with a hefty bribe that the old man had attempted to murder him and got him into jail.

There was a general celebration in the village that at last the old man had been castled in style. As no one went to bail him out, he spent months in jail. I happened to be in jail for a few days also at this time under preventive detention provisions for having taken part in an agitation and I vividly remember the old man in tears pleading with me when I was leaving jail to get him released some how! The other day I happened to visit the area for a meeting in our old village of Attha after almost two decades. I asked after this old man only to learn that the poor fellow was dead. Then I asked about the tradition of sexual vendetta in his village and was told that the new generation had continued where the older people had left off and so the weekly panchayats over extra marital affairs were still the order of the day there. Habits die hard they say. Other villages were not as bad but that such affairs were a frequent phenomenon can be gauged from the fact that the wives of all those men who had been forcibly sterilised during the emergency period later had more children in spite of this. This is

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why Bhil men do not like to undergo the vasectomy operation fearing that their wives will have more children anyway from other men!

There have to be some bad guys to spoil this picture of romantic bliss and entertainment and these are the old villains - the dalals and the police. Like in the case of other disputes the police have put their dirty fingers into the adivasis' romantic pie also. According to the provisions of the IPC a boy running away with a girl can be indicted for abduction and rape in case the girl later lodges a complaint to that effect with the police. The dalals and the police have used this with vengeance to spoil the pretty picture. So sometimes the girl's family instead of agreeing to settle the dispute in a panchayat listens to the dalals and lodges a complaint with the police. The police then arrest the boy and terrorise the girl into saying that she has been abducted and raped against her consent. Since in India at large the increasing incidence of rape cases has become a cause for serious concern, the courts are extremely strict in these cases and so the boy does not get bail until the case is disposed of. Eventually of course in most cases the girl's and boy's families come to an understanding so the girl and all the other witnesses become hostile and the boy is acquitted and they get married. But in the process the dalals and the police and lawyers earn hefty packets.

The most dangerous thing about such cases is that all those who have even in a remote way offered any help to the eloping couple are liable to be prosecuted for abetment once the girl turns round and lodges a complaint that she has been abducted and raped. I remember once in Alirajpur that a young adivasi couple eloped and then came to our office in Attha with one of the villager activists saying that the girl's parents were not agreeable to her marrying the boy and so they wanted to find out what to do. I told them that since luckily both the boy and girl, both educated, were of the legal marriageable age, which was rare among the Bhils in those days, they could go to Alirajpur and prepare a marriage affidavit in front of a notary. So they spent the night in our office and went off the next morning to Alirajpur. The girl's parents along with a dalal had in the meantime gone to the police in Bakhathgarh and demanded that a complaint of abduction and rape be lodged against the boy and some members of the sangathan and I also be charged with abetment of this crime.

Fortunately, knowing the law well in this regard, I had told our activist to also meet the SDO Police with the boy and the girl and submit a memorandum to him along with the copy of the marriage affidavit. This saved the day for us as the SDO Police sent a wireless message to the officer of the Bakhathgarh Police Station to the effect that he had listened to the boy and girl and was satisfied this was a genuine case of love marriage between two adults and so no complaint should be registered against the boy. I thus just missed, by the skin of my teeth, being falsely charged of abetting rape in addition to the numerous false charges of murder and attempted murder that were already hanging round my neck! Imagine my consternation therefore when just after this I came to Alirajpur on some work to find that one of our younger non-adivasi activists had brought a young couple from Vadodara who had eloped and married to spend their secret honeymoon in our office guest room!

Some members of the Vadodara Kamdar Union had set up an amateur theatre troupe, which used to perform street plays with a radical slant. The eloping couple were members of this troupe and in the course of their acting had fallen in love with each other. Since they were of different castes there was some apprehension in their minds as to whether their parents would agree to their marriage. The troupe had decided in a typically radical fashion without thinking out the consequences that the couple should marry in an Arya Samaj temple and then go off somewhere for a few days while they broke the news to the families and softened them up. Our young activist friend from Alirajpur, who happened to be around

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there, had gallantly proposed that the couple could spend their honeymoon in our office! So the troupe and our young friend had enjoyed an impromptu marriage celebration and then the young couple and our young friend had made their way to Alirajpur. In those disappointing times when the battle against the dam was in the doldrums the KMCS was well on its way to transforming itself into a marriage bureau for eloping couples!

Fresh from my narrow escape from being charged with abduction and rape I was aghast at this development. I made the legal consequences of our young friend's gallantry, in case things should go wrong, clear to the entire group. In legal terms in such circumstances an Arya Samaj marriage would have no value without a parallel court marriage. The Gujarat government would say that frustrated in our attempt at throttling their "jeeva dori" we Ravans had now begun abducting their Sitas. So the women activists were then charged with the responsibility of making clear to the girl that she should not under any circumstances compromise us to the Gujarat police in case her parents lodged a complaint. We then packed off the couple to a remote village and waited with bated breath for news from Vadodara. Fortunately things panned out well and the parents of the couple came round to accepting the fait accompli. I for one breathed one of the most satisfying sighs of relief that I had ever. A Charge of murder or attempted murder is one thing but that of abduction and rape is something I would definitely not like against my name.

Another festival that is a happy loving ground for eloping adivasi couples is the Indal. The Indal is in fact the quintessential expression of pristine pre-modern Bhili anarchism. The small Bhili village communities were bound together by close cooperation in almost all aspects of life starting from their agricultural operations to their social celebrations. This cooperation could be maintained only if there was near total equality between the families. One way of ensuring this was to distribute the individual surpluses generated by families from their agricultural, pastoral and gathering activities among the community. The Indal was traditionally the means of doing this. This is a celebration in which the family thanks the Gods for having been bountiful and every five years or so distributes the surpluses it has accumulated among the community by feasting them. Songs in praise of the Gods are sung during this time over three days and nights and on the final night people and especially young boys and girls congregate to dance through the night to the beat of drums and then in the morning partake of the feast. The songs sung during the Indal vary from place to place but they all give a sense of the vastness of nature and the strength of natural processes and inculcate a respect in the listener for these.

Sitting in a dark room with the singer Gayan and his chorus seated in front of the diya singing in a lilting cadence that slowly builds up its tempo to the tune of the dhak or small drum, the listener cannot but feel transported into a different world where all the petty rivalries and desires of the mundane do not matter anymore. In that atmosphere one can immediately understand why the Bhils have remained averse to the development based on greed and profit that we in the modern world crave so much after. There is a great sense of peace in those hills adjacent to the river and even though the life is very hard the great advantage is that it is simple. The people think nothing of climbing up the high hills to some of their farms on top everyday during the farming season and then afterwards bringing the heavy bundles of reaped harvest down on their heads. What unsettles them is the inevitable contact with the modern world, which is often through some rapacious local government official or the equally extortionate bania. That is why Bava of Jalsindhi in a fit of rage once held forth at length in a meeting about the forests and the river and the lands being that of the Gods and the government had no right to usurp this treasure that had been bequeathed to him

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and his people for safe keeping. One of the activists of KMCS took down this outburst, translated it into Hindi and sent it off to the Chief Minister and the press as an open letter. It remains to this day the most authentic and eloquent deep ecological statement to come out of the struggle against the dam.

The young ones of course have little time for the gayna going on inside and are more interested in enjoying the pleasures of loving, singing and dancing. The Indal is a rare event these days as families do not earn surpluses any more but are chronically in debt instead. So instead of the earlier five-year period these days a particular family does only one Indal in the lifetime of its household head. Shankar for instance has not been able to celebrate an Indal of his own and the last one was celebrated when his father was alive. Khemla only recently managed to celebrate his own Indal. This is why the people of Anjanbara were so incensed when the survey team disrupted the Indal that was in progress in their village after the gap of nine years. But when it does take place the Indal is the grandest of celebrations. There is the custom of sacrificing goats on the final night. Apart from the household celebrating the Indal others who are either close relatives or family friends bring their own goats for beheading. They also bring their drums. Thus the final night is a great spree of dancing, singing and feasting which is so entertaining that thousands of people gather from far and near to enjoy themselves.

In the early years of the KMCS we would be concerned with the fact that the adivasis were so ignorant of the modern economic and political systems that they had to depend heavily on us for all kinds of interactions with the modern world. So we would conduct two-day workshops for the youth where the various aspects of modern political economy would be explained to them. Once a ten day long workshop was planned for the youth in Attha, as we found that two days were simply not enough for training them properly. It so happened that there was an Indal celebration going on in one of the villages nearby and the final night celebration coincided with the fourth day of the workshop. During the night all the participants left the workshop venue to go to the Indal and never came back. So much for our attempts at modernising a set of people who had pristine anarchistic tendencies coursing through their blood! We of course did not give up and began organising the longer weeklong training workshops at the ashram at Machla from where there was no escape!

One of the important paeans of praise that is sung during the indal is to the Goddess Kansari. Kansari is the Goddess symbolising the Bhils' staple cereal of sorghum or jowar as they call it and so is their life giver so to speak. The felicitation of Kansari is extremely important to ensure that future harvests too are equally bountiful as the ones in the past. The importance of this Goddess can be gauged from the fact that traditionally oaths among Bhils are administered in the name of Kansari Mata or Jowar Mata as she is sometimes referred to. The oath taker has to take some grains of jowar in his hand and take the oath. The belief is that an oath taken in Kansari's name has to be fulfilled otherwise it will boomerang on the oath taker with mishap befalling him.

As mentioned earlier the Bhils had fought bravely to maintain their habitats and traditional lifestyles intact but with time they had been overcome. At the fag end of the twentieth century they had resigned themselves to being thrown around from place to place like counterfeit coins, when the struggle against the dam started. Initially they rose gloriously in revolt but after a few years they realised that the old story of displacement was going to repeat itself. So except for a few people like Bava most others opted for whatever they could get, which was in any case much more than they would have got had they not fought as they had done. However, even at the peak of the struggle they knew in their heart of hearts that the

dam would not be stopped. One of the practices in the NBA was to stand together and take oaths that no one would leave their homes and land come what may - "Doobenge par hatenge nahin". As long as these oaths were taken empty handed most people were ready to take them but they would never take these oaths in the name of Kansari mata with jowar in their hands. Once everyone was made to stand on the banks of the Narmada and the oath was taken with the waters of the river in the palms of our hands. Khemla not only refused to do so but also commented to me that if this oath was not kept then it would mean harming the Narmada as it would boomerang on her. I responded that the Narmada had already been damned to be dammed by the evil God of modern industrial development that Nehru and his ilk prayed to and so it did not really matter if we contributed our mite to her eventual death by taking oaths in her name that we knew we would not be able to keep.

The Bhils' worldview is thus a very materialist one woven around their agri-pastoral livelihoods. Their Gods are animistic representations of the forces that govern their habitats and their livelihoods. They are practical people living in a material world governed by material passions. The Bhils did not take the spiritual pole vault taken by the early Hindu Upanishadic philosophers from a more or less similar material base. The subordination of the material world to that of the spiritual by the ancient Hindu sages is most vividly portrayed in the Katha Upanishad (Sarvananda, 1975). There the seeker, a young brahmin prince Nachiketa is disturbed by the fact that his father king Vajasravas is distributing old and decrepit cows to the Brahmins as presents during a yajna sacrifice. He persistently asks his father to whom he is going to sacrifice him his son. The father irritated by his repeated questioning says that he is offering him to the God of Death Yama. Nachiketa then decides to go off to meet Yama. The father repents but the young boy tells him that the ancient seers have placed greater value on truth than worldly ways and so convinces his father to let him go. But Yama is not at home when Nachiketa arrives and he has to wait for him for three days without taking either food or water. Yama on his return is told by his wife and others that a young brahmin boy has been fasting in his absence. Yama is both ashamed and afraid because a house in which a brahmin stays without food and water is visited with tragedy and destruction.

Yama offers Nachiketa three boons in which he tells him to ask for anything he pleases in recompense. Nachiketa asks first that his father may recognise and accept him on his return when sent back by Yama and this boon is readily granted. He then asks to be told of the fire that leads to heaven which is beyond all sorrow, hunger and thirst and this boon too is granted to him. Finally he asks for the supreme knowledge of existence by which mortals become free and attain immortality. Yama tries to dissuade him saying that it is extremely difficult to comprehend and that even the Gods have been in doubt about it let alone mortals. Yama offers Nachiketa the whole wealth of the universe but the young boy remains adamant. Then Yama begins to unfold the path to supreme knowledge, which according to him is as sharp as a razor's edge. It consists of always doing the preferable as opposed to the pleasurable because those who seek pleasure lose the goal of supreme knowledge. In a beautiful metaphor set out in exquisite sanskrit verse Yama says that a person's soul is the master of the chariot that is his body and is seated within it. His intellect is the charioteer and his mind is the rein with which he controls the horses which are the senses running on the roads which are the sense objects. The person who unites her soul, intellect, mind and body in reining in the senses from galloping down the road of sense objects attains true knowledge!

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This is the kind of high spiritualism of complete renunciation of material desires that forms the philosophical foundation of Gandhian political theory and action. It requires little imagination to see that there is a vast difference between the anarcho-environmentalism of the Bhils and that of Gandhians. In the former case love and respect for nature has made the Bhils evolve cultural and livelihood paradigms that prevent its exploitation by limiting growth and development beyond a certain point while allowing them to satisfy their material desires as much as they want to. In the latter case material desires and so consumption are sought to be reined in obviating the need for development and growth and consequent depredation of nature altogether. Naturally the Bhils being materialists have tended to militantly defend against intruders, the material bases of their culture - primitive agriculture, pastoralism and hunting and gathering. Gandhians on the other hand being spiritualists have relied on non-violent passive resistance to win over the hearts of the oppressors. We shall see a little later how this variance in preferred modes of action against modern industrial development has been one of the important factors in the NBA losing its influence over the adivasis in the valley.

Despite this crucial difference the one common thing between the anarchism of the Bhils and that of Gandhians is their village and agriculture based and so nature or eco centred worldview based on the principle of "vasudhaiva kutumbakam" - love and respect for everyone and everything in the world. The Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess who acknowledges his debt to Gandhi coined the term "deep ecology" for this worldview in 1972 to emphasise the deeper ecological foundations on which it was based and later went on to call it "ecosophy" (Naess & Rothenburg, 1990). All over the world this principle has been gradually marginalised since the Columbian encounter by the devouring greed of aggrandisement that propels modern industrial development. The creed now is to produce and consume ever more and in the process lay waste both nature and the people who believe in living in harmony with it. Things have come to such a pass that in order to sell the products of a runaway industrialism, the homogenising culture of western consumerism is being popularised worldwide through television soap operas, sports broadcasts and commercials. A global market is sought to be created for the products of the industrial west by washing away local cultural influences from the brains of people through this powerful cultural onslaught of western consumerism. As we have seen the village youth in Chhattisgarh are not interested in desilting their tanks anymore but prefer to play cricket on their dry beds instead these days. Similarly the tremendous concentration of the audio-visual media on the last Cricket World Cup in South Africa in 2003 seeped through to a Bhil adivasi village in Dewas district that had access to television broadcasts. An old woman there who did not know anything about cricket lamented to me the fact that India had lost the final match to Australia. How much more catastrophic indeed than to have lost the ecological paradise that her village had been in her youth.

So when Subhadra and I arrived in Indore in the autumn of 1994 we may have been steeped in our love for each other, our love of nature and our love of our fellow human beings but we were also confused as to the course of action that we would take in our future work to try and spread these feelings of love to the ruling elite of the world who were bent on making war. But like the immortal John Lennon when he sang in the "Our World" concert in 1967, the first ever to be telecast simultaneously worldwide (Lennon, 1967), we still believed in our heart of hearts that

There's nothing you can do that can't be done.

Nothing you can sing that can't be sung.

There's nothing you can make that can't be made.

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No one you can save that can't be saved.
Nothing you can do but you can learn how to be in time
It's easy all you need is love, all you need is love.

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Chapter 14 - The Neglected of the Earth

Subhadra is not one to sit around and twiddle her thumbs. So while I was recuperating from my illness in Machla and writing reports she had begun to work on a voluntary basis from the summer of 1995 with the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust in its field area in the Barwah tehsil of Khargone district and Bagli tehsil of Dewas district about fifty kilometers from Indore. The Trust used to run a mobile health clinic in the area at that time. The clinic with a qualified doctor and a rudimentary dispensary used to pay a visit to the villages in the area three days a week. In addition it had provided training from time to time to thirteen dais, traditional birth attendants, of the area in better delivery practices and basic medicine and used to give them a monthly stipend of a hundred rupees. Subhadra began to work with the two female supervisors who were based in one of the villages there. Thus she was already familiar with the area and the people when we decided to start our own mass organisational work with women there in the autumn of 1996. But before we started our fieldwork we decided to get our theory right.

The failure of the Sangharsh Yatra and the subsequent repression let loose by the government which had reversed the rising tide of environmental mass movements in Madhya Pradesh had troubled me for quite some time in Alirajpur. I used the free time I got in Machla to undertake a serious review of the modus operandi that we had adopted thus far. We activists of the environmental movements fighting against the destruction of the environment and the consequent dispossession of the rural poor by the modern Indian state's thrust towards industrial development were mixing both the understanding of the deep ecologists that the preservation of nature could only be possible by abandoning modern industrial development and the concerns of the affected people about the serious threat to their livelihoods that this development posed. Thus the environmental mass movements we were taking part in constituted an "environmentalism of the poor" as distinct from that of the rich in India and in the West which were concerned with only sequestering environmental niches like National Parks and wildlife sanctuaries and not genuinely bothered with the people who live in proximity to them (Gadgil & Guha, 1995).

We were making demands for fundamental and radical changes in the nature of the state, the forms of governance and the mode of development. We were in fact one jump ahead of the Marxists who acknowledged the need for a centralised state in the transition period after the revolution that would wither away later only as productive forces grew enough to make a communist stateless society possible. Whereas we were rooting gung ho for hamara gaon mein hamara raj or village self rule right from day one and calling for a roll back of centralised modern development. Unlike the Marxists who have a practical understanding of the violent and arbitrary power of the state apparatus, we were labouring under the delusion that the centralised Indian state or the global development institutions that were propping it up were going to bring about their own demise voluntarily by acceding to our demands as a consequence of a change of heart brought about by the moral pressure we were creating through sit-ins and hunger strikes! This could only have happened through a vastly larger, many times more militant and far more resilient mass mobilisation than what we had been able to achieve up to then. It called for a far greater leadership role for the grassroots people who actually are fighting for their rights with activists like ourselves playing only a supportive and educative role instead of the vanguard one that we had played so far. It would also require the building up of a strong alternative cultural movement that could counter the cultural onslaught of western consumerist propaganda and its hegemony

over the minds of the people. Consequently nothing short of a complete overhaul of the mobilising strategy adopted so far was essential.

There was also the question of addressing the needs of women on a priority basis. We had never worked specifically with women before and so for this too we had to clean out the cobwebs and light up the dark spaces in our mental cupboards. Fortunately there is a rich theoretical and empirical tradition of feminism and we drew considerable inspiration and guidance from it. Modern feminism can be said to have started with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's classic "Vindication of the Rights of Women" in 1792 (Wollstonecraft, 1982). The effects of the European Enlightenment were nowhere more pronounced than in the emancipation of women from centuries of bondage decreed by religious obscurantism. Wollstonecraft was a strong advocate of women controlling their own bodies and taking on manly characteristics. Since then through a tortuous process women in the West have gained many rights both economic and political as a result of struggle. A new wave of feminism started in the post World War II era in the nineteen sixties, which spoke of a global sisterhood that could challenge patriarchal power and dominance. Soon, however, there were differences regarding the causes of women's subordination and hence the proposed strategies for change. The different streams resulting from this split were - liberal, Marxist, Socialist and radical feminism (Ollenburger & Moore, 1992). The last school has made the significant contribution of the concept of patriarchy or the deep-rooted structural oppression of women by men, which has now become universally accepted.

Black and coloured women hailing from poorer backgrounds later provided a new dimension complementing and also opposing this Euro-American feminism. Simultaneously third world women considerably widened the scope of feminism by analysing their experiences in the historical context of colonial and neo-colonial exploitation (Mohanty et al, 1991). Earlier the mid nineteen seventies had seen the emergence of eco-feminism with the publication of Rosemary Ruether's seminal work "New Woman, New Earth" (Ruether, 1975). This last challenges the male domination of nature and women and their picturisation by men as passive objects submitting meekly to reason and force. They argue that the tendency to control others and the aggression arising from this are patriarchal attitudes that enslave both men and women. This school has emerged from the ecology and peace movements that are under way round the world and is currently the only feminist one that rejects the dominant mode of development and governance along with the deep ecologists (Plumwood, 1992).

This theoretical and empirical work done to establish the identity of women over the years bore fruit in the form of universal recognition of the rights of women as embodied in the United Nations Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (Boland et al, 1994). A watershed was reached with the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994. There for the first time the reproductive rights of women were recognised. Thence forward population control policies, which targeted women as objects without any decision-making powers of their own were rejected. This process was further reinforced at the International Women's Conference held at Beijing in 1995. There the importance of women enjoying their sexuality for the achievement of complete reproductive and sexual health too got recognition for the first time in an international forum despite some stiff opposition from religious fundamentalists. The far reaching liberating scope of this conference can be gauged from the fact that the male dominated ruling establishments of the various countries have stymied the holding of the

next decadal UN Women's Conference which is overdue. Women's empowerment and the establishment of reproductive and sexual rights have become the key issues in the feminist movement ever since. So much so that the Indian Government too jettisoned its earlier sterilisation target based population control programme in favour of a reproductive health and rights approach.

Indian women too have come a long way from the early beginnings in the anti-colonial and anti-feudal struggles. The women's movement in independent India started in a conscious manner in the mid-nineteen seventies with mobilisations against male violence, both physical and sexual, and later extended to the violence of the government's policies. Later the economic marginalisation of women became a focal point. Thus attention was directed at the development policies that put women in severe stress. The women's movement has succeeded in getting the government to take note of the pitiable condition in which most Indian women live, enact protective laws and frame favourable policies. Like in the West here too there are a lot of differences within the movement but these tend to get blurred when strategic choices have to be made (Agnihotri & Mazumdar, 1995). There have been struggles against the government's population policies and especially against the introduction of harmful contraceptives like depo provera and norplant and the testing of anti-fertility vaccines (FWH, 1995). Issues such as the sati, the burning of a widow on her husband's pyre, in Deorala in the state of Rajasthan, the rape of the women's development programme worker Bhanvri Devi also in Rajasthan and reservation of seats for women in the parliament and legislatures too have been important rallying points. In recent times there has been a lot of activity around the implementation of the new target free approach to population control based on the paradigm shift in the thinking on women's health following the population conference at Cairo. A particularly vexing problem of serious proportions that has exercised feminists of late is that of "the missing Indian females", the declining sex ratio which has gone down to as low as 861 females to a 1000 males in the state of Haryana and 933 for the whole of the country according to the 2001 census (Mari Bhat, 2002).

The problem with organising women is that the deep-rooted patriarchy in rural societies prevents women from coming out of their homes. In most cases patriarchy has been internalised by the women themselves thus making it difficult to make a beginning in organising them by focussing on patriarchal oppression alone. As is well known a combination of patriarchal oppression and destructive development policies has resulted in alarming health problems for poor women. In the case of rural women this is compounded by inadequate medical facilities and illiteracy. The most worrisome problem for women relates to their reproductive health. Thus for poor rural women improving their health is most often an urgent need that they have perforce to neglect (Jeejeebhoy, 1991). Health being an issue that affects everyone it is relatively easy to get the acquiescence of the men to let their women do something about improving it. Thus both felt-need wise and strategically health provides an ideal entry point for organising poor adivasi women and helping them to create a space of their own in society.

Women's health, however, is a much more complex issue than just the provision of adequate healthcare services. It has come to be recognised that women's health, safe motherhood, population control, and poverty alleviation are all dependent on women having reproductive health rights apart from economic and political rights at par with men in a society that is egalitarian in all respects (Correa & Pechinsky, 1994). Thus the basic requirements for improving the health status of women are a direct multi-pronged attack on poverty through the creation of labour intensive work opportunities, removal of social

inequalities of all kinds, a campaign against traditional and modern myths and a comprehensive community health care system with primary and referral services (Quadeer, 1995). So any programme aimed at improving the health status of poor adivasi women has to necessarily incorporate both the service delivery and the mass organisational approaches to community work if it has to be successful. This was amply borne out by the experience of the Kasturba Trust, which had been providing exemplary health and education services for rural women in the Malwa and Nimar regions of Western Madhya Pradesh for more than fifty years without having made any substantial dent in the patriarchal structures, which stifle the lives of the rural women of the area. Even before we could start our work a heartrending incident gave notice to us of the abominable health condition of the adivasi women and their helplessness due to poverty.

On a biting cold morning in the winter of 1996 a Bhil woman lay naked shivering on the earth floor of her ramshackle hut in village Rajna. Beside her also shivering, lay a shriveled new born baby. The woman had so lain for the whole night and her ordeal hadn't ended. There was a twin yet to be born but for the last three hours there had been no movement from within and so the baby was stuck inside the womb. The earth beneath the woman was wet with blood and placental fluid but neither she nor the dai seemed to be least bothered. Just then the mobile dispensary of the Kasturba Trust happened to pass by and was stopped by the people in the village. There were five nurses but they expressed their inability to help as they did not have any instruments. When the villagers beseeched them to take the woman and the baby to the Primary Health Centre at Barwah they pleaded their inability saying they were on their way to different villages to administer vaccines under the Pulse Polio immunisation programme.

Sometime later a jeep came along with a doctor from the PHC at Barwah. The villagers stopped this jeep too. The doctor also after seeing the woman said that he was helpless as he did not have any instruments with him. He too advanced the responsibilities of supervision of the Pulse Polio programme as an excuse for not taking the woman to Barwah. He even went to the extent of saying that the lives of thousands of children were at stake and he could not put them at risk for the sake of one woman and child. Eventually the husband of the woman had to borrow money from a moneylender at an exorbitant interest rate and hire a jeep to take her to Barwah. The woman just about survived but her twin babies died. Later tests revealed that the woman had a haemoglobin count of just 4 grams per decilitre dangerously below the ideal level of 12 or above. Clearly the achievement of health, which according to the World Health Organisation means a state of complete mental, physical and social well being and especially reproductive health for poor adivasi women was going to prove to be a daunting task. There are various socio-economic and political factors that pose a near insurmountable barrier to the achievement of health for poor rural women.

The primary cause of ill health in women is their low status in society. Relegated to a position of subordination from the moment of birth, girls eat last and least, are over-worked and under-educated and have to bear children from an early age. They receive inadequate medical treatment when ill and are often passed over for immunisation. Despite the biologically proven fact that women have a longer lifespan than men, in reality, in India the reverse is true in rural areas where more girls are likely to die than boys leading to a sex ratio skewed against women in the population as mentioned earlier. Adult women lack property rights and control over economic resources, which contributes to the general preference for a male offspring as an insurance against old age incapability. This in turn

results in women having to go through the rigours of repeated pregnancies and childbirths to produce sufficient male children that can survive through to adulthood overcoming the uncertainties of an insecure childhood. Malnutrition, lack of sexual hygiene, repeated pregnancies and overwork lead to most rural women being anaemic and so prone to other diseases in general (Mehta & Abouzahr, 1993)

The prevailing pattern of development has been particularly harsh on women. Destruction of resource bases has led to the workload increasing with a corresponding decrease in nutritional levels of the food intake. The introduction of artificial input mechanised agriculture has deprived women of the little control that they had over production processes in traditional agriculture and further reinforced patriarchal power relations. Forced migration either temporary or permanent has exposed women to sexual violence in unfamiliar surroundings. The loss of traditional livelihoods has been accompanied by the induction of women into low-paid jobs in the informal sector where the work environment is unhealthy and the workload high. The general level of violence in society has gone up, to further sequester women in their homes thus reducing employment opportunities. All this has had a negative impact on the health of these women (Duvvury, 1994).

Last but in no way the least harmful have been the government's health and population control policies. Primary health care has received short shrift both in terms of financial outlays and in terms of the introduction of participative health care systems. Thus apart from the foreign funded immunisation campaigns like the Pulse Polio programme mentioned above, rural populations rarely ever receive any effective healthcare from government health services (Bose & Desai, 1983). Consequently for the poor infant mortality levels are still dangerously high as are maternal mortality and morbidity levels (IIPS, 2003). Again spurred on by the neo-Malthusian myth that population growth is responsible for poverty the government had launched an aggressive population control programme in the 1970s, which targeted women for sterilisations and the use of various unsafe and unhealthy contraception measures (Mamdani, 1973). Even though with the introduction of the sterilisation target free reproductive health approach from 1996 onwards there had ostensibly been a so called paradigm shift at the policy level in population control and maternal and child health care, the ground reality in rural areas had remained much the same as before (Rahul, 1997c). Thus health, we realised, like any other social attribute, was primarily dependent on the urgency with which people sought it. The adivasi women with whom we were going to work were too burdened by the multiple oppressions enumerated above to be able to seek anything at all let alone health. Specifically in the sphere of reproductive health, moreover, there existed an intimidating culture of silence (Dixon-Mueller & Wasserheit, 1991). So we decided to start the organisation process in Barwah tehsil with an attempt at opening up this dark and forbidden area. Weeks were spent in visiting the villages and going from house to house to talk to the women.

We spent a whole day in Chainpura village going to the houses and the fields where they were working to talk to the women and call them to the meeting to be held in the evening. Only five women came to attend. The women listened silently as the conversation was directed gradually towards reproductive health. Initially this did not draw much of a response. Then when specific problems like white discharge from the vagina, leucorrhea, were mentioned, one woman said that she was suffering from it as well as back pain. Another revealed that she had a slight prolapse of the uterus at times when she did hard work. It was decided to hold a bigger meeting on a later occasion.

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The village Golanpati, which is about six kilometres away, is picturesquely set on the banks of the Kanar river in a depression surrounded by hills at the foot of the escarpment of the Vindhya hills descending from the Malwa Plateau. It is unfortunately without any electricity. Consequently most of the men and the young unmarried women were away labouring on the fields of rich farmers atop the Malwa plateau to earn the money needed to buy diesel for running their engine driven pumps with which to irrigate their winter crops. A death of a close relative had taken place in a village some distance away from where most of the young wives of Golanpati hailed and so they too were absent. So we spent our time in desultory conversation about various things and after some time some of the women decided to go fishing in the Kanar river with small nets called "dahwalia". The people of the area are able to supplement their normal simple diet with such occasional infusions of rich fish protein.

The village Akya too was without electricity at that time though later efforts have brought it onto the electrification map. It is situated on the banks of the Sukhri stream. Here the people had already arranged for the diesel and were busy in the fields irrigating the standing crop of wheat and gram. Once again we spent the day visiting the women in their houses and fields. The houses here are all on the farms of the respective people and so scattered over a distance of some three kilometres. In the evening upwards of thirty women attended the meeting. The meeting went off well. As many as twenty-three women reported various kinds of reproductive health problems and demanded that something be done to relieve their sufferings. The women complained that local quacks only gave them injections, which did not relieve their pains or suggested that they get their uteruses removed. The government health worker rarely visited the village.

The villages Okhla and Chandupura are adjacent and for all practical purposes are like two hamlets of the same village. The district administration, however, displaying typical bureaucratic perversity has put the two villages in two separate panchayat clusters. These villages are lucky to have electricity because there is a Hanuman temple in Okhla where the epic Ramayan has been recited day and night continuously for the past twenty-five years. Even though the adivasis and their Gods hold no value for the government the same is obviously not true when it comes to Hindu Gods and their devotees. The people here too were busy with their agricultural operations. The people here have been enterprising enough to draw water over great lengths from the river Kanad using electric pumps and PVC pipes. Here during the initial house visits one woman in Chandupura said she could get all the women together in a jiffy if she was given a share of the pickings from the project being planned for them! Here for the first time women brought up the behaviour and attitudes of their men for discussion. The lust and violence of their men fuelled by alcoholism they felt was the main deterrent to achieving a healthy status. A health clinic in which specialist doctors could diagnose their problems would be immensely beneficial they felt. There are in these two villages, in addition to adivasis, dalits also.

The next set of villages has mixed populations and is dominated by upper caste people. Limbi is a village of Jats. These are a farmer caste, which had come here originally from the state of Rajasthan. They owned most of the land in the village on which the dalit and adivasi people worked as labourers. Here there was a pretty good meeting among the poorer people where most of the problems identified in the earlier villages came to the fore once again. The Jat women were prepared to talk individually but none of them came to a meeting, which was organised separately for them. There was one Jat woman who had lost her mental balance because she could not bear the mounting pressure on her to produce a

male child after repeated births of girls. There is another woman who was tricked into marrying a doddering old Jat in his seventies. The old man had died later and she had been left to make a living on her own with a small girl of five and some land.

Mundla is another village dominated this time by a different farmer caste, the Dangis. These people too own most of the land in the village and make the adivasis and dalit people work for paltry wages as low as Rupees twenty a day which is less than half the statutory minimum wage. Here the men instead of the women attended the evening meeting. The men listened and went on saying "Ha bahenji, Sach Bahenji" - yes sister, true sister, but did not make any comments of their own when they were told that they should be more considerate of the health of their women. Even though they promised to send their women to the repeat meeting to be held in the morning no one came then either.

The village of Palsud is situated between these two villages and the villagers there, some dalits and some adivasis, are continually troubled by the Jats and the Dangis. There have been murderous fights and two dalits from Palsud are serving a life sentence in Indore jail for having murdered a Jat from Limbi. The women in this village enthusiastically took part in the meeting and talked about their reproductive health problems quite freely. There are two other villages Bargana and Barkhera nearby but in both of these the meetings drew only four or five women each. One of these women a Jat went around wearing a cloth belt around her loins to prevent her uterus from coming out. She would have liked to have a hysterectomy but did not trust the private doctors in Sanawad where most of the other women had got themselves operated. In the local dialect this is referred to as the "burra operation" to distinguish it from the sterilisation operation which is called just "operation" and is done free by the government doctors as part of the family planning programme.

The last set of villages is in a cluster on the banks of the Choral river. The villages of Aronda and Kundi lie to the west of the river while the villages of Sendhwa and Karondia lie to the east. In Sendhwa village the Brahmins and Patidars who are higher up in the caste order do not let the dalits draw water from the public hand pump and the latter have to drink water from the Choral River. Consequently during the monsoons there is an annual epidemic of waterborne diseases among these people and in 1995 there were three deaths due to gastro-enteritis. Here too the meetings were sparsely attended but the women who did come all complained of reproductive health problems and of the insensitivity of their men. The upsarpanch was a Muslim who as a community are notorious for their anti-women attitudes. The upsarpanch's wife herself suffered from anaemia with a haemoglobin count as low as 6 grams per decilitre despite their being quite well off economically. She spoke about her problems individually but did not come to the meeting.

Katkut village is located roughly at the geographical centre of this area and by virtue of being the weekly marketplace and also having a civil dispensary, banks, the forest range office and a police outpost it is also the commercial and administrative centre. It is a peculiar village. It is dominated by the Jats and the sarpanch at that time in 1996 was a Jat woman. The husband of the woman operated in her name. The Jats of Katkut are held in low esteem by their caste men from other villages because of their arrogant and boorish behaviour and the men find it difficult to get brides. One young Jat woman complained that she repeatedly aborted and would like to know whether there was any solution. She was the only daughter-in-law in a house of four sons. There was no father-in-law who had died very early. The mother-in-law Karmabai fought a long legal battle with her brothers and gained possession of her share of her father's land. She was a panch in the panchayat. She said that the Jat women were extremely oppressed and it was not possible to get anything done in

their interest given the attitude of the men. This area is just fifty kilometers away from the city of Indore. Yet the women here regardless of whether they are from relatively well off households or from the extremely poor adivasi and dalit ones, are uniformly oppressed by various forms of patriarchal oppression. Despite all the rhetoric and policies of women's empowerment, there is a laudable women's policy document of the government of Madhya Pradesh, the stark reality that came through from our initial forays was that the women of this area suffered from severe neglect both from their families and from the society and government. Truly these women are the neglected of the earth.

Katkut being the local market village has a lot of traders and moneylenders and also five quacks. There is an ayurvedic dispensary of the government with a doctor and a compounder. There are little or no medicines available in this dispensary and mostly the doctor spends his time reading a newspaper or treating patients with allopathic medicines for a fee. The other government health functionaries, who are para medics, too are engaged in the same clandestine allopathic practice. All the local government servants working in various departments stay in rented apartments here. These people along with satellite television, a licensed and many unlicensed liquor shops make the ambience of the village more akin to an urban one than rural. The hybrid half Western, half Indian pop culture being spread through television soap operas and their sponsoring advertisements has spread among the youth whose aspirations have become urban. Despite this the people still retained their traditional abhorrence for constructing latrines in their houses and preferred to defecate on the sides of the roads and fields. Thus the approach roads to Katkut would all stink in the morning with the stench of stools and urine until the pigs polished them off. The Kasturba Trust in true Gandhian fashion offered to supply the material for the construction of latrines and soak pits for the people if they would only contribute their labour. The people treated this as some kind of a ruse that had some catch in it that would trap them sooner or later and turned their noses up and went on defecating on the sides of the roads forcing visitors to turn their noses away. We took up residence in this village in a rented accommodation at the beginning of our work, as we still had to make friends with the people and earn their confidence before settling into one of their villages. Needless to say we too had to get up early while it was still dark to defecate on the roadside!

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Chapter 15 - Gynaecology in the Wilderness

Following on their policy of opening up the forested areas of Nimar and Malwa to agriculture and trade the British had brought a whole village consisting of jat farmers, traders and lower caste menials from Rajasthan and settled them down in Katkut just after the revolt of 1857. The stone for the ballast for the railway line from Indore to Khandwa and the wood for the sleepers too were sourced from this area. For this the British brought in adivasi labourers and settled them in forest villages. So right from the start the British had created a hierarchy here with the Jats on top and the adivasis and dalits at the bottom. Thus this area was different from the areas in Jhabua and Dhar where we had worked before in that there was a powerful exploitative non-adivasi presence in the villages apart from the traders and the government servants whom we had to tackle earlier. We had initially introduced ourselves to the people as workers of the Kasturba Trust. In this way we could allay the suspicions of the non-adivasis and the government staff who had all become very edgy over the adivasi mass mobilisation, which was going on in other parts of Western Madhya Pradesh. Under the circumstances we would not have been allowed to begin our work if it had been made known that we were activists of these adivasi movements. The arrangement with the Kasturba Trust had been that we would do the organisation work among the women and so boost up the demand for the clinical services being provided by the former's mobile clinic cum dispensary and dais.

We had surmised beforehand that we would find women suffering from serious reproductive health problems and so we had planned reproductive health workshops to follow up our preliminary meetings in the villages. We had intended to use these workshops to familiarise the women with the workings of their bodies and the causes of their health problems. This we had thought would be a good preparatory step towards peppering up the women to act in a concerted manner both within the home and the village and also outside to improve their health. All these plans were dashed by the response of the women in the preliminary meetings. The general reluctance of women to talk about their reproductive health problems in a women's group puzzled us initially. Finally Ramanbai of Chandupura provided the answer. She said that in her village there was tremendous infighting among the different families over various issues. There was a lot of backbiting. So women did not want to reveal their illnesses, the public knowledge of which could be used against them. Consequently, even if individually they would talk freely about their problems, often women refused to come to the meetings. Later inquiries in other villages confirmed this to be true. This was an absolutely new problem that we had never encountered before because we had never ventured into the personal sphere of village women. So getting women to come together to discuss health problems turned out to be a tough nut to crack.

One woman from Okhla had recently had a baby at the Primary Health Centre (PHC) at Barwah. During the delivery the vaginal opening had been ruptured and had had to be stitched. She was told that she could later get the stitch removed by the auxiliary nurse-medic (ANM) of the government in Katkut. This ANM, however, said she was not competent enough and that the woman would have to go to Barwah again. This woman mistook Subhadra for another ANM when she went to talk to her and gave her a tongue lashing for not providing her with proper care for which she was being paid by the government. Similarly Bansi of Akya village asked "How will it help if I understand my problem if I do not have the technical expertise to solve it?" She had been ill ever since she had given birth to her fourth child under complicated conditions some three years ago. The women everywhere insistently demanded that arrangements should be made for proper

medical attention instead of holding reproductive health workshops. The demand of the women was for checkups by women gynaecologists from Indore. The gynaecologist in the PHC in Barwah had never set foot in these remote adivasi areas.

The governmental health services were in a sorry state. Not only was there inadequate staff but there was also a shortage of medicines. There was no supply of iron and folic acid tablets with the PHC in Barwah for some six months in 1996. In Bagli Tehsil these were available but there was a severe lack of staff to distribute these and the medical officer there gave us the responsibility of distributing some of his stock. Obviously there was no ante-natal care. When the health records of the PHC in Barwah were studied we found to our surprise that all the reproductive health services, especially ante-natal care, were being provided to the full. Investigations revealed that the government village level health workers were submitting false reports of the services they had in fact not provided. The falseness even extended to the reports of births, infant deaths and maternal deaths. The village level workers brazenly admitted that they could not possibly travel on foot through remote areas attending to the needs of women and so the only option was to submit false reports in the monthly meetings. The provision of reproductive health services is difficult to monitor as compared to the completion of sterilisation targets and so for years together the health records of the Barwah PHC and possibly most other rural PHCs in Madhya Pradesh have had no relation to the reality actually prevailing on the ground. This then was the state of the much vaunted target free approach to reproductive health care for women in the area. Yet when it comes to one-shot affairs like the polio eradication or sterilisation campaigns, there is no dearth of enthusiasm or resources. This was the dismal scenario in which we had begun our intervention to try and improve matters.

As mentioned earlier the Kasturba Trust had been running a minimal community health programme under which the community organisers along with the dais motivated the people of the village to improve their health awareness. They were also supposed to keep track of the diseases in the villages and bring the ill to the mobile clinic when it visited these villages. This ideal plan had not worked partly because of the formidable social obstacles in its path and partly because of a lack of motivation among the workers. Moreover, since this was a funded project there were heavy reporting responsibilities that kept the workers involved in paper work. What can be more indicative of the lack of effectiveness of the programme than the fact that even after two years the Trust workers had no inkling of the severe reproductive health problems being faced by the women of the area. The supervisors had not even heard of the target free approach and the paradigm shift in maternal and child health care. They expressed surprise that the government had taken what they deemed to be a very rash step of freeing the population control programme from sterilisation targets!

Service delivery work like arranging health camps required an infrastructure, which we neither possessed nor had the intention of setting up. So we had no alternative but to fall back on the Kasturba Trust and the government health department and try and galvanise their functioning. Private gynaecologists in Indore had to be contacted and convinced to give their services free of charge. There are a lot of institutional and specialised human resources in the city of Indore, which were not being properly mobilised by the Trust. Thus just by mobilising this existing infrastructure more efficiently it became possible for us to arrange the health clinics. Despite having spent more than a decade organising adivasis we had never paid much attention to health apart from doing crisis management when epidemics of cholera, gastro-enteritis or scabies spread. The actual rural health scenario and especially the sphere of women's health turned out to be much more complex than we had

imagined. Our cut and dried prescriptions, which we had thought out beforehand had to be trashed. The inertia against change becomes more evident when deeply ingrained attitudes and habits have to be changed. Mobilising people and especially women on a secondary issue like health as opposed to more pressing livelihood problems we found was a difficult task.

Three reproductive health clinics were held one each month in the winter of 1996-97. Organising the first one at Palsud village required a lot of preparatory work. Inspection tables had to be constructed. The mobile clinic of the Kasturba Trust did not have any obstetric instruments so these and gloves had to be acquired. The gynaecologists from Indore had to be contacted. The PHC in Barwah had to be informed to requisition the services of a pathologist. The school building in Palsud had to be cleaned and temporary inspection rooms with sufficient lighting had to be prepared. Everything turned out very well in the end. Three gynaecologists, one physician and one paediatrician attended to upwards of eighty patients. Thereafter the other two camps at Okhla and Kundia did not pose many problems as we had got the hang of the process. The camp at Okhla was immensely successful with over a hundred patients. The camp at Kundia had only about forty patients because some of the influential but dubious non-activists in the nearby villages objected to our not involving them.

The doctors found that most of the women were anaemic but exact estimations were not possible because the pathologist from the PHC at Barwah did not come with the reagents required for haemoglobin testing. He said that there was only a limited supply at the PHC. The doctors found it difficult to communicate properly. This difficulty arose not just because of the language difference but also because of the tendency not to reveal too much to the patient. Thus Subhadra had to both elicit more information from the doctors and also convey it to the women in their own language. There were some medicines that were free having been provided by the doctors from their stocks of physicians' samples but others had to be bought. Consequently there was some confusion among the patients who began demanding free medicine as in other camps of this type. We of course had made it quite clear in our meetings that medicines would have to be bought. Many women who had registered their names for checkups in the preparatory meetings later refused to get themselves physically examined. Some even ran away to their farms rather than be dragged to the examination table!

The real problems arose during the follow up to these camps, which proved to be extremely educative for us. A major revelation was that many women do not take the medicines prescribed to them. Some women had orally taken the vaginal tablets for curing leucorrhea given to them for insertion in their vagina. Another woman had kept the vaginal tablets safely wrapped up in cloth in her private box because the doctor had just told her to keep it 'inside' without mentioning the Hindi word for vagina. So the woman had assumed that the tablets were some kind of totem and kept them in her box instead of inserting them into her vagina. Inquiries revealed that this carelessness or reluctance in taking medicines regularly was quite common. Many of the women had come with the expectation that the big doctors from Indore would give them injections of special miraculous medicines which would immediately cure them of their problems. One woman in Okhla, Suraj, even went to the extent of saying that she did not trust our medicines and us. She had gone for the check-up to see what kind of treatment was being given. She was extremely upset when we repeatedly went to her house every week to see whether she was taking the medicines.

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"Mujhe aise lafde nahin chahiye, mere naam tumhari chopdi se kat do"(I do not want to get into such trouble so please remove my name from your register) she told us irascibly.

The quacks were playing an extremely dangerous role as far as the reproductive health of women was concerned. Initially they gave antibiotic injections and pain-killers to the women who went to them for treatment. When naturally this did not succeed they advised the women to undertake hysterectomies. These quacks acted as touts for gynaecologists in Sanawad and Indore who have private clinics. Kusma of Akya related how on one occasion she was taken along with five other women who were complaining of various kinds of pains to a gynaecologist in Sanawad by a quack in Katkut. All five of them were told to get hysterectomies done. Kusma was extremely relieved when the doctor at the Okhla clinic told her that she suffered from hyperacidity and high blood pressure and so there was no need for her to take the burra operation. These quacks also provided unsafe abortion services, which had led to the death of a woman from Katkut the year before.

Invariably the women continue to suffer from pains and leucorrhea even after undergoing this burra operation. Quite a few such women came to the clinics and some solution to their problems had to be found. While some of the women reported improvements from the insertion of vaginal tablets most did not. Leucorrhea too required more detailed analysis and treatment than that made available in the clinics. We tried homoeopathic and ayurvedic treatment as an alternative and there were better results from this. Another phenomenon was that of women's vaginal opening having become so extended and loose from repeated childbirths that when they get up from a squatting position air is sucked into the vagina which is then ejected with an embarrassingly loud sound when they sit down again. All in all it became clear that a much more comprehensive analysis and treatment programme would have to be undertaken for reproductive health problems. Many women had complained of pains in the stomach and of dizziness. Their problems were diagnosed as being acidity and hypertension. When despite appropriate medication some women reported that there was no improvement we decided to inquire about their food habits. We found that they took a diet, which was heavy in salt and hot chilly. They did not drink much water. Combined with low nutritional levels this was a sure fire recipe for hyperacidity and high blood pressure. When Subhadra suggested to one woman that she drink a litre of water first thing in the morning every day pat came the latter's reply, " Why should I drink so much water when I do not feel thirsty?" Why indeed.

One day while coming back from Katkut to Okhla we decided to veer off from the road to visit a group of dalit bamboo basket weavers just to see how they were doing. We found that one boy had been affected by scabies. We wrote them the name of the medicine, benzyl benzoate, on a piece of paper and told them to get it from Katkut and explained to them how to apply it and what precautions to take. We also told them that in the interim they could apply crushed leaves of the neem tree. When we went back five days later we found that the people had not bought the medicine as it was not available in Katkut and had relied only on the neem leaves which had not been effective and the boy was in a worse condition. The infection had also spread to a few more children. We got the medicine for them from Indore so as to ensure that the disease did not spread any further. Among adivasis scabies assumes epidemic proportions because they do not clean themselves properly and rarely apply the appropriate medicine.

There were some serious cases ranging from piles, stones in the bladder, suspected cervical cancer and the like which require detailed examination and treatment in Indore but the patients are too poor for this. The camps threw up three advanced cases of Tuberculosis.

These people were getting themselves treated by private practitioners at great expense unaware that the government had a TB eradication programme, which provides free treatment. One of these patients was from Katkut and yet he did not get wind of a TB camp held by the PHC in Katkut in October 1996, which had drawn a blank. When finally he came to know from us he took the trouble of walking twelve kilometres to the Kundi camp for registration and treatment. Thus just medication alone is not a solution to the health problems that women face. The culture of instant treatment through injected medication and intravenous drips introduced by irrational allopathic practice over the years has totally destroyed the people's capacity to seek their own solutions. Consequently, as mentioned earlier, women want immediate medical solutions and are impatient about sitting and understanding the cause of their problems.

Our discussions with them had clearly revealed that the women felt the pressure of work and patriarchy after marriage. This invariably led to their general health deteriorating and most women coming for treatment were diagnosed as being anaemic from the whiteness of their eyes but due to some logistical problems measurement of haemoglobin levels had not been possible. So it was decided to undertake a detailed reproductive health survey. This it was hoped would give us a better idea of the extent of the problems and so help us in devising an appropriate solution. There are, however, some serious practical and ethical problems with conducting surveys that are normally glossed over by academic researchers and policy makers. The numerous surveys that had been conducted by the government and the Kasturba Trust have induced a survey fatigue in the people and they just do not like to respond, a phenomenon that has been noted by other researchers also (Chambers, 2003). So very often the data are fudged as done by the health workers of the PHC in Barwah. Then there is the question of the ethics of collecting data from people ostensibly for their benefit when they are in most cases utilised for serving other dubious ends (Subhadra & Rahul, 1997). Rarely are the respondents of a survey involved in the design of its structure or in the policy decisions taken based on the results.

When, however, surveys are done in a small local population with the intention of providing immediate relief to the respondents based on the information gathered from them about some problem or the other, then the problem of ethicality does not arise. A good example of such a study is the landmark one done by the Search project in Garhchiroli district in Maharashtra (Bang, 1989). Our survey too fell into this category. Nevertheless we took no chances and had detailed discussions with the women to decide on the best possible design of the questionnaires so as to ensure full cooperation before embarking on the survey. The survey was conducted in the first week of April 1997 by adolescent girl students in the 15-18 years age group studying in the high school run by the Kasturba Trust in Indore. An orientation workshop extending over three days was first held for these girls. The first day was spent in bringing home to the girls the extent to which women are oppressed by patriarchy. This was done not in a pedagogical manner but by inducing the girls to analyse various kinds of injustice being suffered by women in their own surroundings. The second day was devoted to explaining the workings of the reproductive system in particular and the human body in general. The third day was utilised to give the girls an idea of the kind of reproductive health problems being faced by women in the survey area and the survey design and schedules were explained to them.

The workshop revealed that even young girls have internalised patriarchy and are not at all sensitive to the ways in which women are continually downgraded in society. There was stiff resistance on the second day to the open discussion that was conducted by

Subhadra to describe the reproductive system with the aid of overheads. Girls just did not want to discuss sex and the ways in which lack of knowledge about sexual matters could lead to serious reproductive health problems. These girls mostly came from middle and upper middle-class backgrounds and they all had misconceptions about the menstrual discharges. These misconceptions were reinforced by the various taboos that accompany the onset of menses in Hindu society. There is an urgent need for sensitising adolescent girls not only to reproductive health issues but also to the societal factors that contribute to widespread morbidity among women. This lack of information among adolescents and efforts to improve matters is a universal phenomenon (AGI, 1998).

The main aim of the survey was to get a comprehensive idea of the extent of reproductive health morbidity among women in the reproductive age group. Simultaneously the survey was structured so as to test a few hypotheses that we had surmised from our initial fieldwork. One hypothesis was that the high levels of morbidity had a close relationship with the poor general health status as reflected in the anaemic condition of most women. The other more important hypothesis was that this morbidity had more to do with the pernicious effects of patriarchy that were so evident and was not just the result of poverty. A subsidiary to this latter hypothesis was that the effects of patriarchy were more pronounced in married women. The main schedule consisted of a list of various problems and factors that affect reproductive health like the number of childbirths and deaths, the age at marriage and such other related information for women in the 15-45 years age group. There were two subsidiary schedules one for determining the heights and weights of children in the 3-6 years age group and one for determining the educational status of children in the 10-16 years age group. The haemoglobin percentage of the women in the 15-45 years age group was also tested by using haemometers.

Universal sampling was adopted for the survey in thirteen villages of the area, which had been covered by the clinics earlier. Due to various reasons all the women, however, did not respond to the questionnaires. The villages of Limbi and Aronda were chosen because these have upper-caste people who are quite well off economically. Thus the upper-caste women of these villages constituted the control population to test the hypothesis that reproductive health problems were related to patriarchy and not to poverty alone. The other control group was that of unmarried menstruating girls older than 15 years of age to test the hypothesis that the effects of patriarchy were more pronounced on married women than on unmarried women.

On an average each village was surveyed by a team of five girls under the supervision of a teacher. This team stayed with the villagers during the period of the survey. The survey was preceded by a meeting with the men and women in the villages to explain once again to them the rationale behind the survey. The information was gathered through personal interviews. The surveys were carried out over a period of five days. Every evening the survey team held meetings with the men and women explaining to them various aspects of reproductive health. A cultural show was held on the final evening, which included a hand puppet show on the ill effects of alcohol consumption. Subhadra, I and a doctor of the Kasturba Trust handled the logistics of organising the survey. This was a difficult task because the area is a hilly one without proper roads and the haemometers and nurses had to be ferried around on time.

Both the villagers and the team members immensely enjoyed the whole exercise. The only hitch came in the testing of haemoglobin levels. There were just four haemometers, which had to be circulated among the villages. Due to improper use blood

clotted in the pipette of one of the haemometers and so it went out of order after use in only one village. So haemoglobin testing could be done in only eleven villages. Thus even though a total of 268 ever married women in thirteen villages had been surveyed, the haemoglobin levels of only 163 women in eleven villages could be tested and so the data of only these women were considered for the purposes of analysis. In addition to this 28 unmarried girls above 15 years of age were also surveyed.

The results presented a shocking picture of the reproductive health status of the women of the area. As many as 84.7% of the women suffered from some reproductive health problem or other. 49.1% suffered from vaginal discharges and 45.4% from dizziness arising possibly out of high blood pressure. 65% of the women complained of waist pains. Another disturbing statistic was that 6.8% of the women suffered from STDs, which was quite high for such a remote rural area where there was no prostitution. On an average the number of diseases being suffered simultaneously by a respondent, the morbidity index, was as high as 3.1. This morbidity index for adivasi women was highest at 3.5 while that of the dalit women stood at 2.6 and that of other caste women at 2.1. Thus even though the other caste women who are economically well off are not as badly off as the adivasis and the dalits nevertheless the level of morbidity among them too is very high. Notably the other caste women of Aronda who are Muslims showed a high morbidity level of 3.2 almost at par with the adivasi women. Statistical testing showed that the null hypothesis that the means of the samples of the different caste groups were from the same population could be accepted at a 5% level of significance. Thus our surmise that some other factor in addition to poverty was responsible for the poor reproductive health of the women had been borne out by the results of the survey. Significantly none of the 28 unmarried girls surveyed reported as suffering from any problems. Our detailed observations of the day to day life of the married women in the area described earlier led us to believe that the pernicious effects of patriarchy were mainly to blame for their sorry reproductive health status irrespective of their economic condition.

The survey revealed that the average haemoglobin level of the women was only 7.36 grams per decilitre of blood, which was about 46% of the desired value. Thus our hypothesis that there was a close relationship between the anaemic condition of the women and their poor reproductive health status too was amply borne out. Significantly unmarried girls showed an average of 11.1 grams per decilitre, which was relatively all right further confirming that it was married women who were more subject to the pressures of patriarchy. Furthermore 73.6% of the women had been married before completing 18 years of age, 41.7% had lost at least one child, 17.3% of women had more than 5 children and only 10.4% of the women had been sterilised. These discouraging statistics also pointed toward the pervasiveness of patriarchal values. The survey also revealed that there was no statistically significant difference in the literacy levels of boy and girls and the nutritional levels of girls was slightly better than that of the boys even though the difference was statistically insignificant. These levels, however, were far below that of the upper socio-economic strata in urban areas as was only to be expected. Thus these data too confirmed that the effects of patriarchy begin to make themselves felt on women only after marriage. It was clear therefore that gynaecological solutions alone would not be able to solve the reproductive health problems of women without addressing the problem of patriarchal oppression and so ensuring their reproductive rights also.

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Chapter 16 - From Reproductive Health to Reproductive Rights.

Our attempts to solve the health problems being faced by women also gave us a revealing insight into the distorted mindset that sustains the irrational way in which modern medicine is being practised in the area. There are two parts to this mindset. One is the perception of the poor adivasis themselves and the other is the cunning of the medical practitioners both qualified and quacks. The Bhil adivasis have traditionally relied on medicine men called 'burwa's for the solution of their health problems. Traditional adivasi aetiology has it that a variety of evil spirits are responsible for various diseases and so it is necessary to exorcise them by the chanting of mantras. The burwas know these mantras and the ways in which evil spirits can be exorcised. Herbs too are prescribed as a supplement to these mantras. Even today this view of disease persists among the adivasis and because its administration is cheap it is normally the first option for them. There is little understanding of the fact that disease is caused by germs and bacteria of various kinds. The only difference is that now along with the burwa the people go to doctors also who give them injections and pills or intravenous drips. These things are as arcane to illiterate adivasis as the mantras chanted by the burwa but appear at times to be more effective. The adivasis do not take any chances, however, and go to both quacks and burwas either simultaneously or alternately when seriously ill.

The doctors, quacks, nurses and health workers all take advantage of this mindset of the adivasis to indiscriminately inject antibiotics and apply intravenous glucose drips for even such diseases as colds and dysentery. There is never any serious attempt to diagnose the problem being faced by the patient. These are also supplemented by inadequate doses of oral antibiotics. Consequently the patient has to come again and again to the doctor for treatment. The rainy season is considered by these doctors to be their earning season when they take advantage of the natural increase in the prevalence of diseases to fleece the patients who come to them for treatment. There is not much difference between a mechanic who repairs a bicycle and these doctors. In the case of the bicycle at least the owner can see the working of its parts and form an idea of how it works. In the case of the human body, however, the working of its inner parts is not visible and so the patient normally does not know what is happening. This ignorance about the working of their own bodies extends to the general public and is not restricted to just adivasis. A modern voodoo of the irrational use of injections, drips and drugs has grown up around this ignorance. This suits very well the interests of the drug industry, which spares no effort to promote this irrationality among both medical practitioners and policy makers. Thus the market has been flooded with irrational formulations, which are being sold at exorbitant prices through unethical promotional means (Panikar et al, 1990). With the cessation of the process patent regime in India, which allowed the production of a drug through a separate process from the one for which the original licence exists, the cost of medicines is bound to increase even further adding to the miseries of the people.

This state of affairs is even more critical in the case of reproductive health because the working of the reproductive system is not only more difficult to understand but also there are all kinds of taboos and superstitions associated with it. In such cases the doctors go a step further and advocate hysterectomies as the final solution for such persistent problems as vaginal discharges, waist pains and blood pressure. The government health system is woefully inadequate in this respect. This sorry situation with regard to the lack of quality service providers and the miserable state of health awareness among adivasis is on the extreme side in this area but this is more or less the case all over the third world (Aitken

& Reichenbach, 1994). Invariably the suggested solution to this problem is to increase the resources devoted to the public health system and to increase the number of and training of the grassroots workers of the public health system. Given the resource crunch being faced by the government and the total lack of motivation in its staff there is no possibility of this strategy succeeding as is evident from the little progress that has been made in the implementation of the target free approach. Indeed over the past few years the rural public health system has deteriorated to the verge of collapse as allocations have not kept pace with demand.

NGOs can definitely provide better service but they can touch only a miniscule section of the populace and have to constantly depend on external sources for funds (Jeejeebhoy, 1997). Apart from this such funds are more readily available for such high profile work as aids prevention rather than for the basic work of primary reproductive health services. The vast majority of the poor rural women are doomed to suffer in silence. Even when they do seek solutions they mostly go to inadequately trained and extortionate private practitioners. The challenge thus is to build up health awareness in the rural populace so that they can make a better utilisation of the resources, which are at present being siphoned off by quacks. A locally self-sustaining community health system is a distinct possibility; it only requires a lot of hard work to establish it. Community health programmes for adivasis cannot succeed without bringing about a drastic change in their mindset with regard to health. This will involve their understanding the working of the human body, the causes of the various kinds of illnesses and gaining a rudimentary knowledge of the way in which the various drugs operate. Identification and prescription of locally available herbs too can go a long way towards reducing the costs of health care. The close link between patriarchy and ill health too has to be understood and acted upon. The NGO CEHAT has made some practical contributions in this area by collaborating with the many adivasi mass organisations of Western Madhya Pradesh to set up such community run health systems.

The more serious problem of course was that of patriarchal oppression. A recurrent theme in the meetings that we had with the women and even in conversations with individual women was that of the behaviour and attitudes of their men. The women complained that they were not in any way in control of their bodies and decisions within the home. So there was no question of their being able to improve their health. Ramanbai of Chandupura said that she was suffering from piles and the doctor at Sanawad had told her that she would have to get herself operated. The doctor at the Okhla clinic too said the same thing. Yet her husband who is capable of spending the money is refusing to do so. She said that while talking about such matters women have to be afraid of their children also lest they go and tell their father. Kesarbai of Okhla said that she had already had three daughters and did not want any more children but her husband was not agreeing. She had thought of getting a copper T inserted but the bad experience in this regard of another woman had discouraged her. When Subhadra advised the use of condoms she said that this was not possible. She said that her husband when he was inebriated would not listen to anything. If she resisted intercourse at such times then he would charge her of being involved with some other man.

Sumati's (the name has been changed for obvious reasons) case was particularly problematic. Her husband was involved in an affair with another woman. This woman had been driven out by her husband and she stayed with her mother. Sumati said that on some days her husband's penis was full of pus and swollen indicating that possibly he had an STD, which he would convey to her. This was a classical helpless situation in which many

urban women found themselves (Salam, 1995). In Kundia there was a woman who was beaten up by her husband and forced to spend the night out in the cold because her brothers did not entertain him properly when he went to their village for a visit. Reshma of Chandupura said that her husband was angry that she got herself treated at the camp at Okhla, which had resulted in her growing friendship with Subhadra and the revealing of many inner secrets to her. Similarly many young women reported that their mothers-in-law did not look favourably on this new process that had begun.

A social custom of the Bhils that is detrimental to the women is that of the importance given to alcohol as a holy spirit. Children are given alcohol even when babes in arms. The Gods have to be propitiated every now and then with alcohol. This gives the men and sometimes even women the licence to drink. Alcoholism brings to the fore the worst manifestations of patriarchy in the men. As mentioned earlier by Kesarbai men under the influence of alcohol make sexual demands of their wives and resort to violence if these are not met. Men frequently go on drinking sprees doing no work at all for days on end. This too increases the burden of the women who then have to work harder. These alcoholics also invariably object to their women taking part in organisational activities and quite a few of them are active as informers and collaborators of the police.

The Bhils having been a martial race have a clear gender division of labour, which is not easily broken. The men even if they want to find it difficult to help out with domestic work. Interestingly the need to migrate in search of employment has resulted in the loosening of these social taboos and so men have begun to do domestic work. Indeed this taboo against men doing domestic work is widespread across Indian society. I myself being free from such inhibitions quite often cook our food and wash our clothes. Water came only once a day in the morning in Katkut and the tap from the public line was at the front of our rented house. So the washing had to be done on a stone on the roadfront. One day the landlord, an irascible old man, told me that I should not wash Subhadra's clothes. A debate ensued with the old man saying that he hated the very idea of a man washing his wife's clothes. He went on to say that the sacred scriptures of the Hindus forbade men from doing housework. Instead of challenging this patently false statement I asked him why he went to the police station to report disputes when the ancient scriptures mention that they should be resolved within the community. He retorted that the domestic world was governed by the scriptures, but not the outside world of work, where modern ideas had to be accepted for progress! Indeed in Indore word has spread round the colony in which we now reside that I cook and wash clothes and so do not qualify to be called a proper man! And it is the maids who come to work in our house that have spread this around. Talk of patriarchy being internalised!

When it was further pointed out to our landlord in Katkut that the British who had introduced the police system and also the sewing machine with which he earned his living as a tailor had now accepted the equality of men and women in all respects he initially replied that he did not believe it. Finally he said that he would concede that men should wash their wives' clothes only if I could show him a book written by an Englishman that explicitly said so. The landlord's wife related to Subhadra how on one occasion when she had overstayed at her father's house well beyond the time that her husband had told her to come back, she had a nightmare that her husband was chasing her with a stick. She had packed her bags and returned the very next day! All this pointed again and again to the fact that conducting programmes to remedy reproductive health problems would be inadequate without addressing the thorny issue of reproductive and gender rights. Things took a

dramatic turn when the pressure of circumstances forced us to take up rights issues going onto create history in a different way altogether.

Hundreds of adivasi women in their multicolour sarees, ghagras, lugras and doglis were seated under the shade of the two big mahua trees in Akya village one sunny afternoon. It was the first week of May 1997 and in the midst of the marriage season. So an adivasi coming from outside would have wondered why only women were congregated and why there was no drum beating. But this was not a marriage. It was the meeting called to review the results of the reproductive health survey. Subhadra painstakingly explained with the help of coloured charts what all the data that had been collected meant in terms that the women could understand. Then she let the bombshell drop – the data had revealed that all women irrespective of whether they were rich or poor suffered from reproductive health problems because of patriarchal pressures and medication alone could not provide lasting solutions to them. There was a dam burst after this. Woman after woman got up and said that they could do nothing as the men would not listen and would impose themselves on them. The biggest problem they said was that the men drank too much and when under the influence of liquor they became even more demanding. Previously they had had to brew their own liquor from the flowers of the mahua tree, which is a laborious and time-consuming task and so could be undertaken only occasionally. With the profuse availability of bottled illicit liquor from the two distilleries in the area this constraint had been removed the women said. Ultimately the meeting remained inconclusive, as there seemed to be no ideas with the women as to how the male chauvinist pigs and their drinking could be tamed!

It was clear to us of course that the twin problems of alcoholism and bootlegging and the larger issue of patriarchal oppression could not be tackled without involving the men also in the organisation process. However, this meant that we would once again have to stray into the area of general organisation against the poverty arising from exploitation by non-adivasis and the wrong development and administrative policies of the state that had been underway in the whole Western Madhya Pradesh region for a decade and a half by then. This would then pose the problem of women's issues being sidelined in the heat of struggle, something that we were running away from. Our hands were forced in a way because some of the adivasis of the area who had relatives in the Western Nimar region where the adivasi mobilisation was in full flow at that time came back after a visit there with the news that a husband and wife couple had gone east to their area to help them organise themselves. These people put two and two together, sought us out and asked us to get things moving in Barwah too.

We were very cautious about not sidetracking women's issues in the heat of struggle as had happened in the other mass organisations of the region right from the word go. So we took a conscious decision to ensure that women remained at the forefront of all activities of the organisation process. We made it a condition for our attendance at meetings that women should be present in them in large numbers. Even though there was initial reluctance from the men, when we skipped two or three meetings the men began bringing their women. Once the initial barrier was overcome we conducted separate meetings for the women to inspire them to get out of the daily rut of household work and involve themselves in organisational activities instead. I made it clear that my role would be only that of a trainer and that I would not go and talk to any government official from the lowest forest guard onwards and the adivasis, women as well as men, would have to learn to do this themselves.

We had just one preparatory workshop in which Khemla came from Jhabua and the two organisations, Adivasi Shakti Sangathan in Barwah tehsil and Adivasi Morcha

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Sangathan in Bagli tehsil were formed. After that the organisation process never looked back. A domino effect began with people walking in the footsteps of others in the Western Madhya Pradesh region, who had been fighting for their rights for more than fifteen years and attacking the bastions of oppression and demolishing them. The first casualty of course was the forest department, which was totally marginalised within the space of just a month. The forest guards initially tried to intimidate some of the people in Akya village and confiscated a cassette and some literature from them. A protest meeting was called in Okhla and the Divisional Forest Officer in Barwah was given a notice to attend and explain why his subordinate staff had behaved in such an illegal manner. Hundreds of men and women gathered on the appointed day at Okhla but there was no forest department official there. Even the forest guard and deputy ranger who manned the barrier there had fled. Then something unexpected happened that changed the course of events completely.

A week before this I had conducted a workshop exclusively with the men on the issue of patriarchal oppression of women. The group discussions had ended with the conclusion that the alcoholism of the men was the most severe problem for the women. The men also said that it was proving to be a financial drain and so something should be done about it. However, the workshop had ended without any decision regarding the action to be taken in this regard but only the agreement that another meeting should be held. On that fateful day in Okhla, when the people were discussing what to do next since the forest officials were absent, Rajaan, who is a teetotaler got up and said that the illegal liquor shop should be closed down. The bootlegger who ran this shop was a notorious goon as is the case generally all over India. He used to abuse and beat up the adivasis. Thus the wrath of the people, which had been reserved for the forest officials then turned on the bootlegger. They raided his shop, confiscated his liquor, smashed the bottles and warned him to close shop immediately.

The nature of their trade demands that goons and bootleggers be made of stern stuff. So that night he and his cohorts went to the house of Shivilal who was playing a leading role in the sangathan in Okhla village and beat him up. Word spread immediately and by early morning hundreds of men and women had gathered in Katkut in front of the police outpost and were demanding the arrest of the goon who was an uppercaste trader from the village. All these years it was the non-adivasis of Katkut who used to get cases lodged against the adivasis to keep them cowed down. The tables were turned and the massive demonstration resulted in the goon being booked under the Prevention of Atrocities against Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes Act. The adivasis then took out a rally in Katkut and the village reverberated for the first time to the slogans which had become so popular elsewhere – "Lootnewala Jayega, Kamanewala Khayega, Naya Jamana Aayega" - the exploiters will go, the labourers will eat, a new era will dawn and "Jal, Jangal, Jameen Kunin Chhe, Aamri Chhe, Aamri Chhe" - to whom do the water, forest and land belong, to us to us. Then some forest officials in Sulgaon village impounded some buffaloes from the jungle in which they were grazing. A posse of women went and forcibly freed the buffaloes from the forest check post. Later in a massive mass meeting held in Sulgaon in support of this action one man came drunk and began creating a ruckus on the podium. This man being a well-known troublemaker the men were hesitating to take action against him. Two women armed with bows and arrows climbed onto the podium took hold of this man by the scruff of his neck and dragged him off the stage and away from the meeting to the applause of the audience.

This set in motion a powerful movement against alcoholism and bootlegging the likes of which had never before been seen in Western Madhya Pradesh. At that time in

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Madhya Pradesh the government had a system of selling liquor licenses through annual auctions wherein a contractor would bid for the right to sell liquor through licensed outlets in a tehsil for one year. To maximise his profits this contractor then sold more liquor than he had the license for by encouraging franchisees to set up illegal shops apart from the licensed outlets. This required the bribing of the police and the excise department staff and also the maintenance of a gang of goons to ensure that all the illegal liquor being sold in his area was being sourced from him and not from some other contractor or directly from a distillery. Incidentally distilleries in Madhya Pradesh too produce more liquor than they reveal to the excise department and offload it clandestinely onto the market. In this way even the most interior village has an illegal liquor outlet. After the successful action against the bootlegger in Okhla the people of Bagli tehsil just across the border in Dewas district began demanding a similar action in their area.

The situation in the Udainagar sub tehsil of Bagli was slightly different from that in Barwah. While in the latter there were a lot of non-advansi farmers in the villages, in the former this was not so as most villages were populated by overwhelming advansi majorities. However, Udainagar, the market village was dominated by non-advansi sahuikars who had lorded it over the advasis for the better part of a century and they had total control over them. Such was their power that when a debtor failed to pay his due on time an employee of the sahuikar would visit him and take away any moveable property that he may have and also a fee of Rs 100 for the trouble of having to come to recover the due. The first rumblings of change were heard when the Indore Diocesan Social Service Society (IDSSS) began to form grain banks and thrift and credit groups in advansi villages of the area from 1990 onwards. This NGO not only formed and consistently ran self help groups (SHG) but also pioneered their linkage with the branches of the regional rural bank and the commercial banks operating in the area for supply of cheap credit, a practice that has now become standard all over the country. Such is the quality of its work that this NGO has been chosen under the World Bank funded Madhya Pradesh District Poverty Initiatives Programme for the promotion of women's SHGs in Madhya Pradesh, the Swashakti Yojana, and is currently supervising over a hundred SHGs in Bagli Tehsil.

The SHGs begun by the IDSSS not only disbursed credit but also arranged for the supply of agricultural inputs. In some places they also organised the advansi farmers into collectively selling their produce in the wholesale market in Indore. Thus a comprehensive dent was being made into the power base of the sahuikars. Things came to a head when these groups also began to act unitedly in the political sphere. The Bagli legislative assembly constituency had traditionally been a BJP stronghold and had been represented continuously since the formation of Madhya Pradesh by Kailash Joshi who had once served briefly as Chief Minister of the state. This influence was being maintained in the Udainagar region through the sahuikars and they had their henchmen among the advasis in the villages. The SHGs decided to field their own candidates for the elections to the Panchayat bodies in 1994 against the candidates of the BJP. This angered the sahuikars, so they hired goons to beat up some of the SHG members and simultaneously had the latter arrested by the police.

Sister Rani Maria of the IDSSS on learning of the arrest of members of the SHGs went to the police station in Udainagar to enquire about their offence. This prevented the police from beating up the advasis and they had to produce them before the magistrate in Bagli instead where they got bail. This intervention so upset the sahuikars that they secretly began plotting the murder of sister Maria. One day in the spring of 1995 when sister Maria was travelling by bus to Indore from Udainagar she was accosted midway in an area where

the road passes through a forest by hired assassins and murdered in broad daylight in front of other passengers by repeated stabbing with a knife. This incident created a furore all over the state and brought out the hollowness of the rule of law at the grassroots level in this country. This was the state of affairs when we kicked off a more overt political process in 1997. The whole area was literally flowing in alcohol at this time and there was an illegal liquor godown in Pandutalav village from where all the liquor was supplied.

Naturally a murderous goon had been hired by the contractor to oversee the operations. He was a ruthless fellow and on one occasion he had caught a man selling the liquor of another contractor and as punishment had taken him from his village to Udainagar beating him up publicly on the way and then got him arrested by the police on a false charge. So a mass meeting of the sangathan was scheduled in Pandutalav village. The contractor got word of this and he too came down on the appointed day with a jeep load of his henchmen. However, on seeing the thousands of men and women he turned tail and ran away. The liquor store, worth some two lakh rupees, was sealed and the keys handed over to the police. There is no parallel to this action in the history of mass actions against bootleggers in Madhya Pradesh. On that day as the skies above Pandutalav reverberated with the sound of vociferous slogan shouting by thousands of people, the prospect of a revolution, which I had long given up hope on, seemed to become a distinct possibility once again even for a cynic like me. Such was the power of the anti-liquor movement that even men who had not given up drinking participated wholeheartedly in actions against the sale of illicit liquor at that time. The sale of liquor during festivals and marriages too was stopped completely.

There was a fundamental difference in this mobilisation from that we had undertaken earlier. In Alirajpur we non-adviasi activists played a frontal role in the organisation and the net result had been that the advasis themselves apart from Shankar and Khemla had not been able to blossom into leaders in their own right. This lack of a wider base of indigenous activists has later led to the KMCS losing its influence after we non-adviasi activists left, despite all that Shankar and Khemla could do. So a new technique was evolved which let the advasis play a more prominent role in the organisation process. While Subhadra had to take a pro-active role given the fact that she was working with women and in a sensitive area like reproductive and gender rights I restricted myself to just conducting training workshops with the people. Khemla, Shankar, Vaharu and other adviasi leaders were called in to train and lead the people in the initial stages but later on as a local leadership developed both among the men and the women they were able to take up the whole work of the organisation. Such was the impact of this process that a leading Hindi daily of Indore did a frontpage feature on the Sangathan underlining the fact that its main leaders were all adviasi women (Chaturvedi, 1999). The transition from addressing reproductive health issues to mobilising people around reproductive rights proved to be a very successful one. Some of the iron that had crept into my soul due to the setback to our earlier struggles got banished for some time at the sight of these poor illiterate women portraying such powerful leadership roles.

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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 advaitis. Any advaiti 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 advaitis 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 Advaiti 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 advaitis 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 advaiti girls studying in Katkut. The non-advaiti headmistress of the government advaiti 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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Chapter 18 - Reliving the Myth of Sisyphus

The NBA in the meanwhile, in the same way as the adivasi mass organisations in its vicinity, had had some mountain top experiences and like them it too had invariably come crashing down to earth with a thud every time. We all found ourselves in the same accursed nether regions as the mythical Greek hero Sisyphus. Greek legend has it that the king of Corinth, Sisyphus, was cursed by the Gods to continually roll a heavy rock up a mountain in hell only to see it roll down again because of his scornful attitude towards them. Among other things when Pluto abducted the daughter of Esopus the latter came to Sisyphus for help. Sisyphus agreed to help Esopus recover his daughter if the latter would promise to give water to the citadel at Corinth. Thus in exchange for water for his people Sisyphus bore the wrath of the Gods much in the same way as the environmental mass movements have borne the wrath of the false Gods of modern development for ensuring a more sustainable and decentralised water resource plan for the country.

The NBA soon began countering the setback suffered following the failure of the Sangharsh Yatra in 1991 and the repression of the BJP government in terms of a decrease in the oustee mass base through a greater reliance on lobbying and advocacy. To make up for the lack of a strong and numerous mass base in the valley, the NBA went about with gusto cultivating a wide base among urbanites the world over. Initially this kind of support was successful to a certain extent in that the independent review commissioned by the World Bank poked a myriad holes into the way the SSP had been designed and was being implemented and recommended that the project be stopped. The massive international lobbying carried out on the basis of this eventually forced the World Bank to pressurise the Indian Government into saying that it would not avail of the remaining tranches of the loan for the SSP. Consequently the Japanese government too withdrew the loan it was going to offer for the purchase of the electricity generating turbines from Japan.

The euphoria created by the withdrawal of the World Bank was short lived as we have seen because the Gujarat government proceeded with the work on the dam with its own resources and also those garnered from the public issue of a debt bond. But more importantly the World Bank withdrawal came only in 1993 and something had to be done to stop the dam immediately after the Sangharsh Yatra. So a strategy was worked out wherein a special kind of mass action was undertaken, which, since the people who participated in these were not in sufficient numbers, was used as a symbolic peg on which the thrust of advocacy was hung. This was the "Manibeli Satyagraha". With the height of the dam being raised continuously the villages behind it gradually began to be submerged and as a result land in the first village in Maharashtra, Manibeli, was to be submerged in the monsoon season of 1991. So Medha led a motley crew of adivasis, Nimari peasants and urbanites from across the country and the world into staging a satyagraha in a hut called "Narmadai" specially built for the purpose in Manibeli waiting for the waters of the Narmada to come and engulf them. Despite heavy police presence the satyagraha was conducted well with people coming and going in batches from the entire valley to keep Narmadai inhabited at all times. The whole operation was a grand success in publicity terms, the waters in the monsoons came only upto fifteen feet of the hut, and so the actual test of drowning did not occur.

After the monsoons the construction work of the dam once again began and so by the time of the next monsoons in 1992 it was clear that the Narmadai hut would be drowned. All the people of Manibeli were not with the NBA. Some of the people had

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resettled in Gujarat earlier and the government with heavy police presence decided to move out their houses and belongings to their resettlement site in March 1992. The police used this as a pretext to attack the supporters of the NBA sitting in the Narmadai hut and a series of skirmishes ensued in which upwards of two hundred people were jailed and the hut itself was demolished. This repression continued throughout the monsoons as a police picket was posted in Manibeli to ensure that the hut was not rebuilt at the same place as before. So it had to be built higher up. People, even children from Anjanbara village who had gone to put in a vigil at the newly constructed hut, were continually arrested by the police and sent to jail. Many supporters from outside the valley too bore imprisonment in solidarity with the people in the valley.

All this, however, had no impact on the government and after the monsoons once again the work on the dam proceeded as before. Medha along with an oustee from Nimar, Devarambhai, launched a hunger strike in June 1993 in Mumbai, armed with the moral authority of the critical report of the Morse Committee, demanding that the work on the dam be stopped and a full review of the SSP be undertaken. After fourteen days the Union Water Resources Minister agreed to a comprehensive review of the dam by an independent committee of experts but not the stoppage of the work on the dam. The hunger strike was withdrawn on this agreement. The monsoon floods began in July 1993 and the houses in Manibeli began to be submerged. The villagers stayed put in their huts in a valiant demonstration of resilience, braving the rising waters and not fleeing like rats as the government had thought they would. After all this is what Subhadra's parents had done and also the oustees of the many other dams that had been built earlier. Then the police forcibly removed them to tin sheds that had been built higher up for the purpose. The swirling waters of the Narmada engulfed the huts and all their belongings. Vitthalbhai of Manibeli bravely declared that he did not consider this to be a loss at all. He said he would think that he had given alms to the government as he would to a beggar (Sangwai, 2002).

The intransigence of the Gujarat Government and the bureaucracy in the Union Water Resources Ministry had meant that no concrete steps had been taken to begin work on the promised review of the SSP. This and the submergence of the villages of Manibeli and Bamni forced the NBA to announce that Medha along with other activists and villagers would commit "Jal Samarpan" or drown themselves in the Narmada if the review was not undertaken. Medha had by then become a cult figure and was at the peak of her popularity. About this time, once, I was travelling in a local train, when our co-passengers began talking about the state of governance in our country. They were lamenting the lack of integrity and sensitivity to the needs of the masses among the leaders of the mainstream political parties as well as the bureaucracy. Then one of them said that what the country needed was more Medha Patkars. Every one concurred saying that here was a lady who had courageously taken on the corrupt politicians and bureaucrats and if only she had more people to support her then things would change for the better in India. Throughout the country and abroad there were many people who felt the same. So there was general concern about her well being given her professed resolve to drown herself in the Narmada. Police was deployed in large numbers along the Maharashtra and Gujarat sides of the river to ensure that Medha did not commit Jal Samarpan.

Medha Patkar went underground and declared that she would jump into the river at any location that proved suitable unless the dam construction was stopped. Parliament was in session at the time and this announcement created a furore there with many members demanding that the government do something. The Government decided in August 1993 to

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finally constitute a team of five independent experts to review the SSP but no firm assurances were given about the work on the dam being stopped. Medha withdrew her Jal Samarpan threat on the announcement of the constitution of the review committee and came out into the open in Gujarat where she was arrested. The Gujarat Government refused to cooperate with this review committee, as was only to be expected and after the monsoons once again resumed construction of the dam even while the review process was under way. So after this in November 1994 a dharna was organised in Bhopal to pressurise the Madhya Pradesh Government to withdraw from the SSP and demand that it be scrapped. Here too Medha went on a hunger strike along with some other oustees when there were no signs of this demand being met. When the condition of Medha began to get serious after three weeks, the police in a pre dawn swoop arrested all the hunger strikers and took them to hospital where they were forcibly put on intravenous drips.

Seeing little possibility of the dam being stopped through symbolic mass actions and lobbying alone the NBA had in the mean time taken recourse to legal action and approached the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the Supreme Court of India in May 1994. Both of them took cognisance of the issues raised by the NBA and issued notices to the concerned governments. Since it was not legally possible to continue proceedings in both forums simultaneously the petition to the NHRC was later withdrawn. The Supreme Court after hearing out all the parties decided to review the facts and arguments on the basis of which the SSP was being constructed on December 13th 1994 the day on which Medha and her co-hunger strikers were arrested in Bhopal. Taking a cue from the Supreme Court the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh announced on the 16th of December that his government would also review its support to the SSP and on this assurance Medha and her colleagues withdrew their hunger strike. Later the Supreme Court ordered a stay on the construction of the dam in May 1995 pending the disposal of the case thus bringing some relief to the NBA as far as the battle against the SSP was concerned. This was the highest point reached by the NBA in its struggle to save the Narmada valley.

The tenacious struggle against the SSP succeeded in igniting many more such struggles all along the valley. Things began hotting up in 1992, upstream near Jabalpur, where the Bargi dam had been completed and the gates closed in 1990, submerging some one hundred and sixty odd villages. Once again there had not been anything like adequate provisions for the rehabilitation of the people with many of the poor oustees having to migrate to Jabalpur and pull rickshaws there for a livelihood. So an agitation started there too. The immediate fallout was that the "Bargi Baandh Visthapit evam Prabhavit Sangh", the organisation of the oustees was given the fishing rights to the reservoir, which had been appropriated by the government and the contractors. Later the adivasi oustees of the Tawa dam constructed in the nineteen eighties on the River Tawa, a tributary of the Narmada, also began agitating under the aegis of the Kisan Adivasi Sangathan and got this right after the usual police beatings and stints in jail. These federations of oustees have managed the fishing activities in these reservoirs so well that they have become profitable both for them and for the government. Fish is now supplied from these reservoirs to far off places like Kolkata. This has been achieved despite opposition from the vested interests among the erstwhile fishing contractors and the bureaucracy.

However, the more important demand of being given land in place of the land lost due to submergence was not acceded to by the government despite a few long hunger strikes and Jal Samarpan campaigns. As always the government would give some assurances and then take recourse to repressive measures to break the agitation and renege on the

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assurances made. Similarly movements against the construction of the dams on the tributaries of Man and Veda too have met with repression and false assurances to break hunger strikes that were undertaken and the oustees have been deprived of the elusive right of rehabilitation with land in place of the land lost due to submergence.

The Supreme Court finally disposed of the case against the SSP in 1998 saying that the dam should go on but adequate steps should be taken for the proper rehabilitation of the oustees according to the NWDT provisions and lifted the stay on its construction. This put things back to square one and completely deflated the NBA's balloon of unrealistic expectations regarding the possibility of a complete cancellation of the dam by the apex court. Not only were the political forces in support of the dam much stronger than the NBA but there were very few takers for the NBA plea that the dam would prove a disaster in the future and so it should be scrapped. The NBA was forced to fall back on the rather less effective Jal Samarpan actions to try and stop the dam. This was the time when Arundhati Roy jumped into the fray and pumped some adrenalin into the NBA's veins for this renewed battle. However, this was not enough and so the SSP has continued to be built submerging an ever-larger number of villages by the year.

The only saving grace for some time was that due to the Supreme Court's stipulation that before the height of the dam is increased beyond a certain level the oustees upto that level should be properly rehabilitated, the NBA got a chance to delay the construction of the dam by bringing the matter of non-rehabilitation up before it from time to time in the form of contempt petitions. However, the basic problem was that there was no cheap agricultural land of good quality available anymore either in Gujarat, Maharashtra or Madhya Pradesh. If the oustees were to be given good agricultural land in accordance with the provision of the NWDT then the costs of the project would shoot up astronomically. So the Madhya Pradesh Government, which had to provide for most of the oustees tried to palm them off with monetary compensation. The NBA protested but to no avail and the Narmada Control Authority gave the go ahead for further construction of the dam in 2006. Medha went on a hunger strike once again in Delhi along with a few other oustees and supporters. Once again with her health deteriorating she was arrested and hospitalised. When the executive refused to do anything concrete then the NBA approached the Supreme Court and Medha broke her hunger strike. However, the Supreme Court this time refused to stay the construction and decided to take the easy way out provided by its earlier judgment in which it had said that further disputes in the matter should not be brought before it again but referred to the Prime Minister for resolution and threw the hot ball back into the government's frying pan. Given the tremendous pressure created in Gujarat with the Chief Minister going on a hunger strike and massive mass rallies organised by all political parties in support of the dam the NBA has finally lost out.

The numbers game is just not in favour of the NBA. Most of the oustees in Madhya Pradesh are taking what they can get in cash compensation from the government and clearing out. It is only a few hundred diehard NBA members from the valley who are still fighting with the support from some of the urban intelligentsia across the country and around the world. That is why the Narmada valley has been dammed with impunity and the other dams also have either been completed or work is progressing apace on them. The work on the Indira Sagar dam near Punasa too began after this in 2000 with the formation of a company, Narmada Hydroelectric Development Corporation (NHDC), as a joint venture between the Government of Madhya Pradesh and an undertaking of the Government of India, National Hydro-Electric Power Corporation. Later the NHDC also began work on the

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Omkareshwar dam downstream of the ISP. The contract for the actual construction of these dams went to the same Jayaprakash Associates that has been building the SSP. The state adopted a vigorous policy of distribution of cash compensation to the influential landed people and so the initial mobilisation that had been there at the time of the Harsud rally in 1989 soon dissipated and the dam was completed in 2004. This has led to the submergence of the very town where fifteen years earlier we had all gathered in such large numbers and pledged in right earnest to stop destructive development. This is a telling reminder of the weakness of mass environmental movements in this country, even of one with such a wide national and international support base as the NBA, when confronted with the intransigence of the state. As usual rehabilitation has not been properly done and the people were forced to tear down their houses and leave literally at gunpoint (IPC, 2004). The NBA has tried to salvage something for the oustees to get them at least decent cash compensation of which the government has tried to cheat them. Rallies were taken out in Khandwa town in Madhya Pradesh against the government's apathetic treatment of the oustees and finally a petition has been filed in the High Court in Jabalpur for their proper rehabilitation.

Temporarily the movement to stop the construction of the Maheshwar dam on the River Narmada in between the dams at Omkareshwar and Navagam had been successful for some time. This was primarily because this dam is being built by a private company, which does not have enough finances and technical competency of its own. Initially the government sought to bulldoze the movement against the dam into submission through repressive measures and for a time it did succeed. However, the tremendous international support base that the NBA has built up is so powerful that it has succeeded in stalling international funding and technical support for the dam. But now the work on the dam has started once again as the company has managed to tie up fund agreements with Indian financial institutions. The NBA has begun agitating against this but there is every likelihood of the government resorting to renewed bouts of repression to bulldoze its way through to building the dam.

What price satyagraha then as an action strategy for bringing the modern state to heel. Satyagraha has some chance of succeeding in crunch situations only when those practising it are in very large numbers and so convinced about their cause and the philosophy of Gandhism as to be able to exert moral pressure and bring about a change of heart in the oppressor. The Gandhian philosophy relies heavily on Hindu ascetism and mysticism as we have seen, and is far removed from the lives of common everyday people and even more so from that of the Bhil adivasis. Arundhati Roy, who has pitched in lyrically in support of hedonism in her Booker Prize winning novel "The God of Small Things" (Roy, 1998), has admitted in the monograph 'Greater Common Good' that the theory and practice of Gandhism requires a very strong moral fibre, especially when it comes to renouncing sex and shopping, which most ordinary mortals cannot do without (Roy, 1999). Significantly Gandhi himself wrote in the course of the freedom struggle that, whatever his personal anarchistic beliefs, at the societal level he was not trying to establish the kind of village self rule he had advocated in Hind Swaraj but was fighting for the more practical goal of establishing parliamentary self rule only (Gandhi, 1921).

So even during India's freedom movement when there was such a groundswell of mass protest against the British, Gandhians could rarely achieve their immediate demands let alone win the jackpot of freedom through satyagraha in general and the hunger strike in particular. Of the many hunger strikes before independence the most famous instance of such an action ending in the death of the faster was that of Jatindranath Das who was

ironically not a Gandhian but a bomb making expert who had been jailed for armed militancy against the British along with the great martyr Bhagat Singh for their part in the Lahore bomb conspiracy of 1928. He had demanded along with Bhagat Singh that they be recognised as political prisoners and better facilities be provided in Lahore jail to the prisoners. His demands were not met and he died after sixty-three days of fasting in 1929 (Gupta & Gupta, 2001). Das's death resulted in a massive hue and cry and the British had to constitute an enquiry team. The team found a lot of lacunae in the jail administration and suggested reforms, which were then undertaken. But this was a small demand compared to the demand for independence, which was finally gained only after the burgeoning mass struggles during and after World War II brought home to the British the realisation that it would be far wiser to hand over power in a smooth transition to a capitalist and feudal elite led by Nehru within the colonial constitutional framework that the British themselves had prepared. So they did not hold on to power for long after the World War ended and risk it being seized by a more radical and militant formation of the masses with possible help from Soviet Russia as later happened in neighbouring China. Indeed if it had not been for the Hindu - Muslim showdown and the consequent need for the partition of the Indian sub-continent independence would have been achieved even earlier in 1946 itself.

The only time Gandhi himself did in fact succeed to some extent with a fast was in rather controversial circumstances in 1932 over his standoff with Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar against the proposal for separate electorates for the untouchable dalit castes. Ambedkar, who had himself had to bear virulent upper caste discrimination throughout his childhood and youth when he was trying to educate himself, felt that traditional Hindu caste society, especially in rural areas, was deeply biased against the untouchables and the latter would not be allowed to vote by the former. So when the British, in a bid to fragment the unity of the freedom movement, proposed separate electorates for all possible sections of society for election to the provincial and central assemblies as part of the process of devolution of powers through a new act, Ambedkar was quick to take this opportunity to press for separate electorates for the dalits also. Ambedkar suggested the delineation of separate electorates of the untouchables who would vote for untouchable candidates. Gandhi who was in Yeravda jail near Pune at that time immediately launched into a fast unto death against this so called "Communal Award". Pressure was brought to bear on Ambedkar and eventually a compromise was reached known as the "Poona Pact" under which seats were reserved for the dalits but they did not get separate electorates (Rajasekhariah, 1989). Incidentally the Muslims under Jinnah held fast to their ground and got both separate electorates and separate candidates. Thus satyagraha worked only with Ambedkar whose heart was amenable to change and not with the British or the Muslims whose were not. Indeed the saga of dalits not voting continues to this day as there are sections of dalits in some parts of this country who are still not allowed to vote by the upper castes.

Immediately after independence the burning question, after all the princely states had either acceded or had been forcibly integrated into the Indian Union, was that of the formation of states based on linguistic sub-nationalities. Nehru was in favour of a strong central government that could push through his modern temple building, riding roughshod over local opposition. He was thus opposed to the formation of such states that would in the end give rise to regional power centres that would weaken the authority of the Union Government as is the case at present. Telegu nationalist aspirations were, however, very strong and a mass movement soon began for a separate state of Andhra Pradesh to be carved out from the erstwhile princely state of Hyderabad and the Madras Presidency area. Nehru was adamant in his refusal to accede to this demand. Then a leader of the Andhra

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movement, Poti Sri Ramulu, began a fast unto death in November 1952. Nehru following the practice of the British ignored this and allowed Sri Ramulu to fast to death on December 15th 1952. All hell broke loose after this in the Telugu speaking areas as the masses came onto the streets and eventually Nehru had to backtrack and the state of Andhra Pradesh was formed in 1953 (Rao, 1988). This is one rare instance in which the determination of the hunger striker to bear death and the tremendous mass support for his demand has been able to bend the obduracy of the state apparatus.

Master Tara Singh a venerable Sikh leader and one of the founders of the Sikh political party, Akali Dal, also launched a hunger strike in 1961 to press for the formation of the separate Sikh majority state of Punjab to be carved out from the Patiala and East Punjab States Union. Unfortunately he broke his fast after forty odd days on a vague assurance given by Nehru to look into the matter and so did not achieve his goal. The withdrawal of the hunger strike led to Master Tara Singh losing his leadership of the Akalis who eventually achieved their demand in 1967 after some further agitations at a time when other such linguistic states had already been created (Singh, 1967). Thus the success of a hunger strike in securing an important and radical demand hinges crucially on the hunger striker going on to bear death and the demand being supported by a substantial and organised mass base. Such a mass base was never possible given the serpent like geographical spread of the affected people and the worldview of most of them, which is vastly different from that of Gandhi. So the NBA has not met the conditions for success of Gandhian political action in the numerous hunger strikes and jal samarpan andolans that it has staged. Consequently Khemla's prophecy has come true a decade after he made it and it is the River Narmada instead which is facing death by indiscriminate damming.

The biggest mass upheaval against the state in independent India to date was that started by Jayaprakash Narayan in the state of Gujarat in 1974 in the form of the Navnirman Andolan, which later spread to the state of Bihar and became the Sampurna Kranti Andolan (Rammoorty, 1999). These movements were against the corruption of elected Congress governments and their negligence of the needs of the poor people at a time when the Indian economy was going through a phase of high inflation and low growth. They had tremendous participation from the youth. The movement in Gujarat was so strong that the state government had to be dissolved and a similar demand was being made in Bihar too. In early 1975 Morarjee Desai, a veteran Congressman who had later fallen out with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and stayed with the old guard when the Congress party split in 1969, launched into a fast unto death demanding the holding of fresh elections in Gujarat where the assembly had been dissolved. Finally after seventeen days Indira Gandhi agreed to the demand because the Nav Nirman Andolan had assumed mass proportions and threatened to become violent. However, she remained adamant about not dissolving the Bihar assembly and ordering a fresh election there too. The movement in Bihar in the meanwhile had assumed such strength that it had been able to withstand all repression and brought governance there to a standstill. Jayaprakash Narayan began touring the whole country to build up opinion against the governance of the Congress party and got quite a response from the people of the Northern Indian states. Jayaprakash Narayan even went to the extent of publicly exhorting the army and police personnel to listen to their inner voice and refuse to act on illegal orders that may be given to them by the government to crush the burgeoning mass movement. A harking back perhaps to his early communist training in which he must have learnt that the liberal democratic state always throws away the fig leaf of legality that it wears when its foundations are challenged by mass upheavals against its iniquities.

Then in early June 1975 the Allahabad High Court in the state of Uttar Pradesh pronounced a far-reaching judgment setting aside the election of Indira Gandhi to the Lok Sabha from the Rae Bareilly constituency in 1971 on technical grounds. A veteran socialist who had fought and lost against her, Raj Narain, had filed a petition in the High Court earlier in which this order was passed. Immediately the opposition parties began demanding that Indira Gandhi resign as Prime Minister on moral grounds. A massive public meeting was organised in New Delhi on June 25th led by Jayaprakash Narayan to press for Indira Gandhi's resignation and for the dissolution of the Bihar assembly. That evening internal emergency was declared stating that there was a serious threat to the continuance of democracy in the country and all civil liberties stood curtailed. In nightlong police swoops all over the country thousands of leaders and workers of opposition parties and political movements were arrested including Jayaprakash Narayan. The Bihar movement was crushed and nineteen months of dictatorial rule followed all over the country after this before the emergency was lifted and elections announced again in January 1977.

Thus state power had once again prevailed over satyagraha despite the biggest ever mass popular mobilisation in the post independence era. Since the mobilisation of the NBA or all the other environmental mass movements has not achieved even a small percentage of this historic level of mobilisation it is not surprising that these movements have not been able to withstand state repression and impact upon state policies in any significant manner. In recent years the mass popular mobilisations in Manipur have hit the headlines. These mobilisations were against the Armed Forces Special Powers Act 1958 (AFSPA). This statute had been enacted to deal with the armed secessionist militancy in the Northeastern states and gives draconian powers to the armed forces to detain and even kill people that they arrest without any due process of law. These mobilisations because of their strength have achieved some success and a review of the AFSPA is in progress by a committee headed by a retired Supreme Court Judge but there is little likelihood of the act being scrapped altogether. Here too a young lady Sharmila Irom went on a hunger strike from November 2nd 2000 demanding the repeal of the AFSPA (CRAFSPA, 2005). She was arrested under the charge of attempting to commit suicide and is being kept alive since in solitary confinement through intravenous drips. Once again the character of the state that is revealed is that of being an iron-souled one not at all amenable to the change of heart that is proposed to be brought about by satyagraha.

Ironically the most successful application of mass satyagraha in the post Gandhian era has not been in India but in the United States of America under the charismatic leadership of Martin Luther King (Davidson, 1991). He gave a new mass orientation to the Civil Rights Movement for equal treatment and opportunities for the blacks in the southern states, who were living as second-class citizens. Within the space of just five years between 1958 and 1963 he was able to remove the legal sanction for discrimination against blacks that had been there in the southern states and also get recognition for the policy of affirmative action in the provision of government jobs and education benefits to the Blacks. He became the youngest recipient of the Nobel Prize for Peace at the age of thirty-five in 1964. He then began to get involved in the other serious and far more difficult issues of exploitation and poverty and also the movement against the war in Vietnam but was assassinated in 1968. Despite his meteoric success it must be remembered that he was not fighting a monolithic state apparatus united against his demands but one that was divided between the whites of the north and south with regard to the policy towards Blacks. Thus the whites of the northern states supported King's movement and ultimately the Supreme Court held the racist discriminatory legislations of southern states to be unconstitutional.

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King's famous dream of removing poverty and exploitation of the blacks has proved a more difficult proposition and today the blacks, despite constituting thirteen per cent of the population, have only eight per cent representation in the United States Congress while comprising a whopping fifty percent of the prison inmates (Trice, 2005, Parkin, 2002).

In this context one can't help wondering in awe at the tremendous achievement of Babasaheb Ambedkar in his battle over a more or less similar issue in which he almost single-handedly achieved much more for the dalits in this country without having the same kind of mass support as that of King or Gandhi. He was steeped in the liberal democratic tradition but was at the same time aware that in reality parliamentary democracy in India is only a top dressing over the main course, which is essentially undemocratic. So his exhortation to the dalits was to "educate, organise and agitate". Unfortunately the dalits have not been able to build on this inspiring legacy and posit a concerted united challenge to the domination of the upper castes in independent India. Some hopes were raised in the nineteen eighties when the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) was formed. Calling the casteist Hindu society "Manuvadi" because it followed the discriminatory prescriptions of the ancient Indian lawgiver Manu, the BSP called for a total rejection of the domination by the miniscule upper castes. However, the corrupt dynamics of electoral politics in India soon overwhelmed them and they have now lost their radical cutting edge.

Another serious problem in the practice of mass satyagraha is that it frequently gets caught in a pincers between the violence of the state and the spontaneous retaliatory violence of the agitating masses. The difficult Gandhian tenets are rarely followed by the masses in such situations and in the absence of a well thought out alternative practice the energy of the masses gets dissipated by state repression. The most famous example is that of the Chauri Chaura incident of 1922 during the Non-Cooperation Movement (Ghosh, 1989). Gandhi after coming back to India from South Africa had slowly made his way up to the leadership of the freedom struggle through the partial resolution of problems faced by people in the Champaran movement of 1918, The Kheda Satyagraha of 1918 and the Ahmedabad mill workers' strike also in 1918 by the use of satyagraha (Dhanagare, 1983). At that time there were only the militant nationalists who believed in individual violent actions and the staid leadership of the Congress party, which believed in just petitioning the British. Thus Gandhi introduced the crucial element of organised mass participation on a national scale, which had been lacking up to then in the freedom struggle. Gandhi brought the Congress round to his point of view and the Non-Cooperation Movement was launched in September 1920 demanding Swaraj or self-rule along Gandhian non-violent lines. This was at a time when the British funding of their World War I campaign through increased extortion and forced donations from the peasant masses had left the latter in desperate straits. The horrendous Jalianwalabagh massacre of hundreds of unarmed protestors in Punjab in 1919 during the earlier satyagraha against the draconian Rowlatt Act had further angered the people all over the country. There was an immediate nationwide response to the call for non-cooperation and people began boycotting British cloth, and courts and defaulting on land rents and taxes. The British responded by the usual means of police repression only to make matters worse for the masses.

Some volunteers from Chauri and Chaura villages near Gorakhpur in the state of Uttar Pradesh began picketting liquor and cloth shops at the local market on 1st February 1922. The police abused them and gave them a good thrashing. On 4th February thousands of villagers launched a demonstration in front of the Chaura Police Station protesting against this illegal action. They were leaving after holding a meeting when the police once

again roughed up some of the people in the rear. This led to the crowd of people gathering again in front of the Police Station. The police opened fire on them and killed three of the people. This angered the crowd and it rushed the police who retreated into the Police Station. The crowd then set fire to the Police Station killing all twenty-two policemen inside. Similarly in 1942 after the announcement of the Quit India Movement all the prominent leaders including Gandhi were immediately put into jail but the masses, who had been suffering the depredations of the British because they were once again extorting heavy taxes and land rent to fund their World War II military campaign, broke out in spontaneous violent outbursts all over the country. Particularly glorious were the battles fought spontaneously by the rural masses of Bihar and Eastern Uttar Pradesh. To quell this uprising the British had to divert bomber squadrons and battalions of the army from the war front (Ghosh, 1995). The author Rahi Masoom Raza has written, in what is probably the greatest novel in Hindi in independent India - "Aadha Gaon", a hair raising account of villagers attacking a police station during this period in Eastern Uttar Pradesh (Raza, 1998).

The history of the NBA too corroborates this. Even though the NBA has worked within the Gandhian framework, time and again the adivasis, who have an enviable martial tradition, have broken out in spontaneous violence in response to the illegal violence of the state. Whether it was the violence of the villagers of Anjanbara in 1993 or later that of the villagers of Nimgavan, Sikka and Surung in Maharashtra in the same year which resulted in the death of the only martyr of the NBA, Rehmal Punia Vasava, in police firing, these were all instances of the people fighting in their own idiom disregarding the directions of their leaders. The state in such cases then responds with even greater repression and crushes the movement altogether. The Gandhian framework does not allow for the possibility of such violence and so does not have any strategy to use this energy constructively and instead prescribes that a movement that has become violent must be withdrawn totally. The legal monopoly over violence that the state has is used most effectively by it to crush protest movements against injustice being perpetrated by oppressors in search of economic gain. Under the circumstances there is bound to be spontaneous counter violence of the oppressed. The Marxists have, consequently posited that this spontaneous counter violence should be channelised into a systematic armed struggle but as we shall see later this too has proved unsuccessful in the long run. The problem of whether to use violence or not in political action thus remains unresolved to this day.

When we started political mobilisations in the Katkut area we tried to prepare the people for this inevitability of the use of illegal violence by the state. Thus the people were much more consciously resilient to this violence and not given to responding spontaneously with counter violence. However, since the mobilisation was spread over only about twenty villages it did not have even a miniscule amount of the huge mass mobilisation needed to challenge the state in any significant way. So in the end we found ourselves in a similar cul-de-sac as the NBA despite our conscious appreciation of the might of the modern Indian state and the inadequacies of satyagraha as a means of countering it. Indeed it has been the fate of almost all environmental mass movements in this country, beginning with the Chipko movement of the nineteen seventies, that they have been agitating in isolation around issues that concern only a very small number of people directly affected by some project or environmental disaster and so are incapable of building up substantial mass bases that can challenge the destructive development policies at a national or global level.

Sisyphus was such a daredevil that on one occasion he even kidnapped the God of Death and kept him chained in his palace. Pluto had to send the God of War to free him. We

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in the environmental mass movements in India too have been trying to chain the God of Ecological Death and like Pluto the high priests of the God of Modern Development have continually sent their God of War to stymie us. It looks as if we are similarly doomed to eternally rolling the rock of mass mobilisation up against the mountain of state obduracy only to see it go crashing down time and again. What can be more punishing than such futile and hopeless labour? But according to the French philosopher, author and Nobel laureate Albert Camus, Sisyphus is in fact at his glorious best when he is back at the foot of the mountain because then he is not bemoaning his fate but pondering over its inevitability given his rebelliousness against the Gods (Camus, 1955). He accepts his fate and decides to defeat the Gods by enjoying the struggle as he endlessly rolls the rock up the mountain regardless of the failure to keep it up there permanently. Thus seemingly intractable ideological and practical problems notwithstanding Medha Patkar and the NBA deserve laurels for having led from the front in keeping the rock of environmental mass movements rolling in this country and so inspiring many people to spurn the God of Modern Development and continue to relive the myth of Sisyphus.

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Chapter 19 - The Exasperating Anarchist Catch 22

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Chapter 20 - Casting Pearls Before Swine

Two hands are required for clapping. The actual nitty-gritty of administration and policy implementation in a modern democratic state has to be carried out by the bureaucracy and so its orientation has to be similar to that of the elected rulers if their agenda is to be fulfilled. The British administrators of the Indian Civil Service (ICS) were initially apprehensive of the "fire-eating agitators" who came to power after the provincial elections in 1936. Their fears were soon allayed, however, as they found that the elected Congress leaders acted as "responsible ministers" eager to continue with the same administrative policies that were being practised by the British (Hunt, 1980). So much so that they sanctioned the repression of popular peasant and worker's movements with an iron hand. These movements naturally went on the upswing after the elections with the oppressed people feeling that since their own representatives were in power they could press successfully for a better dispensation. But these expectations were belied as Socialist and Communist leaders were prosecuted by the criminal investigation department of the police and the masses themselves were subjected to repression in no uncertain terms. The Congress Ministries acted openly in the interests of the upper class landlords and industrialists and showed an increasing hostility to mass struggles (Dutt, 1947). Sardar Patel went to the extent of warning without mincing words that the Congress did not want a Lenin in India and that those who preached class hatred were enemies of the country! (Pandey, 2005) Thus instead of the dog wagging the tail it was the tail that wagged the dog and the Congress adapted itself to the colonial anti-people mode of administration.

Nehru in typical fashion waxed eloquent within the Congress against this use of the colonial bureaucracy for the repression of the masses but did not make any public attempt to fight it on the specious plea that he could not agitate against his own government (Chandra et al, 1999). Nehru was a keen student of history. In fact he spent his last stint of about three years in jail after the announcement of the Quit India Movement in 1942 reading up and writing on World and Indian history (Nehru, 1985). He had also travelled extensively in both the Soviet Union and the western developed countries. So he knew very well that centralised industrial development, whether in the western capitalist economies or in Soviet Russia, had been achieved through barbaric repression of the labouring masses. He realised that similar policies would have to be adopted in India and since this repression could be carried out only with the help of a bureaucracy trained in such methods he supported the Rightist move for the retention of the authoritarian "steel frame" of the civil service after independence. This despite having earlier publicly expressed the opinion that the bureaucracy had failed to pass the test of bringing about the well being of the Indian masses during colonial rule and that "the spirit of authoritarianism is the rally of imperialism and it cannot coexist with freedom" (Nehru, 1990).

As early as the year 1944 a group of leading industrialists got together under the leadership of G. D. Birla and drafted a plan for the economic development of India after independence, which has come to be known as the Bombay Plan. These industrialists looking ahead to the situation that would prevail after independence paradoxically spoke of both strengthening their ties with imperialist capital for the supply of much needed capital and technology and at the same time of protecting the Indian market from direct predatory penetration by the latter (Thakurdas et al, 1944). The Bombay Plan also envisaged the rapid development of basic infrastructure through heavy state spending garnered from exploitation of the labour of the masses and the vast natural resources. Given the low level of capital formation and savings in the Indian economy it advocated massive creation of money through

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deficit financing. Foreseeing that such policies would not go down well with the majority of the labouring poor of India this plan specifically mentions that the state must intervene to maintain law and order and restrict individual freedoms so as to stifle dissent from the masses against it. Two Mumbai economists criticised this approach as being a wholly capitalist one involving collaboration between dominant imperial and subservient Indian capital to the exclusion of the interests of the masses. Nehru, who was in prison at this time, welcomed the Bombay Plan wholeheartedly and resented the economists' criticism of it (Ghosh, 2002). Little wonder then that the Bombay Plan formed the core of the development planning process and the black repressive laws of the British and their bureaucratic machine were retained after independence to implement this so called "trickle down" approach to development. Unto the rich first and forget about the last became the byword as Gandhi's ideas of sarvodaya were given a quick burial to make way for Nehru's modern temple building spree.

This was nothing but the institution of an internal colonialism to replace that of the British in which the Rightist politicians, landlords, princes, industrialists and the bureaucrats were to benefit at the expense of the masses. Such is the brotherliness between these exploitative groups that over time there has been an increasing flow of landlords, princes, industrialists and bureaucrats into electoral politics with film stars and hardened criminals being the latest entrants in the punch and judy show of Indian electoral politics. A legal framework had to be put in place to make this possible. Thus the same Indian Civil Service bureaucrats who had prior to independence been part of the repressive colonial state apparatus did the actual work of drafting the Constitution of India. Consequently the Indian Constitution that was finally adopted in 1951 had as many as 250 out of a total of 395 articles copied almost verbatim from the colonial Government of India Act of 1935. The basic thrust was that of a strong centralised state apparatus that could subdue organised protest by the ordinary citizens quite easily. For this purpose all the draconian colonial laws like the IPC, CrPC, Police Act, Preventive Detention Laws, Indian Forest Act and the Land Acquisition Act were allowed to continue. The bureaucrats who drafted the Constitution were also clever enough to retain the provisions protecting them from prosecution by the citizens. The citizens of the country were given some fundamental rights, which were not there during British rule relating to various basic freedoms and social and economic justice. However, since violations of these by the state and the bureaucrats could only be remedied by expensive litigation in the High and Supreme Courts, this effectively put paid to the hopes of the poor for social and economic justice. As mentioned earlier Panchayati Raj or village self rule was relegated to being just a directive principle of state policy with no binding on the government to implement it.

The "Brown Sahibs" have ruled the roost ever since and have been trampling the rights of the vast majority of the masses at will so as to push forward an agenda of centralised industrial development. There have been blatant violations of the rule of law that is supposed to form the basis of a liberal democratic system of governance. This means that there should be just laws and that there should be established procedure for citizens to be given adequate opportunity to present their own case when affected or implicated by some law or other (Dhyani, 1997). First of all most of the laws themselves are a continuation of colonial statutes and violate the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution and secondly rarely does the state give the majority of its poor citizens the opportunity to be heard before applying these black laws on them. Throughout the decade of the nineteen fifties thousands of people, both the masses and the activists owing allegiance either to the Communist or Socialist parties or who were a part of spontaneous mass movements, were jailed, tortured in police

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custody and often killed to stem the tide of protests that erupted seeking to bring about a more just social order (Das, 2001). Nehru while giving the people the stick did not forget to give them a stern school master like homily that Gandhian satyagraha had become obsolete with the gaining of independence and should be forsaken for different methods of working (Nehru, 2001).

Government and administration have been grossly illegal and inappropriate all these years because there have been few calls to answer for this illegality and inappropriateness. Not surprisingly, given such arbitrary powers and protection from public scrutiny the civil service has been a cesspool of corruption and inefficiency right from the time of independence and not from after the passage of the Nehru era as has been argued by one of the more upright IAS officers of that time (Appu, 2005). Over the years the repressive powers of the state have been augmented further with the enactment of newer laws and it has become increasingly more difficult to organise the oppressed (Ghosh, 2001). Such is the tenacity of this repressive nexus between the government and the bureaucracy that the Socialists and Communists who had earlier been at the receiving end of its disfavours have also become "responsible" like the Congress had become earlier and begun using it to suppress popular dissent against corrupt governance in the states in which they have come to power in the last decade and a half. The tail continues to wag the dog.

The utter failure of the Indian state in bettering the lot of the millions of its poor citizens due to this unholy nexus between ruling politicians, industrialists, feudal lords and the bureaucracy and its devious attempts to camouflage this became apparent towards the end of the Nehru era itself when the maverick Socialist party leader Dr Ram Manohar Lohia moved the famous first no-confidence motion against the Congress government in 1963. He alleged that whereas Rs 25,000 was being spent daily on Nehru the poor person was earning barely 3 annas or about 20 paise a day. The government response was that according to the estimates of the Planning Commission the average daily earning of a person were 15 annas or 95 paise and not 3 annas. In one of the most moving and well-researched of rebuttals in the history of Indian parliamentary debates Dr Lohia showed how the Planning Commission had arrived at its estimate by averaging the earnings of the richest people in the country with that of the poorest while his own estimate was based on a sample of only the poorest people of the country who constituted seventy per cent of its population. Member after member from the opposition who had been listed to speak on the motion gave up their time to allow Dr Lohia to put forth his case, which ruthlessly unmasked the reality of mis-governance and mal-development that Nehru's penchant for temple building had led to (Ramakrishnan, 2005). The "three anna - fifteen anna debate" as it came to be called shook the complacency of the Nehruvian establishment for the first time in parliament and was to be a precursor of the eventual decline of the Congress party later.

A fair idea of the hierarchical attitude of the ICS officers who were to set the trend for civil administration in independent India can be had from the reminiscences of one of the foremost Indian ones among them, "A Collector could shake hands with a Deputy Collector or Superintendent of Police even though he belonged to the Provincial Service. He could be offered a seat. He could even be called by his first name without prefixing, 'Rao Sahib' or 'Khan Sahib'. But to a Tehsildar or Inspector of Police no such courtesies could be extended except on the first arrival or departure from the station. It was by such taboos that the British officer maintained his prestige. The Indian officer of the ICS also conformed to this tradition" (Menon, 1965, pp 77). Given this milieu it is not surprising that one of the early IAS officers of the country who used to spin khadi yarn on the charkha as a student enamoured with

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Gandhism had to precipitately give it up after becoming a civil servant in 1950 because " for a young IAS officer to be seen spinning would have been taken as self-serving hypocrisy, like the young taking up causes like secularism and gender justice" (Vithal, 2004). Gandhi of course had, mercifully for him, gone to heaven by that time.

Another early doyen of the IAS who later rose to adorn the top bureaucratic post of the country, that of Cabinet Secretary, has in his memoirs paid homage to the British Viceroy Cornwallis as being the epitome of a good administrator for having instituted the first systematic land settlement system in India (Subramanian, 2004). This land settlement system was in fact the retrogressive Permanent Settlement under which the responsibility for the payment of land taxes was farmed out to the Zamindars who were given free rein to resort to rack-renting. Indeed the term District Collector for the head of the district administration underlines the importance that the British gave to the efficient collection of land revenue, which constituted a major chunk of the income of the colonial state. This broke the back of the Indian peasantry and deprived Indian agriculture of surpluses for its development, a body blow from which it has never recovered as we shall see later. The peasants rose time and again in glorious revolt against the British to protest against this unjust system of extortion. The first posting as Collector of this IAS officer was in Ghazipur district in eastern Uttar Pradesh in 1965, which had witnessed such a massive peasant uprising against the British in 1942 as has been mentioned earlier. The skewed land distribution and the hobbled agriculture of this district is so disastrous for the poor peasants that even today a large section of them have to migrate to the cities of Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata in search of livelihoods. Given his reverence for Cornwallis this IAS officer could hardly have been expected to set about suo moto setting things right for the peasants as he could have done under the various land reform and control of usury laws that had been enacted by that time. He instead preferred to busy himself with setting up 'nets' in the garden of his official residence for providing coaching and practice to a cricket team that he built up there. He proudly declares that it had begun winning matches with other districts before he left for greener pastures. He no doubt must have greatly appreciated the Hindi film "Lagaan" released in the year 2001, which is centred around the absurd theme of how peasants in an Indian village get the payment of their land rent in a time of drought remitted by winning a cricket match against the British!

Our lawyer in Alirajpur in the mid nineteen eighties was the seniormost in that town. Not surprisingly, given the tremendous aura that surrounded an IAS officer, despite being a lawyer who should have known better, he used to tell us that the SDM was a very powerful person and we should not behave in a disrespectful manner with him. As we thought nothing of going to jail and had done so quite frequently since our college days, we did not see why we should respect the SDM. But the power that this arbitrary right to jail somebody can give became clear to me one day after an incident. A freshly inducted IAS officer had been posted as SDM and he wanted a cable TV connection immediately in his bungalow. There was only one cable TV provider then in Alirajpur and he said that he had run out of cable and that it would take him a day or two to get a fresh supply from Indore. The SDM would have none of it and had him arrested under section 151 of CrPC, which provides for preventive detention of people who may cause breach of peace. The SDM must have felt that his being deprived of television viewing in a God forsaken place like Alirajpur was a breach of his peace of mind. The poor cable TV provider stayed in jail till his staff went to Indore got the cable, came back and established the connection. This fellow happened to be a friend of mine and I told him that we should go to the Collector and complain at this high handedness but he clasped his hands with fear written large on his face saying that he had had enough and I should keep my advice to myself!

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This section along with some other such sections in the CrPC, all provided to ensure public order and prevent breach of peace by criminal elements, are in fact handy tools with which the administration can easily snuff out any democratic mass protest whatsoever. Theoretically there is a division between the police who actually arrest people under these sections and the executive magistrates before whom they are produced before being sent to jail. However, in the case of controlling democratic mass protests the magistrates themselves take the decision that the leaders are to be arrested and then the police carry out these orders and bring the arrested persons before the very same magistrates who have ordered their arrest. The person arraigned has to bail himself out and after that regularly attend the court. Finally the arraigned person is made to sign a bond that in future he will keep the peace. Once a person signs this bond he automatically acknowledges that he has broken the peace in the case in question and so admits to his guilt and is considered to have been convicted. Once a person is convicted in this kangaroo court manner a few times she becomes a hardened criminal in the eyes of the administration who can then start a process under another draconian law, once again enacted for the control of criminal activity, for her externment from the district in which she lives and all the adjoining districts. Often people in mass movements have other similar false criminal cases too against them and so it is easy for the administration to pass an order of externment against an activist of the mass movements.

I have lost count of the number of times I have been jailed under section 151 of CrPC. But I have never ever signed on the dotted line saying that I am going to keep the peace in the future. The first time I was so arrested the people outside filed a Habeas Corpus petition in the High Court. I was released unconditionally after a few days and later the High Court ruled that proper procedure had not been followed during my arrest thus violating the basic principles of natural justice and passed strictures against the police for having written up a false chargesheet and against the executive magistrate for not having applied his mind to the falseness of the chargesheet and discharged us. That was the first time anyone in Jabua had moved the High Court against the arbitrary and illegal use of preventive detention by the administration and it created a minor flutter within the administration. On later occasions sometimes I have gone on hunger strike and on some others the administration knowing that I would not sign on any paper has released me on its own. On one occasion the Superintendent of Police of Dewas had me arrested from a bus in which I was travelling just to show me who was boss. He then sent wireless messages all around over the five districts of western Madhya Pradesh to see if there were any arrest warrants pending against me. There were none and so eventually after having kept me in custody for eight hours he ordered his henchmen to prepare a false chargesheet against me under section 151 of CrPC. I had in the meantime been continually pestering these lower level policemen to make out an arrest memorandum stating the reasons for my arrest as per the rulings of the Supreme Court (AIR, 1997 SC 610). So when they finally asked me to sign on the arrest memo under section 151 CrPC after eight hours I refused to do so. This created a problem for the police and eventually the SDM before whom I was produced declared that the chargesheet against me was false and so discharged me unconditionally!

The same kind of toughness cannot be expected from adivasis. So these people invariably sign a bond stating that they will keep the peace in future and so convict themselves. One such adivasi activist, a veteran of many battles, including the one against the hostel warden in Katkut mentioned earlier, is Chhotelal Bamnia of Katkut village. The Superintendent of Police of Khargone district put in a proposal to the District Collector listing all the cases pending against him and demanding that Chhotelal be externed from the district. On receiving the notice the ASS engaged a lawyer to fight the case and made a detailed

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presentation listing the fact that all these cases were of old vintage and ones in which Chhotelal was falsely implicated along with other members of the ASS for taking part in some demonstration or other. He had not been convicted in any of them and so he was not guilty until proved to be so. The District Collector then summoned Chhotelal and told him in no uncertain terms that he had better give up his association with the ASS otherwise she would pass an externment order against him. Chhotelal not to be cowed told her that the Bhil homeland was very large extending over the four states of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan in addition to Madhya Pradesh. The District Collector could only extern him from his own district and the adjoining districts not from his homeland. He challenged the District Collector to banish him from his homeland and came away with a flourish.

Just after this he took part in the preparations for the Mayday rally in Barwah and then played a prominent part in it. At the end of the rally the SDM in Barwah sheepishly handed him the order saying that he had been externed. The procedure under the law is that the person so externed has to appeal to the Home Secretary against the order within thirty days. So we prepared an application against the order and then the time came to go to Bhopal to meet the Home Secretary and give it to him. On the appointed day our lawyer suddenly fell ill and so I had to go along with Chhotelal to Bhopal. This was after the massive repression carried out in Mehendikhera to snuff out the Adivasi Morcha Sangathan and I had become labelled as a dangerous subversive. I thought that if I were to reveal my identity to the Home Secretary then whatever little chance Chhotelal had of getting relief would be scotched. So I asked Pushpendra who had by this time become the editor of an evening daily in Bhopal to set up an appointment and I would tag along as his assistant. Pushpendra called the Home Secretary for an appointment and explained to him that an adivasi had been needlessly externed by the District Collector. The Secretary asked him to come over at once and he would look into the matter.

The three of us went off to the Secretariat. We were cordially ushered in and asked to sit down. After some preliminary exchange of pleasantries Pushpendra handed the Home Secretary the application on behalf of Chhotelal. He started perusing it and then suddenly jumped with a start and exclaimed at Pushpendra that he did not know with whom he had got enmeshed. He said that Chhotelal was a member of the Adivasi Shakti Sangathan and this was a dangerous organisation that was out to destabilise the state and if Pushpendra did not watch his step he might get into serious trouble. Then he said that Chhotelal and other adivasis like him were simple people and the real culprit was Rahul Banerjee who was instigating them from behind the scenes. Then he came into his forte and told Pushpendra that I was a very cunning fellow who was secretly preparing the base for the spread of Naxalism in western Madhya Pradesh and using the simple adivasis as a front. He told Pushpendra that despite the crushing action taken by the state in Mehendikhera they had not been able to wipe out the seeds of extremism from the region precisely because of my versatile presence.

The Home Secretary, warming up to his theme asked Pushpendra to do a story on the way in which I was vitiating the atmosphere in the region by using the press and the international human rights agencies to counter the efforts of the state to root out extremism. Pushpendra then asked him for some details about me and my activities for the proposed story. The Secretary immediately sent for a file and when it was brought began reading out from it. Pushpendra told me to take down whatever was being said! I felt flattered while I wrote down all the exaggerated insurgent activity that had been falsely imputed to me. Among other things it was also written that Subhadra and I were not married and that we were only living together. What a sin. Subhadra had not changed her surname after marriage

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leading to the police making this deduction. Are the feminists listening in! Indeed Subhadra's retaining her maiden surname has led to many bizarre encounters with the bureaucracy. On one occasion when I had gone to register our names in the electoral rolls after shifting to Indore the SDM refused to put down Subhadra's surname as Khaperde. When I told him that Subhadra is an independent person and free to use whatever surname she liked he told me that I had got a golden opportunity to put such an uppity wife in her place and should jump at it and put her surname down in the electoral rolls as Banerjee! We had to go to the Collector after that to get Subhadra's surname properly registered in the electoral rolls. Even then the published electoral rolls show only Subhadra's father's first name and not her surname!

After this the Secretary said that he would call up the details of the case from Khargone and gave us a date some fifteen days later for hearing arguments. Chhotelal then asked him to sign on the copy as proof of receipt of the application. Once again the Secretary flared up saying that he could not imagine a simple adivasi not trusting him and plucking up the courage to ask him, the Home Secretary, for a receipt. All this was my work he fumed. We came out of the office and once safely out of hearing burst out in laughter that rang through the corridors of the Secretariat. Pushpendra finally recovered and clapped me on my back and said " Rahul all your years of struggle have not gone in vain." Needless to say that after dillydallying for about two months on various pretexts The Home Secretary finally rejected the appeal. We then went in further appeal to the High Court and after another seven months or so we had the order quashed. The High Court held that the order of externment was illegal and had violated the provisions of the externment law and also the basic principles of natural justice. We then sent a demand of justice notice to the Superintendent of Police and District Collector saying that the High Court order clearly stated that they had illegally harassed Chhotelal and so they should give a written apology and pay compensation. There was obviously no response from the culprits. We have subsequently sent applications to various authorities right upto the President of India demanding permission to prosecute the two in the courts as is mandatory under the law. These applications are still pending as the sanction order for prosecution from the state has not yet materialised. We are biding our time before going to the High Court once again.

One IAS officer who started his career as an enthusiastic Don Quixote tilting at the powerful classes takes the cake as far as bureaucratic highhandedness against political activists goes. As the SDM of Barwani he began a campaign against the non-payment of minimum wages to agricultural labourers. He ordered his subordinates to register cases against landowners who were found not paying the statutory minimum wage to the labourers. These landowners who were politically powerful immediately launched an agitation cutting across party lines. The SDM did not relent but had the leaders jailed under section 151 of CrPC. This inflamed matters further and as things began snowballing into a major confrontation the government ordered the transfer of the SDM and he was packed off to Alirajpur. Here he sniffed out the practice of the police of passing off murders as suicides. He immediately began investigations and soon got to the bottom of the malpractice. Once again he came up against political forces too strong for him. They had a false case registered against him by the police and got a non-bailable arrest warrant issued by a judicial magistrate. He somehow escaped from his bungalow and made it to the High Court in Indore to get a stay order. He desperately appealed to us to do something and we used our contacts in the press and the higher bureaucracy, some of whom used to be quite friendly with us in the late nineteen eighties when the movement against the SSP had not yet taken on major proportions, to help him out of this fracas. He told me then that the police were a gang of criminals who had the sanction of the law.

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A few years later he came back to Jhabua as the District Collector in 1993. This was when things were very hot regarding the NBA campaign to prevent the surveys for the SSP mandated by the World Bank. By this time he had learnt the lesson that laws in India are not to be implemented when they go against the politically powerful and so had instead begun directing his boundless energies against mass organisations of the poor, which were considerably easier meat. Forgetting the cordial relations he had had earlier with us he took it into his head to break the KMCS and the NBA and get the surveys done so that the World Bank's stipulations in this regard could be met. He began tours of the villages on foot saying that he would woo away the people from our folds in a jiffy. The result of all this was the inevitable confrontation at Kakrana where he slapped Khemla as has been mentioned earlier. Khemla and the others were then beaten up by the SDM in Alirajpur another IAS officer and the police at his behest and then they were all paraded in handcuffs in the streets of Alirajpur. He came into his own after the Anjanbara confrontation letting loose his legal gang of criminals on us, beating us up and packing us all into jail. He even engineered a rally against us in Alirajpur with government money. Madhya Pradesh was under President's rule at the time, which is basically rule by the bureaucracy when a state assembly is dissolved and there is no elected government. Since his actions were backed to the hilt by the administration one can safely assume that the whole bureaucracy of the state connived in this illegal repression of our organisation. It was only with the intervention of the Supreme Court where we filed a petition challenging the human rights violations that he had ordered that finally we could get this officer transferred.

One IAS officer has made an anonymous assessment of his colleagues, which speaks volumes for their irrelevance, nay evilness, for a largely rural developing country like India, "A critical lack of concern for the poor is reflected in the way IAS officers grade their jobs.....Posts in the Industrial and Commercial Departments and the corporations occupy a very high rank. These enable the IAS officer an entry into the Government of India, his Mecca, as also afford an opportunity to hobnob with industrialists and businessmen with whom he has class affinity. Next in the list would be posts, which carry a lot of patronage and influence like a district charge, the departments of Home, Establishment, Finance, etc. The lowest rank goes to jobs where excellent performance would directly benefit the poorest, such as Harijan and Social Welfare, Revenue Administration, Land Reforms, Land Settlement, Rural Development, etc". He goes on to say, "An officer in the late 1960s went to a backward district in Central India, but his only recollection of the two year stay was that the district was full of ancient statues and how excitedly he used to look forward to unearthing and obtaining such antiquities. Not only did the illegality of his action not bother him, but he did not notice the poverty of the people, social indebtedness and intense exploitation in the district"(Anon, 1996, pp 6&7).

There are exceptions to the rule as there always are. But it must be remembered that a few swallows do not a summer make and so generally the winter of oppression continues unabated for the country's deprived poor. I have mentioned that some IAS officers did help us in the early stages of our work in Alirajpur. Some of these officer friends later helped Subhadra out in an important personal battle of hers. One of the biggest tragedies of India is the lack of property inheritance rights for women in almost all societies barring some matrilineal ones in the Northeast. This is even more of a problem in rural areas, where land is sometimes the sole economic resource, leading to severe patriarchal oppression of women (Agarwal, 1994). Babasaheb Ambedkar as the first law minister of independent India tried to pilot a law to give equal inheritance rights to women and came up against stiff opposition. After four years of fruitless effort he resigned in disgust in 1951. However, later such laws

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did get enacted in some states. The law in Madhya Pradesh regarding inheritance of agricultural land clearly states that daughters as well as sons will have to be given an equal share of their parent's ancestral plot. However, in practice this is never implemented. Subhadra decided to claim her share when her father passed away in 1993. Her brothers obviously demurred. So she decided to move the administration to get her share.

Luckily the District Collector of Bastar at that time happened to be an IAS officer who had earlier been in Alirajpur. So when we approached him he immediately got things moving and the case was registered by the Tehsildar in Charama. Since the law is cut and dried after a few hearings spread over a year or so the decision went in favour of Subhadra. By that time our IAS friend who was District Collector had been transferred and so it became a problem getting the Tehsildar to implement his order giving Subhadra possession of her share of land in the face of fierce opposition on the ground in the village not only from her brothers but the panchayat as a whole. After all this would be a dangerous precedent for the whole region where never before had women been given a share of their parent's land. We then approached another IAS friend of ours who was then the Secretary to the Chief Minister to intervene. He phoned the new District Collector in Bastar and in next to no time the Tehsildar went to Jepra with a posse of policemen and measured out Subhadra's share of land. The bureaucracy has its uses after all when your side of the toast has to be buttered. A central Act has now been enacted to give women this right all over India. The moot point is how many poor rural women will be able to muster the same kind of contacts within the IAS as Subhadra to be able to get this law implemented.

These officers who had helped us out earlier in our battles against the local state, which were not fundamentally challenging to the system, distanced themselves from us preferring to go with the system rather than against it when we took on the larger state apparatus. In the preparations for and the aftermath of the grossly illegal oppression by the government in Mehendikhera not a single of our IAS friends spoke up for us. The more sensitive souls in the IAS have sooner or later been forced to resign given the basic anti people nature of the system. Dr B D Sharma was the first to do so in Madhya Pradesh. Many years later he was followed by Harsh Mander, who resigned because he felt that members of the All India Services had sullied their name by sitting mute when the massive riots involving murder, loot, arson and rape against the Muslims took place in Gujarat in 2002 (Mander, 2004). He had taken leave from government duty much before that to work in the NGO sector after his early experiences as an administrator had shown him how difficult it was to do something for the poor from within the system (Mander, 2001). The most shining example of an IAS officer who has resigned and then devoted her life to the emancipation of the oppressed is that of my one time colleague and mentor Aruna Roy.

I met her for the first time when I went to Tilonia in 1985. Khemraj took me to meet her. She told me that as an IAS officer she was not able to sit cross-legged on the ground and talk freely with the common people. How could you understand their problems if you did not do that she asked? She had resigned from the IAS in 1974 and joined SWRC to be able to do something with the people. But after a decade of rural development work she too like Khemraj had felt that the rhetoric of participatory development was a hollow one unless the structures of oppression were smashed to enable the people to think and act freely. She had encouraged Khemraj to go to Jhabua and had gone and spent some time helping him with his work there in the early stages. Later she decided to move out of Tilonia and go and work in the Bhim tehsil of Udaipur district in southern Rajasthan in the late nineteen eighties. This was an area from where most of the peasants had to migrate for work, as the produce from

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their fields was not sufficient to sustain them even in years of normal monsoons. Moreover since the year 1986 there had been drought in the area leading to even less agricultural production. This made Aruna and the organisation of the peasants and agricultural workers there, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), search around for ways in which to improve employment opportunities in the area itself (Roy, 2001).

Their investigations revealed that there were rampant irregularities in the implementation of the rural development works being carried out through the panchayats. Thus began a campaign to root out the corruption, which was going on due to the nexus between the local state and the elected panchayat representatives. "Hamara paisa hamara hisaab" or our funds our audit became the slogan of the MKSS. It was clear that funds were being defalcated by various means like fraudulent muster rolls and nonexistent construction that was nevertheless evaluated and certified to be up to the mark. But to get documentary proof it was necessary to scrutinise the records of the work done and payments made. Here the MKSS came up against the obdurate refusal of the bureaucracy to open its records for inspection claiming that they had been certified to be in order by the government auditors. Attempts to get the higher-level bureaucracy and the politicians to intervene too did not bring any tangible results because this demand was a potentially dangerous one that could prove to be the thin end of the wedge for public access to records at higher levels also. The MKSS then had to take recourse to the traditional Gandhian means of satyagraha to try and force the government to make these records available and initially met with the same kind of police repression that is the fate of such agitations. Eventually the Rajasthan Government made some concessions in this regard.

This is when the MKSS hit upon a new strategy in the year 1995 that has brought about a sea change in the field of public action in India subsequently. Faced with the stalemate of the state regularly using repression to crush "jan karyavahi" or militant mass action by mass organisations, the MKSS hit upon the idea of holding a "jan sunwai" or public hearing. This involved mobilising the press and influential people in society including in the government and the bureaucracy to be present in specially organised meetings in villages where the people would congregate and give details of how they had been cheated of their wages or other developmental benefits. The intention was to build up moral pressure on the government and the administration and make them accede to just demands. This soon became a movement that spread its wings across the whole nation. Jan sunwais began to be held in every nook and cranny around all kinds of instances of denial of rights to the deprived sections. The movement took the shape of a National Campaign for the Right to Information. The jan sunwai perfected and formalised the tactic of synthesising both people's mobilisation at the grassroots and the mobilisation of sympathetic people in civil society at large along with the press that the NBA had begun utilising earlier. Not only has this led to the enactment of a Right to Information Act in 2005 but it has also inspired the launching of many other national campaigns like those for adivasi, housing, child, employment and specially abled rights. The jan sunwais have come in particularly handy for directing the spotlight on human rights violations by agencies of the state. Aruna was awarded the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award for community leadership in the year 2000 as had been Jayaprakash Narayan and Baba Amte earlier.

Jan Sunwais, however, cannot be a substitute for jan karyavahis or militant mass actions involving vast numbers of the oppressed people for bringing about lasting radical changes in society. They are a means of focussing attention on rights violations but cannot by themselves ensure that these violations will be remedied. In the absence of massive mass

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mobilisation in support of the decisions taken at the jan sunwais this form of political action suffers from the same impotency in the face of state obduracy as other forms of Gandhian struggle. In one well publicised example of jan sunwai conducted by the MKSS in Umarwaas Panchayat of Rajsamand district in Rajasthan in the year 1999 things backfired embarrassingly (Mishra, 2000). The sarpanch of the panchayat who was a dalit had been sponsored by the powerful upper castes in the elections of the year 1995 since the seat had been reserved for scheduled castes. He was a pawn in the hands of these upper caste leaders who had got themselves elected as ward members. They then engaged in various malpractices. When the unaccounted withdrawals in his name grew to huge amounts the sarpanch got worried and contacted the MKSS. This infuriated the upper caste leaders and they connived with the rural development bureaucracy to indict him for having defalcated funds, had him suspended and had a recovery notice for the amounts due slapped on him. The jan sunwai that was organised after this was a high profile one with Arundhati Roy presiding and the Collector and Superintendent of Police of the District attending. The villagers spoke out in favour of the sarpanch despite attempts by the upper castes to intimidate them. Detailed statements were recorded of how the upper castes had defalcated the funds in collusion with the bureaucracy. Surprisingly despite the passage of a resolution at the jan sunwai that a criminal case should be filed against the corrupt ward panches and bureaucrats the police registered a case against the sarpanch for defalcating the funds of the panchayat!

Eventually Aruna had to use her contacts in the high level bureaucracy to salvage something from this effort by getting the FIR against the dalit sarpanch withdrawn but no criminal case could be instituted against the powerful upper caste ward panches who had defalcated the funds. This is why the success of the MKSS has not been replicated so easily elsewhere by other mass organisations and NGOs that have held jan sunwais because they have not been able to garner the same kind of contacts in the bureaucracy and the mainstream political parties as the MKSS. It is indeed unlikely that the ruling elite will go beyond supporting such one off successes as those of the MKSS and welcome any widespread movement for transparency at the grassroots, which will cut into its hegemony of power. After all it is only a short step from demanding transparency to demanding greater allocations of resources for local development or like in the case of the adivasis of the Narmada valley demanding that mega development be scrapped. Unlike Medha who has directly challenged the state to repeal unjust laws and policies and implement fully its just laws, Aruna has remained content with coaxing it to just formulating good laws and implementing them in fits and starts and so has tasted a little more success. When the National Advisory Council was formed under the chairpersonship of the President of the Congress party Sonia Gandhi to act as a super think tank for the Congress led coalition government at the centre in 2004, Aruna was chosen to be a member of this powerful body. She used this opportunity to make two very good interventions resulting in the passage of the Right to Information Act 2005 and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005.

Advocacy and lobbying, however, have serious limitations. These are political strategies that have been developed in the United States of America where the rules for state funding of political parties make it near impossible for small groups to even participate in elections let alone win them and so the radical political formations there have even more of a "bin pende ka lota" image than the ones in India. Witness the unsuccessful attempts of public rights activist Ralph Nader to get the required percentage of votes for qualifying for state funding despite having fought four presidential elections since the year 1992, two of them as the candidate of the Green Party (Rowen, 2005). The movement against the Vietnam War in the late nineteen sixties was possibly the most prolonged and most widespread concerted

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mass action against the state in the USA (Gettleman, 1985). Since then radical activity has perforce had to follow the same path as that of the powerful groups in using lobbying and advocacy to influence government policy. That is why there was such great euphoria among radical political activists when once again, by Indian standards very rudimentary, direct mass action became visible during the ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organisation in Seattle in 1999 (Cockburn et al, 2001). Indeed just before this environmentalists in America had plumbed the farcical depths of eulogising, as the saviours of mother earth, the likes of the Biotic Baking Brigade, a group of people who believed that they could overturn the rule of Multinational Corporate Capital by throwing pies in the face of people like Renato Ruggiero, the then Director of the WTO! (SAA, 1999) However, civil society in India is much less well developed than it is in the USA and so lobbying and advocacy or a mixture of this with weak grassroots mobilisation as in the conduct of Jan Sunwais has even lesser chance of bringing about the major people oriented changes in development and governance that the environmentalists envisage.

The Right to Information Act was finally passed by parliament in 2005 after some high drama behind the scenes. Aruna used her membership of the National Advisory Council to impress on Sonia Gandhi the President of the Congress party the need to get the draft formulated by the National Campaign on RTI passed instead of the toothless one drafted by the bureaucrats. Both these ladies carried the day in the face of stiff opposition from the bureaucrats and the most radical Act yet in independent India became a reality. But what guarantee is there that it is not going to fare the same fate of non-implementation as the land reform laws and the law that is there for the prevention of atrocities against the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to mention a couple. When a workshop was held in Bhopal to sensitise the District Collectors regarding the implementation of the Act they unanimously protested that it would make their work difficult and came up with a plethora of excuses for not implementing it. One Collector going to the extent of saying that it is not a right to information but a right to harassment! (HT, 2005) Not surprisingly the bureaucracy has subsequently been flouting the provisions of the Act which exhort it to suo moto reveal as much information as possible. Applications for information under the Act are either not being accepted or are being sidetracked by the bureaucracy on some pretext or other. The result is that the Information Commissions at the Centre and in the States have become overloaded with appeals, which they cannot dispose of expeditiously because of the lack of staff. The typical bottlenecks have been created that have enervated so many progressive legislations in this country and is the bane of justice delivery.

Once at a workshop held to get more and more people to use the RTI Act I was talking to Arvind Kejriwal the enthusiastic grassroots RTI activist who has been awarded the Magsaysay Award for emergent leadership in 2006 for popularising the RTI and fighting corruption with it. I told him then that the RTI Act as it stood was too radical and the bureaucracy and government would surely try and amend it later and dilute some of its powerful provisions. When he asked me what could be done to prevent this I said that the only way was to build up a big grassroots movement of people in favour of the Act which after all had been passed through efficient lobbying and had little mass support as such. Later things panned out exactly as I had predicted and the government was all set to amend the Act to prevent the revelation of the notings made by the bureaucrats on the files regarding the decisions taken by the Cabinet of Ministers on major economic and political matters (Bhattacharjee, 2006). Media criticism and lobbying has managed to stall this for the time being but this is the thin end of the wedge. The day is not far when the humdinger of a provision making the Public Information Officers responsible for delays or refusals in

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providing information and penalising them for this too will be sought to be removed through an amendment and the Act made toothless like the many others that adorn our statute books.

One of the more people friendly IAS officers from the Madhya Pradesh cadre, who was at that time the Director of the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration in Mussoorie where the IAS are trained, once related an interesting anecdote in a seminar that I was attending there. He said that he had introduced a course in which the IAS probationers had to stage street plays and write, compose and sing songs around some theme of importance for village uplift. He had introduced this to inculcate in the probationers a feel for modes of people friendly communication. He said that he overheard one of the probationers saying with much appreciation from his batch-mates that they had come to learn how to rule over people so why were they being taught how to sing and dance? When the vast majority of the bureaucrats in this country still suffer from such a hangover of colonial power intoxication, then appealing to them to heed the sane logic of transparent people centred governance and environment friendly development is like casting pearls before swine.

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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

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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

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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.

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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 spate 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

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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!

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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

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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

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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

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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."

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Chapter 22 - The Elusive Holy Grail of Justice

Members of social movements after getting floored by the illegal pahalwani of the police finally end up standing in front of a Judicial Magistrate or a Sessions Judge. Theoretically in a liberal democracy the judiciary is supposed to act as a check on the arbitrariness of the executive by critically perusing the charges being made out against the accused and the evidence being adduced in support when considering the application for bail. The cardinal principle being that a person is assumed to be not guilty until proven to be so beyond any shadow of doubt. There is also a provision in the CrPC for the judge to weigh the evidence brought against the accused before framing charges against her and if this is found to be inadequate prima facie then the case should be dismissed without wasting the time of the accused and the court. There have been innumerable pronouncements by the Supreme Court, which have considerably strengthened this provision (CrLJ, 1990 p 1869). Similarly the Supreme Court has time and again upheld the 'Rule of Prudence', which states that the evidence of the police or confessions and statements made to them should always be discounted by the magistrates while trying cases as the latter are prone to fabricate statements against people and especially against political activists who question the lawlessness of the state (Venkatesan, 2001). Yet the lower judiciary acts as if it is an arm of the executive and treats all those brought before them as hardened criminals irrespective of the quality of the evidence being produced against them and the work they are doing.

When Subhadra was produced before the magistrate in the false case lodged against her when she had sat in a dharna before the police station the magistrate told her that she should not do "netagiri". In Hindi speaking areas in India any attempt at organising people against oppression is pejoratively referred to by the upper classes as netagiri, which literally means leadership. The upper classes are the "netas" or leaders and the lower classes and all those who fight for them can never aspire to be netas but must be doomed to do only netagiri, which the police invariably snuff out. Subhadra not one to take such language lightly told the magistrate that he had no right to make such a comment and should restrict himself to what was mentioned in the case papers. A debate ensued in which Subhadra questioned the legitimacy of the IPC itself since it was a colonial law, which should have been struck down because it violated the Constitution in many respects. The upshot of all this was that Subhadra along with the other women were refused bail despite the case against her being a bailable one and sent to jail. It is of course another matter that they would not have bailed themselves out even if offered bail, as it was their intention to go to jail anyway as part of a jail bharo campaign. Subhadra complained against this arbitrariness of the magistrate to the District Judge and the High Court but the result was that the magistrate became even angrier and slapped a fine on her.

Subhadra subsequently went on hunger strike in jail as mentioned earlier demanding that she be released unconditionally on a personal bond as she was not a criminal but a political activist. This forced the police higher ups to agree to withdraw the case after review and she was immediately released. However, later the Inspector General and the Superintendent of Police who had acceded to this demand got transferred and so eventually the police in their perversity did not withdraw the case. As we have seen there have been many such instances of the administration and the police promising to act on the demands of agitators to make them take back their agitation only to renege later. The animosity of the initial magistrate and the apathy of the one after him meant that eight years elapsed before the case finally came to an end. Some witnesses were examined but still the case dragged on, as others were yet to show up. The case being a false one should have been dismissed at the

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charge stage itself. Due to preoccupation with other work an application was not made at the charge stage for discharge. However since in the other case in tandem with this one Subhadra had been acquitted, an application was made saying that this was a case in which she had been needlessly implicated for the same incident and thus been subjected to "double jeopardy". The magistrate perversely rejected this application and Subhadra refused to go to the High Court in appeal saying that she would not avail of a facility that would not normally be availed of by adivasis because of their poverty.

Nothing of course has come of the case because eventually Subhadra has been acquitted for lack of evidence but nevertheless the time of the court and the accused was wasted over a period of almost a decade so that other people too do not dare to do "netagiri". The police just fabricate cases so as to harass the accused who has to get herself bailed out and then attend court dates interminably and pay the fees of the lawyer. Indeed in the hundreds of cases that have been filed by the police against activists and people of the environmental movements in the western Madhya Pradesh region over the past two decades there has not been even a single conviction barring one. This was the case filed by the police on us for having blocked the highway in Alirajpur in 1990. By the time the case came up to the charge stage most of the activists had left the area and so the case would have dragged on and on for years in the absence of these activist accused. So we thought it prudent to plead guilty to having blocked the road and plea for mercy from the magistrate. Since the public prosecutor did not object to this we were given a warning by the magistrate and let off without any jail sentence or fine. A momentary weakness on our part that has dogged me ever since because the police mention this with glee in the file they have compiled on me. It proves conclusively that I am not only a criminal but a self confessed one to boot!

In the Anjanwara incident as many as four false cases involving such serious sections as attempt to murder were filed and some thirty odd people and activists were implicated in them. The police beat up most of the accused in custody and then paraded them in the streets of Alirajpur in handcuffs before producing them before the magistrate. In the initial stages the administration had through heavy publicity falsely propagated that we had used firearms and were secretly spreading naxalism and so poisoned the minds of the magistrates that they refused to hear anything that the accused might have to say. Thus despite the fact that the people protested that they had been beaten up and handcuffed the magistrate refused to record their complaints in a gross violation of the basic rights of the accused. I was the last person to be arrested in these cases a month after the first arrest and by that time there had been a tremendous amount of counter publicity regarding the truth of the illegalities committed by the police that had put the administration on the backfoot. So I was not beaten up but I was paraded in the streets of Alirajpur in handcuffs. When I pointed out to the magistrate that I had been produced in handcuffs before him despite several Supreme Court rulings that undertrial accused who are in custody are not to be handcuffed he said that in the special circumstances prevailing in Alirajpur the Supreme Court's ruling did not apply there and the police had the discretion to handcuff anybody they considered to be dangerous. Nevertheless I insisted that it be put down in writing that I had been produced before him in handcuffs. He did so and this was to prove his nemesis later on.

In non-bailable offences the release of an accused on bail is at the discretion of the judge depending on the seriousness of the crime. The police routinely apply non-bailable provisions like attempt to murder or threat to murder and cook up some evidence through the use of their informers and then tell the public prosecutor to oppose the bail petitions of the accused. In such circumstances justice demands that the judges apply the rule of prudence

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and weighing the evidence before them grant bail to the accused as they are not criminals but social activists who have been agitating against the violation of their rights by the administration. But this rarely happens. In the Mehendikhera incident given the very hot false propaganda by the administration regarding my being a Naxalite who had armed and incited the adivasis into firing on the police and also into setting up an explosive trap for blowing them up my bail application was not moved at all in the first month after my arrest. In this time widely publicised enquiries by many independent commissions had established that the administration had resorted to illegal destruction of the villages of the Sangathan, killed four of its members in arbitrary police firing and then cooked up a false case against us. Yet the District Judge refused to grant bail when an application was made despite the flimsy hearsay evidence on which I had been arraigned. Immense pressure was brought to bear on him by the administration to refuse me bail and it worked.

This perverse tendency of the executive putting pressure on the lower level judiciary not to grant bail to the accused and send her to jail affects adversely not only the millions of small fry like Subhadra and I but even powerful corporate bosses. The incident mentioned earlier in which one IIT Kharagpur student had sold sleazy Video CDs through the internet auction site Baazee.com is a case in point. Two school students in Delhi had sex with each other and the boy filmed this with the camera on his mobile phone. He later circulated the clip to his friends and gradually it reached a wider and wider circle finally hitting the World Wide Web. Someone at IIT downloaded it and circulated it on the local area network and from there another student copied it into Video CDs which he then advertised on Bazee.com suitably titling them to camouflage the contents. Once the CDs began to be sold they slowly came to the notice of the girl's parents who are politically well connected and the row they kicked up resulted in the police waking up and swinging into action. Internet auction sites operate in such a way that it is impossible to physically verify the goods sold and so the sites get an agreement from the seller to abide by their sales policy which bans the sale of all objectionable merchandise and lays the responsibility for any damages caused squarely with the seller. The whole operation of selling and buying takes place automatically through the Internet. The people operating the systems do not know anything about the nature of the products being sold except what the sellers reveal to them. Thus there is no way in which the CEO of Bazee.com or his staff could be held culpable for the sale of the sleazy Video CD through the site. Yet he was not only wrongly arraigned for "publishing of information that is obscene in electronic form" but due to the political pressure put on the magistrate before whom he was produced after his arrest he was not granted bail and made to cool his heels in jail for a few days (Singh, 2004). Even lobbying by the powerful software mughals of India could not save him.

The most galling thing about the lower courts is that an accused has to attend the court at regular intervals regardless of whether the proceedings are going on or not. The magistrates can absent themselves, the witnesses may not deem it fit to be present but that does not matter. The accused has to be present or a warrant is issued against her for not attending court and she is put back into jail or has to produce sureties all over again. Chhotelal when he was externed had given in writing through his lawyer that he would not be able to attend the many cases he had against him and so he should be spared attendance till he was either given relief by the High Court or he had served his term. This had no effect and the magistrate issued warrants against him in all his cases when he had not attended the court dates of these cases. When finally he won the externment case from the High Court he submitted an application to the magistrate that he should be allowed to attend court dates without having to get himself new sureties in view of the High Court order, which clearly

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stated that he had been illegally victimised by the administration violating all canons of natural justice. This did not carry any weight with the magistrate who ordered him to get fresh sureties or go to jail.

The lawyers too are no better. They have a vested interest in the cases dragging on for years and giving them continuous earnings. Most lawyers try to prolong the cases and get as much money out of the accused as is possible. Moreover, even if a lawyer does want to pursue his clients' interests with gusto the magistrates and judges have so much discretion in giving judgments that they can easily make or mar a case depending on their rapport with the lawyer. Thus when a lawyer is unusually feisty then invariably he finds his cases being adversely settled by the magistrate. In such a circumstance the lawyer would lose his clientele. Thus even sympathetic lawyers do not want to take up the cudgels for political activists for fear of jeopardising their practice. As one lawyer once said to me if the magistrate says that the sun rises in the west then the lawyers too have to agree and say that that is so! This was in connection with one case in which the police had not submitted the chargesheet even after the lapse of six months in a summons case or a case that was of a minor nature. The CrPC provides that on such an occurrence the case should be dismissed immediately. I pressed the lawyer to submit an application for dismissal of the case along with the relevant rulings of the High and Supreme Courts. The magistrate said that she would give the police some more time before deciding on the matter. We pressed for a decision on the matter in the subsequent court dates but nothing would materialise as the magistrate would neither reject our application nor dismiss the case. Finally our lawyer said that he could not do anything, as the magistrate would become angry if he pressed her too much. The case has now been dismissed because the High Court has sent down strict orders that all frivolous cases should be dismissed without delay. This is the way in which the lower courts operate totally on the whims and fancies of the magistrates and judges.

This is also why our lawyer in Alirajpur was fearful of the SDM there. The civil service administrators in India are also executive magistrates who sit in judgment, to the woe of the common people, on some law and order issues and many other laws like those with regard to the settlement of land records. Here too they have vast discretionary powers and can easily give an adverse judgment which then has to be challenged at a higher level necessitating much trouble and expense. They too can make life hell for a lawyer who rubs them the wrong way. After the Anjanwada incident the madcap District Collector threatened our lawyer in Alirajpur with serious consequences if he moved bail applications for us. Medha Patkar had to plead in court on our behalf in the immediate aftermath of the crackdown and arrests and lawyers had to be brought in from outside Madhya Pradesh to move our bail applications later. This District Collector even had the sign board on our office in Alirajpur torn down by the police ruling that it was a "defacement of public space"! A feckless administration has no qualms in abusing its magisterial powers against the faceless masses they are ostensibly supposed to serve.

The prolonging of cases gives the clerical staff in the courts too the chance to earn extra money. It is common practice for these people to take small bribes from the accused to give them their court dates. Not obliging them would mean getting court dates at very short intervals. This takes place under the eyes of the magistrates and judges. Once I asked one of these clerks whether they gave a cut of their earnings to the magistrates. He said that they did not do so in a direct manner. The magistrate would say one day to the clerk that he had gone to the market and found that a certain shop had a very good brand of cooking oil on sale. He would ask if the clerk would not purchase a fifteen-litre can of the cooking oil and bring it to

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his home. The clerk has no option but to oblige! This is of course only the tip of the iceberg. The magistrates and judges regularly take hefty bribes to decide cases in favour of one party or other. This has become so much of a menace that recently the Madhya Pradesh High Court had to terminate the services of many magistrates and judges on finding that the complaints of corruption against them were true (CC, 2005).

Liberal constitutional democratic best practice as it has evolved today stands on the two pillars of justice and pluralism (Rawls, 1993). Any nation is bound to have citizens with a plurality of sometimes incompatible moral, religious, philosophical, social and economic views and so to be fair to all of them a democratic one must give all its citizens the opportunity to voice and practice their views without fear. However, this freedom and equality cannot be absolute but have to be circumscribed to ensure justice for all and also the smooth running of the affairs of the nation. Thus liberal democratic justice envisages that each person has an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty and that social and economic inequalities are so arranged that they are both to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged and attached to offices and positions of governance open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity (Rawls, 1999). Once again this is very close to Ruskin's and so Gandhi's anarchism and also Marx's Communism with the difference that unlike the latter this theory of justice is well coded into a constitution and laws to be administered through a due process of law by an executive that is both accountable to an electorate which periodically elects it by a process of free and fair elections and is monitored by an independent judiciary. Unfortunately in India both these checks have been weakened by the overwhelming power of the executive.

The only saving grace in this sordid story is that the higher courts and especially the Supreme Court currently functions with much more appreciation of the crucial watchdog role of the judiciary in a liberal democracy committed to social, economic and political justice and so some relief can be gained from the arbitrary and illegal actions of the executive as well as its failure to implement beneficial legislation. However, this was not the case as far as the poor were concerned in the first two decades after independence when the higher judiciary used its power of judicial review to block progressive legislations being enacted by the parliament and the state legislatures, especially those relating to land reform. The judges in that era were "drawn from a class and raised to a class which is allergic to the socio-economic commitment to the widening poverty sector guarantors of the status quo" (Krishna Iyer, 1985, pp 14). Things came to a head in the early nineteen seventies when the Supreme Court held as *ultra vires* or unconstitutional the legislations regarding the nationalisation of banks (AIR, 1970 SC 564) and the abolition of the privy purses of the erstwhile princes (AIR, 1971 SC 530) saying that they infringed on the fundamental right to property of the aggrieved persons. This problem arose because at the time of its framing the fundamental rights including the right to property had been made justiciable in the Constitution while the directive principles of state policy were to be made justiciable through later legislation. Thus when these legislations began to be enacted they were challenged as being violative of the fundamental rights which were superior to the directive principles of state policy having been made justiciable from the beginning and the Supreme Court supported this argument.

This was at a time when the Naxalite uprising had made it clear that drastic legislative steps would have to be taken to address the growing poverty and frustrations of the masses in the country side and Indira Gandhi had just come to power with a massive electoral mandate on the slogan of "Garibi Hatao" or remove poverty. Parliament was thus forced to amend the Constitution to make the attaining of the goals of social and economic justice for the vast

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majority of the citizens provided for in the directive principles of state policy override the provisions of fundamental rights of individuals. These amendments were challenged and in a far-reaching majority judgment in favour of the toiling masses of this country the Supreme Court upheld their constitutionality one of the judges ruling that ".... the fundamental rights themselves have no fixed content, most of them are empty vessels into which each generation must pour its content in the light of its experience..... (as) in building a just social order it is sometimes imperative that fundamental rights should be subordinated to directive principles" (AIR, 1973 SC 1461). In a later judgment the Supreme Court went even further and ruled that when the constitutionality of welfare legislation calculated to benefit the weaker sections is challenged then the state should submit a "Brandeis Brief", first popularised by the American lawyer and later judge of the Supreme Court Louis Brandeis in 1908 (Strum, 1988), detailing the socio-economic circumstances and statistics that had inspired the enactment (AIR, 1975 SC 1146). After this the Supreme Court in another historic judgment broadened the interpretation of Article 21 of the Constitution which secures the fundamental right to life and liberty of a citizen to mean not just a right against unjust or illegal detention but a right to live with dignity, severely restricting the arbitrariness of the executive while at the same time exhorting it to play a proactive role in ensuring this in reality (AIR, 1978, SC 597). Finally the Supreme Court in yet another landmark judgment relaxed the rule of locus standi, which had maintained that only that person whose fundamental right had been infringed could approach the higher courts for remedy, by allowing "public spirited citizens" to file writ petitions on behalf of poor and indigent people whose rights had been infringed (AIR, 1981 SC 298).

The ball of judicial activism in support of the rights of the oppressed was set rolling after this as the floodgates were opened to a plethora of Brandeis Briefs in support of human, economic, social, political and environmental rights being filed in the form of public interest litigations or class actions on behalf of the poor who were being exploited or otherwise harassed by the administration or vested interests. The provisions of the Constitution thus began to be interpreted in a way that was much more favourable to the poor. Dr Ambedkar had in the Constituent Assembly commented with regard to the fundamental right to Constitutional remedies, "If I was asked to name any particular Article in this Constitution as the most important - an Article without which this Constitution would be a nullity - I could not refer to any other Article except this one.... it is the very soul of the Constitution and the very heart of it" (CAD VII pp 953). Thus it can safely be assumed that prior to the relaxation of locus standi rules in 1981 and the various other pro poor judgments of the nineteen seventies mentioned above the Constitution was indeed a nullity for the vast majority of poor citizens in this country due to the conservative outlook of the judges. Doubts have recently begun to be expressed regarding the commitment of the Supreme Court to social justice and the efficacy of public interest litigation for securing the rights of the poor after some adverse judgments in a few cases following the liberalisation of the economy in the nineteen nineties and most notably its deciding to wash its hands off the thorny issue of proper rehabilitation and resettlement raised by the NBA (Bhushan, 2004). Nevertheless overall the positive intervention by the higher courts, which continues despite such aberrations, has provided great support to the beleaguered mass environmental movements in general and to those in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh in particular. It can be said without hesitation that without this support of the higher courts these mass movements would have long folded up and people like I would either have been permanently behind bars or forced into inaction by the illegalities of the executive and the insensitivity of the lower judiciary.

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In the Anjanbara incident KMCS went directly to the Supreme Court alleging custodial torture and public handcuffing. The Madhya Pradesh Government took the notice issued to it by the apex court lightly and maintained in its reply that it had been right in doing what it had done because the petitioners were a gang of criminals. The Supreme Court Bench led by the Chief Justice came down hard on the respondents saying that it would order them all to go to jail for such a blatant violation of human rights in the face of repeated orders by it against custodial torture and handcuffing. The bench gave the respondents another chance to refile their response in a proper manner failing which they would all be sent to jail for contempt of court. This shook up the Government of Madhya Pradesh and the respondents. Since all the respondents had not been present hand delivery of the notices to those that had been absent was ordered. This led to a hilarious denouement when the KMCS members went to deliver these notices to the policemen concerned as they fled at the sight of the notice bearers. One head constable fled from the police station to his house and when he was followed there escaped via the backdoor and made haste to hide himself in some other house. The adivasis had the time of their life seeing the police run away from them in this manner. The Government of Madhya Pradesh then submitted a revised response saying it was sorry for what had happened and that one of the policemen had been suspended and all the major officials involved starting from the District Collector and the Superintendent of Police had all been transferred. Nevertheless the apex court ordered an investigation by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) into the allegations made by the KMCS.

Finally the CBI confirmed the allegations of torture and handcuffing that we had made and also revealed how the police had tampered with the daily logs and the case diaries to hide their culpability. The court directed the CBI to register cases against all the guilty officers and it also pulled up the magistrate, who had told me that the Supreme Court ruling on handcuffing did not hold in the special circumstances prevailing in Jhabua. When this magistrate went to the hearing, he was singled out for a special tongue-lashing for having not known the law despite being a member of the judiciary and the judges pronounced, "We are of the view that Magistracy requires to be sensitised to the values of human dignity and to the restraint of power. When it allows inhuman conduct on the part of the police, it exhibits both the indifference and insensitiveness to human dignity and constitutional rights of the citizens. There could be no worse lapse on the part of the judiciary which is the sentinel of these great liberties" (JT, 1994 (6) SC pp 60). The court also expressed its displeasure at "the sordid picture and sorrowful plight of public spirited men who desire to prevent exploitation of poor Adivasis" and stated "It cannot be denied that there have been acts by the police, which should concern everyone who values human rights. It cannot be said that the day of the silent poor is over. There is anger and bitterness among those who are poverty stricken. One should have regard to these aspects in enforcing law".

As mentioned earlier in the grossly fabricated false case that was instituted in the aftermath of the Mehendikhera firing the accused went to the High Court in appeal against the lower court's dismissal of the application for discharge. A massive revision petition supported with a host of case law citations and documents was filed for discharge of some of the accused and the removal of some charges against the others. Then began a theatre of the absurd. The prosecution would continuously demand time and avoid a final hearing on flimsy grounds. Their game plan was to delay the consideration of the case so that the lower court judge would proceed with the trial and then they could plead that since the trial had already started the petition was unmaintainable. The High Court judges too kept on changing and none would give the petitioners a stay on the proceedings of the lower court. Nevertheless the proceedings in the lower court were kept at a standstill by various means and the appeal was

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pursued in the High Court resulting in the order quashing the farcical charge of waging war against the state but keeping the other charges intact after five months. The problem for the High Court was that the prosecution, meaning the police, had appended the statements of as many as 106 witnesses in support of their charges. Now the High Court could not be expected to go through all those statements to ascertain our claim that these did not prima facie support all the charges made out against us. Thus by quantity if not quality the police try to get their investigations pass muster enough to entangle the accused in never ending litigation.

Subsequently this case is being heard in the lower court and already after some twenty-five witnesses, mostly independent ones, having been examined it has become clear that the case is totally fabricated. But now the remaining witnesses who are mostly police and forest staff are loathe to come to the witness stand given the rigorous cross examination that the earlier ones have had to face and so the case like the other ones against us is dragging on. The other day the main witness and the person who lodged the FIR, a police sub-inspector, came and stood in the witness stand all prepared to hold forth against the accused. The defence lawyer requested the judge that the prosecution be made to produce the daily log of the police station and the case diary in the court so that the police inspector's statements could be tallied with the entries made there. Immediately the inspector began to cough convulsively and plead that he was seriously ill and that he was in no position to give evidence and should be spared for the day! Despite protests from our lawyer that this would mean unnecessarily prolonging the case in contempt of the rulings of the Supreme Court regarding the expeditious disposal of cases the judge went along with the patent play acting of the police inspector and let him escape for the day. The case has been going on for four years and it will take at least four years more at this rate before it will be disposed of with judges changing in the meantime and the newer ones having to be briefed all over again about the details of the case. A modern equivalent of the classical Sisyphean curse!

The judgments of the Supreme Court in the Bhopal Gas Tragedy and the NBA case have already been mentioned. The NBA in fact continued to depend heavily on the Supreme Court to get some purchase against the highhandedness of the executive even after the latter finally disposed of the case allowing the construction of the SSP dam to continue. This is because the Supreme Court made it clear that the construction of the dam would proceed only in stages subject to the proper rehabilitation of the oustees being displaced at each stage as per the provisions of the NWDT Award. Since proper rehabilitation had not been done and the number of oustees had gone up with the inclusion of the names of the major sons the work on the dam did not progress for some time as the NBA filed objections to any proposal for further construction giving the details of the incomplete rehabilitation (Patkar, 2005). This strategy was later adopted for the Indira Sagar Dam also. While the Narmada Hydro-Development Corporation and the Government of Madhya Pradesh rode rough shod over the protests of the people and forcibly evacuated the town of Harsud in 2004 without providing proper compensation and rehabilitation its efforts to do the same with the rest of the villages in the submergence zone in 2005 also have been stayed by the High Court of Madhya Pradesh and it has been prevented from closing the gates of the dam until the people to be affected are all properly compensated and resettled (Palit et al, 2005).

Even though the Supreme Court has now sneaked out of the SSP case and pulled the rug from under the NBA's feet there can be no gainsaying the fact that from 1995 when the Supreme Court stayed the construction of the dam till 2006 when it finally distanced itself totally from the NBA's radical line its pronouncements did provide a fairly stable dance floor on which the NBA could choreograph its anti-dam jig. One of the comments about the

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Mughal Empire in India that preceded British rule is that one should not bemoan that it finally fell but should wonder that it survived for such a long period spanning two centuries. Similarly one should not crib about the Supreme Court having finally betrayed the oustees of the SSP as it was bound to do sooner or later but should be thankful that it too in chorus with the NBA chanted the slogan of "bandh nahi banega, koi nahi hatega" for as long as a decade.

Undoubtedly the most important judgment of the Supreme Court from the point of view of the adivasis in the Fifth Schedule areas in India is that delivered in what has come to be known as the Samatha case (SCC 1997 (8) pp 191). The worst depredation that the adivasis have suffered in India is from the establishment of mines in their habitats. Right from the time of the British adivasis have been ruthlessly displaced from their lands and homes, without any worthwhile compensation, for mining as in most cases minerals are to be found in forest areas inhabited by adivasis and this process continues unabated. The provisions of the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution clearly state that land, including government land, in scheduled areas cannot be transferred to non-adivasis. Apart from this there are other statutes preventing transfer of adivasi land to non-adivasis. However, despite these provisions land in scheduled areas in Andhra Pradesh had been transferred to private companies and public corporations for the purpose of mining through leases. Samatha an NGO in Vishakhapatnam district challenged these leases as being unconstitutional in the High Court. The High Court rejected the Samatha contention that the private companies were juristically non-tribal 'person's and allowed the leases to continue. Samatha then appealed to the Supreme Court against this order of the High Court.

The Supreme Court upheld the Samatha argument that private mining industries were also non-tribal 'person's and hence all mining leases in tribal lands in scheduled areas to private industries are null and void. Although the case was filed on behalf of a few remote tribal villages in Andhra Pradesh, the Court's judgement is a boon to all the millions of adivasis in the nine states of India, which have Fifth Schedule areas. While the government could in the public interest still launch mining operations on its own it was expressly forbidden from leasing land to private parties. Instead the Court suggested that cooperatives of the adivasis be formed and the leases given to them along with appropriate training to run them. The Court also directed the Government to formulate an overall policy for development of adivasi areas so that the mining operations benefited the adivasis instead of devastating them as had happened earlier and even prescribed that twenty percent of the profits from these operations be set aside for this purpose. The Court further ruled that the permission of the adivasi gram sabhas would have to be taken before a mining project could be implemented. The Government filed a review petition against this judgment, which too was rejected by the Supreme Court. The Government even thought for some time about amending the Constitution to get round this judgment instead of heeding the sage advice that it should help in forming cooperatives of the adivasis for exploiting the natural resources in their areas and formulate a pro-adivasi development plan.

Similarly in the area of human rights the Supreme Court has continually intervened to monitor and control the persistent aberration of torture of those in custody whether in police lock ups or in jails. In a recent case it has noted with concern that "The dehumanising torture, assault and death in custody which have assumed alarming proportions raise serious questions about the credibility of the rule of law and administration of the criminal justice system.....the now celebrated decision in D K Basu versus State of West Bengal seems not even to have caused any softening of attitude in the inhuman approach in dealing with persons in custody.....death in police custody is perhaps one of the worst kinds of crime in a

civilised society governed by the rule of law and poses a serious threat to an orderly civilised society." (SCC 2005 (9) pp 631) The Supreme Court goes on to note, "Rarely in cases of police torture or custodial death, direct ocular evidence is available of the complicity of the police personnel, who alone can only explain the circumstances in which a person in their custody had died. Bound as they are by the ties of brotherhood, it is not unknown that police personnel prefer to remain silent and more often than not even pervert the truth to save their colleagues."

Giving a major new direction to jurisprudence the Supreme Court questioned the "exaggerated adherence to and insistence upon the establishment of proof beyond every reasonable doubt by the prosecution, at times when the prosecuting agencies are themselves in the dock, ignoring the ground realities, the fact situation and the peculiar circumstances of (such) a case.....often results in the miscarriage of justice and makes the justice delivery system suspect and vulnerable. Tortures in police custody, which of late are on the increase, receive encouragement by this type of an unrealistic approach at times of the courts as well because it reinforces the belief in the mind of the police that no harm would come to them if one prisoner dies in the lockup because there would hardly be any evidence available to the prosecution to implicate them in torture." The court cited approvingly the 113th report of the Law Commission which recommended amendments to the Evidence Act 1872 so as to provide that in the prosecution of a police officer for an alleged offence of having caused bodily injuries to a person while in police custody, if there is evidence that the injury was caused during the period when the person was in custody, the court may presume that it was caused by the police officer having custody of the person during that period unless the police officer can prove to the contrary. The Supreme Court recommended, "Appropriate changes in the law not only to curb custodial crimes but also to see that such crimes do not go unpunished. The courts are also required to have a change in their outlook, approach, appreciation and attitude, particularly in cases involving custodial crimes and they should exhibit more sensitivity and adopt a realistic rather than a narrow technical approach." The government has not yet listened to this sage advice to curb the pahalwani of the police.

We were benefited by the D. K. Basu judgment mentioned above to a certain extent in a case in which the forest officials had murdered one of our Sangathan members while on duty and the government was nevertheless refusing to pay compensation. After a long drawn legal battle when finally relief was given by the High Court to the tune of Rs 2,00,000 as compensation to the widow of the deceased then the Judge while passing the order made a note of this and another landmark judgment to the effect that -

1. Functionaries of the government cannot themselves become law breakers and adopt inhuman methods in trying to enforce the law against alleged offenders as they had done when they had murdered Roopsingh while ostensibly going to apprehend Balu for an alleged timber cutting offence (SCC 1997 (1) pp 416).

2. The Government is vicariously liable to compensate the victims of such lawlessness on the part of its functionaries and if it doesn't then it is the responsibility of the High and Supreme Courts to ensure that it does so (SCC 1993 (2) pp 746).

Possibly the most important and effective intervention of the Supreme Court ever has been that in trying to ensure the right to food for the vast majority of the poor in India under the larger rubric of the right to a dignified livelihood (Gonsalves et al, 2005). The Supreme Court has come down hard on the union and state governments in the course of hearing a petition filed by the Rajasthan unit of the PUCL regarding the anomaly of widespread hunger

and malnutrition despite the existence of massive buffer food stocks with the Food Corporation of India. Commenting on the fact that it was more expensive to store these massive stocks of food grains than distribute them among the poor and needy it has coaxed the state governments to prepare lists of people living below the poverty line and has impressed upon the union government the need to ensure proper implementation of the various schemes it already has for providing food at cheaper prices or through relief works to such people. The Supreme Court has appointed Commissioners to monitor and report on the way in which its orders were being implemented. This case too like the D. K. Basu case on custodial torture has been kept pending so that the Supreme Court can continue to monitor the working of the government. Refusing to entertain the argument of financial incapacity of the government the Supreme Court has held that hunger spreads not because the State lacks the funds to act but it chooses to use its money elsewhere in "perverse expenditure logic."

The higher courts do provide some relief from the waywardness of the politicians and bureaucrats but approaching these forums is an expensive proposition. In most of the more famous cases like those of the Bhopal gas tragedy, the NBA, Samatha or PUCL Rajasthan, top-notch lawyers have appeared pro bono. However, apart from the Anjanbara case we ourselves have always had to hire lawyers paying through our nose. Even when deciding in favour of the poor petitioners rarely do the higher courts order as to costs. The petitioner is left to file a case for damages in the lower courts which as we have seen have little sympathy for their cause. Once Subhadra and I with our little nine-month old son were in Barwah to attend a court date. We went to the house of an old Socialist activist so that Subhadra could nurse our son before we went to the court and there, we met a member of the Bharatiya Janata Party. That person had already heard of our exploits but this was the first time we were meeting. He said that he himself had once taken part in a roadblock agitation and had been implicated in a case. That case had dragged on for eighteen years before finally ending a few weeks back. He had never again participated in any agitation for fear of more such cases. He said that Subhadra and I with our infant son making the rounds of the courts impressed him no end. He could not think of bearing such harassment to struggle against the state! This coming from the member of a mainstream political party shows how effective the colonial repressive laws and the conservative judicial culture of the lower magistracy are in stifling popular dissent and how elusive indeed is the Holy Grail of justice for the vast majority of the poor citizens of this country.

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Chapter 23 - The Interest on the Kohinoor Diamond

When it comes to Catch 22s anarchists seem to be swimming in a sea of them. We have already seen how their abhorrence for political centralisation has reduced the effectiveness of their opposition to the centralised state. Fighting for the rights of the poor requires money, and loads of it, as must have become self evident by now. The more they struggle the more the money required. Herein lies the second Catch 22 that the anarcho-environmentalists face - the poor, by definition, do not have money to fight for their rights. Ideally when people are organised they should pool in money to defray the costs of organisational work. Even one rupee a day per family comes to a lot when an organisation spans over a few villages and has upwards of a thousand members. The money pooled in this way can easily cover the expenses of a few full time activists and also that of various court cases and other organisational expenses. However, this never materialises because people tend to seek free services. Contribution to the organisation fund is like a tax and people all over the world dislike paying taxes. Moreover, all the families in a village are never members of the organisation as some, the more powerful ones, owe allegiance to the mainstream political parties. These families constantly pester the organisation members to leave the organisation or at the least not pay its membership fees and free ride on the time and money being expended by the more active members. Thus even in the early KMCS days, when the costs of organisation were minimal and the benefits to the people were immense, apart from free food whenever we visited the villages, little monetary contribution would be forthcoming.

So willy nilly mass organisations have to seek external funding of their operations. Ruling out looting of banks and rich people and forcible extortion from contractors and industrialists, which have been resorted to by the more violent armed revolutionaries one constitutionally legitimate way is to have individual middle and upper class supporters of the movement contribute either regularly or irregularly for the cause because they believe in its genuineness. This is how the Communist and Socialist parties traditionally operated. Those supporters of these parties who were working for a living contributed a portion of their earnings as a levy to finance the full time activists and other party work. However, the rampant consumerism spread by television advertisements has taken its toll as the middle and upper class people these days are busy financing houses, cars, fridges, washing machines, television sets and even their holidays on loans and after paying for these in monthly instalments have little to spare from their salaries for organisational work. Consequently this source of politically correct external funding has all but dried up in the present era.

Not surprisingly when Subhadra and I came to Indore in penniless straits and were forced to beg for help from our friends and family we were looked down upon as worthless panhandlers instead of as public spirited citizens trying to make democracy more meaningful for the less privileged citizens of this country. Begging of course is an exalted Indian pastime with mystic greats like Buddha, Mahavira and an illustrious line of Hindu saints having survived on it. The grand idea propagated by the mystics is that the supreme spirit behind the world can be known only through inward meditation and this has fascinated people throughout history. While the Buddha was an atheistic mystic who stated that there was no way of knowing whether God existed or not and so people should stop bothering about this question and go about living their lives by reining in their desires, Mahavira and the Hindu saints were spiritual mystics who preached of a supreme spirit who was unconcerned with the material problems that common people face and so they should give up the desires from which these problems arise and concentrate on living simply. Thus all the Indian religious

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sages have advised the people to give up their desires and meditate on their inner selves as a way to end their miseries. But common people, while being fascinated by this idealistic mysticism in theory, have in practice turned to a form of grosser religion, that has grown up around the mysticism of the saints, for solace from their every day problems. These arise from a combination of their desires, which they do not want to give up and the basic unpredictability of life. That is why the tendency in people is to reject the exalted desire negating mysticism of the saints and instead worship anthropomorphic Gods who can put an end to their problems. This belief that one single God or spirit or many Gods and spirits animate the inanimate universe and direct it with a divine purpose, in some form or other, has been the core idea of all religions. Throughout history human beings have supplicated these Gods to alleviate the miseries arising from their desires. This animistic tendency in human beings is so widespread that even the atheist Buddha is today worshipped as a God by his followers! So people rich and poor are ever ready to donate generously to religious mendicants and saints who, they feel can mediate between them and the Gods but will only reluctantly do so to social and political activists who can organise them to fight injustice.

On one occasion I was taken aback when an adivasi woman met me at a shop in Katkut and said that she was going to our Mandir or temple. Neither the shopkeeper nor I could make out what she was saying till she explained that she was going to our office cum residence! When the shopkeeper asked her whether she was going to take some dakshina or offering to the temple and its Goddess she said that Subhadra was the bread giver for all the adivasis of the area so there was no need to take anything to her temple. We had taken great pains to build up a democratic mass organisation but animism is so deep rooted in the psyche of the common people in this country that there is no escaping from it. We had been converted into Gods too and particularly benevolent ones at that because we did not demand any dakshina from our devotees! We had learnt the hard lesson from our experiences earlier that one can't rely on the masses to provide for one's sustenance and so had made our own arrangements. But the mediators between the Gods and the masses do not have such worries and these days they are not only able to garner much more mass support than political organisations but also money from the people at large only too willing to buy salvation rather than fight for it.

The reality is that when it comes to fighting in any serious way the Leviathan of the state bent on further beggaring its poorest citizens then unfortunately both levies and begging do not provide much financial succour. Globalisation and the consumerism that it has spawned have so impoverished the poor and their sympathisers that not much is available for radical action anymore. Consequently the university town of Oxford in Britain, which used to pride itself on being their traditional home, now finds that the whole world has become littered with utopian lost causes without so much as a penny being paid to it for the replication of its unique geographical indication! Ironically when the British philosopher Hobbes first mooted in a book of the same name, the proposition of the absolute power of the state or commonwealth as he conceived of it as a beneficial Leviathan that would rescue human beings from the arbitrary use of power exercised through mob violence he was pilloried as being a monster by the members of the British parliament (Hobbes, 1982). Hobbes had been a supporter of the royalty in its losing battle against the rising mercantile class prior to the Revolution of 1648, which established the supremacy of parliament over the king. He thus drew the ire of the parliamentarians as they, characteristically for a set of obtuse plebeians, failed to see the prophetic nature of his ideas in predicting for the first time the rise of the modern state! The parliamentarians even went to the extent of fanning mob fury to burn copies of his book in public and then preposterously alleging that this had caused

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the Great Fire of 1666, which burnt most of London! The Leviathan of the state has not only gained tremendously in power with time but also contrary to Hobbes's expectations become an oppressive entity protecting and promoting the exploitative activities of the mercantile and industrialist class at the expense of ordinary citizens and so impoverishing them that they are now not even able to fund protests against it!

The initial modern anarchist response from the eighteenth century onwards came as a reaction to this centralisation of political powers in the state and its control by the industrialists who had centralised economic power within society. The French anarchist Pierre Proudhon going to the extent of labelling all private property as robbery (Proudhon, 1994). But like in the case of the anarchist political challenge to the state, in the case of its funding too ground realities have once again forced anarchists to compromise on their principles and they have gone in for institutional funding to sustain their activities. No less a figure than Gandhi had to do this by relying on the nascent Indian capitalist class to fund both his political and social work. In the wake of the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1931 during which the boycott of British cloth had led to the Indian mill owners earning huge surpluses he urged them to contribute generously to the Congress and his ashrams (Ghosh, 1989). It was far easier to garner funds from these moneybags than doing so from the penniless masses. But as we have seen, these businessmen succeeded where Shylock hadn't by taking their pound of flesh in the form of state acquiescence for the Bombay Plan in preference to Gandhi's own pet dream of the establishment of decentralised village economies. In the post independence era the Gandhian ashrams have had to rely heavily on the government for their funds in addition to the contributions from industrialists and businessmen. The net result has been that these institutions have gradually become appendages of the state system without any dynamism of their own and mostly cut off from the realities of rural life.

Dhirendra Mazumdar the first chairman of the Sarva Seva Sangh grappled with this problem of bureaucratisation and marginalisation of the Gandhian institutions with little success throughout his incumbency and finally resigned from his post in 1960 on reaching the age of sixty to try and blaze a different trail. He decided that the warp and weft of feudal class and caste oppression had woven a shroud around a moribund rural India and that this shroud could be torn away only through a non-violent mass movement from below funded by the rural people themselves (Mazumdar, 1979). So he went and dropped anchor in a remote village in Bihar, which had a highly skewed land distribution in favour of the upper castes and a surfeit of landless lower castes. The condition that he set for his stay there was that all the people rich and poor must contribute to the expenses of running the village organisation that was to be set up which included the living expenses of the fulltime workers. The landed people had to give up some of their land in such a way that a common farm could be carved out on which all the people would be able to work and produce in a communitarian manner. Initially things went well but soon the enthusiasm of the people began to flag and the contributions of money, grains and labour began to dwindle. The stream of cooperation in farming between the rich and the poor began to dry up in the dreary desert sand of traditional distrust. The lower caste people began to lose interest in the many innovative communitarian sanitation, education and village fund initiatives that had been introduced while the rich upper castes, the babus, actively worked against these.

Enquiries revealed that the people had initially agreed to Dhirendrabhai's conditions in the hope that once he was there he would leverage his status as the chairman emeritus of the Sarva Seva Sangh to bring huge amounts of development funds for the village. But when

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they were told that this was not to be the case and that resources had to be generated from within the village itself through contributions of time, labour, money, land and grains in proportion to the capacity of the contributor their interest in Dhirendrabhai's programme of rural renewal through self reliance began to wane and the poorer dalit landless labourers even began to question whether he had in reality ever been the chairman of the Sarva Seva Sangh! While Dhirendrabhai wanted to persist despite this his young companions who had given up their jobs in various Gandhian institutions to work with him found it very difficult to continue in such circumstances and had to leave thus putting paid to the experiment. Later Dhirendrabhai tried the same experiment in another remote village in eastern Uttar Pradesh to meet with the same fate. During these experiments he learnt in detail about something regarding which he had only an inkling while serving as the chairman of the Sarva Seva Sangh. This was that there was tremendous corruption in the redistribution of the land donated as part of the Bhoodan campaign in which the sarvodayis who were members of the Bhoodan committees at the various levels had colluded with the powerful landed castes to prevent any real redistribution to the lower caste landless peasants.

In the early years after independence the expanding state system and the constitutional provision for reservation provided ample job opportunities in the government sector for youth getting educated from the lower castes. Consequently there was a continuous drain of such youth from the villages and very few of them opted for voluntary or low paid social service work under the aegis of the Sarva Seva Sangh. It was the idealistic youth from the towns inspired by Gandhism who provided the leadership for rural development work as workers of the Gandhian institutions. But the tremendous political and social obstacles they faced and also the progressive bureaucratisation of these institutions soon disillusioned them. Not surprisingly most of them jettisoned their early dreams and left to return to the mainstream and only some stubborn people like Radheshyam Bohre remained for whom Gandhism gradually became a majboori. Bohreji's sole work and headache in Machla when we arrived there was to prevent the people of the village who were at one time active participants of the programmes of the Gramodyog Vidyalaya from encroaching on its land and pilfering its materials. He used to spend most of his time chasing the boys and girls from the village that came to steal the mangoes, custard apples, bananas, lime, drumsticks, bamboo and sandalwood that used to mature at various times of the year. Finally, when Mahendrabhai passed away in 2003, he resigned from this thankless job and is back to enjoying farming on his own piece of land in Khategaon once again.

This highlights yet another Catch 22 that bedevils anarchists in particular and radical social change in general. A mass movement for radical social change can be initiated and sustained only on the strength of a continually increasing committed and knowledgeable grassroots cadre of youth. But youth will be drawn in sufficient numbers to a movement and their living and operating expenses will be borne by the masses only if it is a vibrant one. How does one create a Cinderella of a vibrant movement from the general apathy of the masses without the magic wand of a fairy Godmother? And even if one can find a fairy Godmother in special circumstances like in the case of the NBA there is always the danger that the clock of state oppression will strike twelve sooner or later and the movement will lose its vibrancy in a jiffy! Dhirendrabhai addressing this question came to the conclusion that the monopoly of the state in the provision of social and developmental services through a corrupt and insensitive bureaucracy had killed the initiative of the people to cooperate among themselves and improve their situation by pooling their own resources. He found that the Gandhian institutions too had become a surrogate for the state in their style of working and so the people regarded them as another government department. This was in the early nineteen

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sixties when the stranglehold of the state over its citizens had not become as widespread as it is today. Moreover since he worked within Vinoba Bhave's Gandhian paradigm that stressed on cooperation rather than confrontation as the panacea for the mitigation of disparities between classes and castes he did not have to contend with the phenomenon of state oppression that a confrontationist approach invariably involves.

Jayaprakash Narayan in the Sampurna Kranti movement in 1975 brought these contradictions of post independence Gandhism out in the open causing a split in the Gandhian fold as mentioned earlier. Narayan emphatically stressed that the Gandhians must once again engage in mass civil disobedience against an oppressive and unjust state as opposed to collaboration and cooperation with it. The government decided to hit back by instituting enquiries against Narayan and the Gandhian institutions that supported the movement despite having taken government funds to run their programmes. Many such institutions thus lost their source of funding including the Gramodyog Vidyalaya in Machla. This was a crucial blow because the whole Khadi programme had been surviving on the crutches of the heavy subsidies that were being provided to it and the withdrawal of this government support meant a total collapse of this programme and the institutions that were surviving on it. Indeed it was the danger of such an eventuality that had prompted many including the leaders of the Gandhi Memorial Fund in Indore for which Bohreji worked to distance themselves from Narayan's movement. Narayan, despite this setback, was able to mobilise youth and funds from the common people outside the Gandhian fold in massive numbers to sustain his movement and make it into a major threat to the establishment. However, after the imposition of the emergency and the subsequent mass arrests of leaders and activists the movement was dissipated because it had not yet been able to strike deep roots within the masses. After the lifting of the emergency most of the youth leaders who had been mobilised by the movement opted for participating in mainstream electoral politics instead of pursuing with the considerably more challenging anarchist agenda of Narayan who himself was bedridden due to a serious illness which eventually led to his demise in 1978.

This was the time when the spring thunder of the Naxalites also had stopped rumbling having been dissipated through a combination of heavy state repression and internal squabbling. Thus while the failure of "trickle down" development leading to deteriorating economic conditions of the people and the festering social inequities had opened up a vast sphere for people's action the two formations outside of mainstream electoral politics hitherto available for channelising such action, that of the Gandhians and the revolutionary Marxists, were both in disarray and unable to provide intellectual and organisational leadership for such action. Globally the oil-price shock of 1974 had put a stop to the post World War II boom in the developed economies of the west and in Vietnam the Americans had been stymied in their onslaught against communism. The first necessitated a greater penetration by the MNCs of the developed countries into the developing countries for raw materials, cheap labour and markets and the latter a new way to dissipate mass movements for radical socio-economic change other than the path of direct extermination as adopted unsuccessfully in Vietnam. This led to the onset of the current wave of globalisation and the NGO boom (Petras & Veltmeyer, 2001). The first consisted of greater bilateral and multilateral aid being given to developing countries in return for their opening up their economies to trade and investment by the MNCs and their reduction of social sector spending and subsidies so as to be able to pay back the debt. The latter involved heavy funding of NGOs in developing countries to bring about "participatory development" trying to ensure greater participation of the people in development without addressing the structural inequalities in society and the economy. India too was drawn into this new wave and there was a mushrooming of NGOs of all kinds

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engaged in service delivery, rural development, mass mobilisation and policy and legal advocacy.

In this new dispensation the Indian state too encouraged mass mobilisation by NGOs through such programmes as the National Literacy Mission, National Watershed Mission and the like and the formation of the Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART). Thus under cover of the rhetoric of participatory development it became possible for the first time to garner funds for mass mobilisation from the government and foreign funding sources. Rajaji faced with the eternal problem of getting youthful cadres and funding them when he wanted to expand his grassroots mass mobilisational work in Chhattisgarh fell back on both these sources. That is how Subhadra who would otherwise have had to spend her time making bidis for a living became a social activist. Similarly I too along with Khemraj and Amit could give shape to our mass mobilisational work among the Bhils in its initial shaky stages as a part of the SWRC and benefit from both its varied funding sources as well as its clout with bureaucrats and the central government. The NBA too started out with NGO support in its early stages and has continually been supported overtly or covertly by various national and international NGOs and has used an admirable mix of policy, media and legal advocacy and rural development work to complement the mass mobilisational work on the ground.

However, there are serious drawbacks to the involvement of NGOs in movements for radical social change. On the one hand when the mass mobilisational work begins to threaten the state or local power structure in any substantial way then the funding tends to dry up or not measure up to the heightened demands resulting from the imposition of false criminal cases as we found to our cost in our relationship with the SWRC. Rajaji and the Ekta Parishad too have had to rein in their activities so as to avoid any direct confrontation with the state, which might lead to the imposition of false cases and a cessation of funding. On the other hand the funding can corrupt the activists and make them give up cutting edge mass work for some support work like running micro-finance groups or doing policy, media, human rights or legal advocacy that can only partially alleviate the problems of the masses. Examples of this latter makeover, a desired outcome as far as the funders' objectives go, are too legion to require enumeration. There are numerous hot debates going on over the Internet, workshops and jan sunwais are being held off and on and online petitions are being filed left, right and centre but there are very few actual mass movements on the ground.

Thus overall the immense amount of funds coming into the NGO sector has turned out to be a bane rather than a boon as far as mass social action is concerned. The NGO sector has become professionalised and there are many more people, from both urban and rural backgrounds, with the shrinking of employment in the government sector, coming in to pursue social work as a career rather than out of an urge to do something for the poor and downtrodden. Moreover theorising about and ensuring participatory and sustainable development has become a lucrative profession for researchers and consultants what with the multilateral institutions like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank and the various United Nations agencies stressing on social development and stakeholder participation as a sine qua non in the implementation of development projects. So with NGOs having spread to the remotest corners of the country disbursing funds for some development activity or other and employing paid staff to do so, the mindsets of the people have changed so much that it has become far more difficult to get the masses to engage in self sustaining community based activities with self generated funds. Activists who are prepared to live on a pittance and organise them to achieve this are even rarer to come by. This is the principle

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reason for the waning of mass movements for social change over the last decade or so coinciding with the new phase of globalisation of the world economy.

Once in 1996 Subhadra's sister in law, Narmada, came over from Jepra to Machla for a few months to get treated for a chronic illness that she was suffering from that required surgery. Jacob was at that time carrying out a project to conserve and promote the indigenous cereals, pulses and oilseeds of the Malwa and Nimar regions and had about five acres of experimental farming plots in the ashram at Machla and Kasturbagram under cultivation. He had employed two youth to help him with his work and was paying them fifteen hundred rupees a month each as salary. Narmada who was used to working for twenty rupees a day as a farm labourer in Jepra to supplement the meagre harvests from her own farm was puzzled that Jacob could afford to pay so much to his workers despite cultivating low value and low yielding crops. Try as she might Subhadra could not make Narmada understand then that Jacob was running an NGO that was being liberally funded by an agency and so he was not constrained by the generally weak bottom-line of subsistence agriculture in India. Now a decade later the same Narmada is working fifteen days a month vaccinating children in and around Jepra for an NGO and getting paid fifteen hundred rupees for doing so. She phoned up from Jepra after landing this job and proudly told Subhadra that like her she too was now part of the NGO sector!

Things become even more desperate when a mass movement grows to the stage where it faces state repression. On one occasion Subhadra and I were in Barwah to attend a court date and on that day there were more than a hundred people from the Sangathan present there for some case or other. I proposed that we should not let this opportunity go by and start shouting some relevant slogans against the state but I found no takers! This was at a time after the Mehendikhera crackdown, which had smashed the backbone of the Sangathan and considerably reduced its efficacy. The leading adivasi activists like Chhotelal had tens of cases against them and spent most of their time attending the court dates of these cases. The people said that they were finding it tough to bear the expenses of the pending cases and did not want to burden themselves with yet another one for breaking the peace in the court premises. A few funding agencies like SRUTI will at the margin fund mass mobilisation work but will never agree to fund the expenses of the cases that invariably get foisted on the people and the activists when the mobilisation assumes threatening proportions. The contrast between mass mobilisation against inappropriate and unjust state policies and service delivery, rural development or advocacy work becomes starkly visible in such circumstances even to the people at the grassroots. Not many among activists and the people are going to take such risks when comparatively much easier pickings are available in service delivery, rural development, advocacy or consultancy or in just providing training. Many from among the cadre that we had so painstakingly trained have either taken up jobs with NGOs, become members of mainstream political parties acting as agents for them or have become inactive.

There being little accountability either for funds received or work done in the case of NGOs they have now become a handy via media for the Government and Corporates for working in the social sector without having to face parliamentary scrutiny in the case of the former and as a cheap recompense to society for the tremendous social and environmental costs that the latter are externalising on it and nature in their quest for more and more profit. Thus instead of paying taxes and bearing the costs of modern industrial development the big corporations are apportioning a miniscule proportion of their profits to NGOs and basking in false glory by naming this as Corporate Social Responsibility. So there are many NGOs that have been set up by the Government and the Corporates and these have begun to dominate

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the sector given the immense resources they command. Not surprisingly these days the leading social workers and change agents in the country are politicians of mainstream political parties, bureaucrats, corporate honchos and Godmen! Thus a very poor service delivery person like Narmada, mass social activists like Subhadra and Medha Patkar, powerful politicians like Bill Clinton and Sonia Gandhi, assorted retired and serving bureaucrats, Godmen like Asaram Bapu and Sri Sri Ravishankar and billionaires like Bill Gates and Azim Premji are all part of the NGO sector. These latter big guns have taken centre stage by hogging the headlines in the media by virtue of splurging their immense resources. Indeed being media savvy is very important as exposure in the media gets an NGO both funds and respectability. But as one editor friend of mine once told me the media focuses only on the newsmakers and a poor grassroots worker toiling to bring about a change in the social order and her mass movement are never newsmakers. So Bill Gates flexing his financial muscle for aids prevention or Azim Premji doing the same for primary education get the bytes in the media. One would not be far of the mark in saying that the NGO sector as it stands today is a Punch and Judy Show being staged to divert the people away from the serious and taxing work of overturning the prevailing exploitative, destructive and over centralised system of development and governance through widespread mass action.

Some classification of the NGO sector is thus necessary if any sense has to be made of it. There are first of all PGOs or pro government organisations, which work with and as a complement to the government to provide services and development and also formulate policies. Then there are the SGOs or surrogate government organisations set up by the government or corporates and headed by mainstream politicians, bureaucrats both serving and retired and corporate executives or business magnates which have been set up to control the NGO sector and see that it effectively coopts all serious opposition to the prevailing forms of government and development. Finally there are the AGOs or anti government organisations which are uncompromising in their opposition to the prevailing modes of governance and development. These are mostly of a neo-Gandhian bent that have taken off from where Jayaprakash Narayan had left his task unfinished and have added on an environmental dimension to it. The AGOs are very few in number and in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh they can be counted on one's fingers. The PGOs are the largest in number and have spread across the length and breadth of the country penetrating into the remotest corners doing work that should ideally be done by the community on their own or by the government. The SGOs are numerically in between the former two categories but they are the most powerful because they have the greatest command over resources and easy access to the established centres of economic and political power and the media.

A plea is advanced on behalf of the PGOs that they are in general less corrupt and more efficient than the government departments. However, given the abysmal quality of performance of the government this is not saying very much. Only a very few PGOs of repute are actually doing good work and some even creatively mix service delivery, advocacy, activism and fundraising to do exceptional work in favour of the poor and oppressed (Bornstein, 2005). However, the sector as a whole still represents a miniscule proportion of the services in the two crucial social spheres of education and health which are dominated by the formal and informal private sector in this country. The government too remains a major player in both these sectors despite the roll back of its services post liberalisation and there is very little chance of the working of the government in these two sectors improving through PGO participation or consultation. As we shall see presently some exemplary efforts in the field of education in Madhya Pradesh by an internationally renowned PGO have finally come a cropper faced with bureaucratic and political obtuseness. The same thing can be said for

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rural or urban community development. Ultimately the majority of the PGOs rarely have any original ideas of their own but have to implement the policies dictated by the donors whether in the government, in the corporate sector or in the international funding agencies starting with the World Bank at the top of the pile. The SGOs only facilitate this and in the case of corporate sponsored NGOs there is a clear thrust towards opening up newer markets for their products and services as in the famous "e-choupal" initiative of the Indian Tobacco Company of which more a little later. No wonder that most PGOs these days have lost their original voluntary character and have become professionalised with work cultures that copy the government or corporate sector possess little capacity for bringing about any widespread and fundamental change for the better in the living conditions of the poor and deprived.

These two categories, the agencies that fund them and the intellectuals who eulogise them have perfected the tactic first developed in the western world to counter the revolutionary upsurge of the late nineteen sixties, that considers "everything which disturbs the harmonious coexistence of groups performing different social roles... as an unjustified disturbance symptom" and instead recommends research into how a group may be "conditioned to accept its social role, and how its grievances may best be handled and channelled" (Thompson, 1968 pp 9-10). So much so, that even the much-touted World Social Forum (WSF) of mass movements and NGOs against the deleterious effects of globalisation has been co-opted to a great extent by the funding agencies and their protégés (RUPE, 2003). Ostensibly the WSF is organised to bring together movements and NGOs from around the world to coordinate the efforts to make "another world possible" from the one being promoted by the MNCs and institutions like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organisation and Funding agencies. However, in reality the idea of holding it grew out of a need felt among the proponents of globalisation after the Seattle demonstration of 2000 to provide a forum for a safer venting of the protests from below. Moves were made to get some leading NGOs in France and Brazil to organise the event and rope in people who were opposing globalisation. Thus a considerable portion of the tremendous costs of staging the show and transporting people from all over the world to attend it are in fact borne by funding agencies like the Ford Foundation and so the really uncompromising opponents of globalisation who demand a total dismantling of the present system of modern industrial development are excluded from it.

Naturally the AGOs are wary of the PGOs and SGOs and they never overtly take funds from the government, corporates or funding agencies so as to preserve the independence of their actions. However, the exigencies of conducting a mass movement in highly adverse conditions and the inability of the poor to pay for the costs of struggle invariably force the AGOs to covertly source funds and other kinds of help from the other two categories and from funding agencies both Indian and foreign. In Madhya Pradesh at present only the Kisan Adivasi Sangathan in Hoshangabad can claim to be totally free of outside funding as they have the resources of some of their members who have gained from the successful functioning of the cooperative fishing society that is being run by them in the reservoir of the Tawa dam which had been set up following an agitation conducted by the Sangathan. Similarly the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha in its heyday before it became moribund, financed itself solely through the contributions of its members who had gained much by way of their sustained agitations. But since it could not expand its base to make it more widespread and firm by including in its fold the workers in Bhilai the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha gradually lost out in the battle to forge an alternative to the dominant paradigm when the mines in Dalli Rajhara in which its members worked got gradually wound up. Similarly the fishing cooperative of the Kisan Adivasi Sangathan too is constantly under

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threat of being taken over by the government which eventuality will deprive it of its source of funds for mass mobilisational work and plunge it into crisis.

Ideally there should be a large number of AGOs of various disadvantaged communities and especially their women, with numerous and active dues paying members, operating on principles of thrift, cooperation and equality that challenge the status quo of ruling class domination, through mass civil disobedience. This will ensure that grassroots democracy functions properly and pressure is created on the rest of the players in the NGO sector itself as well as on the corporates, political parties and governments in larger society for the adoption of socially and economically just and environmentally sustainable development and governance policies. However, it must have become abundantly clear by now that this is an anarchist pipe dream that is much more difficult to actualise than the labours of Hercules and we in the environmental mass movements are unfortunately doomed to be followers of the accursed Sisyphus rather than the more successful Greek hero. Not surprisingly very few young people these days opt for the rigours of working in an AGO and most of those who do soon run away and only a very few of us are still left rolling the stone of mass mobilisation up the hill of state insensitivity and oppression.

Ever since we came to Indore, Subhadra and I have been out on our own. Left to plough a lonely furrow we had perforce to do without the ideological luxury of being prim about the sources of the external funds that we had to garner for our mass organisational work. As long as they did not influence the direction of our grassroots work we did not bother about their character. Operating as we do in a very limited area and with a practical understanding that there is not much chance of our work escalating to a scale where it can bring about far reaching changes in the socio-economic arrangements that prevail we can afford to take this cavalier attitude towards funding sources as the funds required are not very large. An attitude that has allowed us to work freely in the field without much hindrance while funding this through research work, which is sometimes of dubious provenance. Thus I have done research consultancy work for the very same World Bank protesting against whose policies I once went to jail! Foundations and agencies in the west that believe in maintaining the status quo rather than upsetting it radically have been and continue to be the sources of funds for our research work while such agencies in India knowing our true colours are not prepared to adorn their canvases with our mugs. The foreign funds we have help us defray the expenses of the legal and other battles that we continually fight to stay afloat against the state.

The state had the intention of completely wiping out the mass organisation in Dewas in the course of the Mehendikhera crackdown but it failed to do so primarily because we had a respectable financial buffer with which to fight it. Try as it might to prove that this buffer was illegal it failed because it had been built up legitimately through completely legal fellowships and research assignments and was well accounted for and professionally audited. If we had baulked at taking these foreign funds we too would have had to run away leaving the poor adivasis to fend for themselves as best they could. Instead we are still rolling the stone and that very act itself has some braking effect on the arbitrariness of the state if nothing more. In the end it does not really matter whether one is taking foreign or Indian funds because all external funds have some strings attached and have the tendency to restrict the capacity to genuinely mobilise the masses. It depends on the persons taking these funds as to how far they can put them to good use given these restrictions. We can only say that we have tried our best to retain our effectiveness as activists. Since in the present milieu taking foreign funds either directly or indirectly has become a necessity that cannot be avoided the best way to get over one's qualms about accepting them is to treat them as the interest being

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paid on the famous Kohinoor diamond, which was taken away by the British from India and is now embedded in the British Crown!

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Chapter 24 - The Spring Thunder Rolls On

A group of twenty-seven armed policemen returning in a van from a sortie into the deep jungles of Bastar were blown up in a landmine blast on September 3rd 2005 killing twenty-four of them (Rediff.com, September 4th, 2005). The blast was so powerful that the supposedly anti-landmine vehicle, which was carrying them, was thrown thirty-five feet up in the air and landed a good ninety feet away. This was a retaliatory action by the Naxalites or Indian Maoists against a combined armed and civil offensive launched a few months earlier by the Government of Chhattisgarh to finish them off in which some fifty odd cadres and some of their sympathisers had been killed in combing operations. This established, literally with a bang, the Naxalites' ability to carry on their armed struggle despite the heavy repressive and cooptive tactics being adopted against them by the state. This act was preceded by the killing of a senior Congress legislator in Andhra Pradesh on August 15th and followed by a successful daring raid on the jail in Jehanabad town in Bihar on November 3rd to free some of their comrades incarcerated there, interspersed with raids and bombings on state institutions and the police in the states of Karnataka, Orissa, Tamil Nadu and Jharkhand.

This fascinating admixture of pre and post modernism with modernism in a typically post-modern "micro-narrative" (Lyotard, 1984) of the tenacious armed struggle being waged by the Naxalites to overwhelm the state apparatus and bring about a New Democratic Revolution through the armed mobilisation of the peasant masses has significantly challenged the attempt of the Indian ruling classes to foist a counterfeit meta-narrative of socio-economic progress based on corrupt electoral politics and centralised industrial development on the Indian masses. In fact the current second phase of the Naxalite movement has gained much more support among the masses and been much more of a headache for the Indian state than the resistance put up by the mass environmental movements which have emerged in the same period since the late nineteen seventies. It all began when a grassroots activist of the CPI(M) in West Bengal, Charu Mazumdar, began pondering from 1965 onwards over the failure of the Indian communists, despite forty years of struggle since the formation of the CPI, in freeing the peasants from the feudal oppression of the landlords. Over a space of two years he wrote eight essays, which have since become famous as the "eight documents" that led to a section of the CPI(M) cadres breaking away and sparking off the Naxalbari movement in which peasants began seizing the produce and lands of the landlords in 1967 (Mazumdar, 1991). He analysed his own experiences beginning with the "Tebhaga" peasant movement in Bengal of the pre-independence days and the later struggles after independence all over India. In all of these struggles he found that the main reason for their failure was the inability of the communists to build up a cadre based revolutionary party capable of fighting the armed might of the state through a sustained armed struggle. He came down heavily on the Communist Party leaders for their "revisionist" approach of working within the bourgeois constitutional framework despite repeated illegal crackdowns by the Congress party after independence on the mass organisations of the party and also on the efforts to form governments through the fighting and winning of elections. He stressed the need for educating the peasant masses and giving them a taste of blood by following a policy of physical annihilation of class enemies and the police.

However Mazumdar and his Naxalite comrades were themselves following the by then obsolete combination of the pre-modern and the modern in the Maoist "meta-narrative" of the nineteen thirties China of setting up of base areas in the villages and then laying siege to the cities and towns by surrounding them. There was no way in which this strategy could work against a much better entrenched and powerful modern bourgeois state apparatus in

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India. Crucially this state apparatus also had a fair amount of legitimacy in the minds of the people because of being chosen by them in the elections. The government the Naxalites confronted was a leftist coalition in which the CPI(M) was a partner and had three ministers. The CPI(M) tried to reason with the rebels but when this did not work they chose the practical course of sending in the armed police and para military forces in strength to suppress the rebellion and so save its own government from falling. Thus the rebellion in the countryside was crushed within a few months in West Bengal. Nevertheless the coalition government did not survive and President's rule was imposed. The Congress government at the centre tried to use this opportunity to weed out more thoroughly what it must have considered a serious menace. A later Naxalite spurt in Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh in 1968 too was similarly obliterated. In both instances heavy armed police repression was carried out including extra-judicial killings of peasants and activists badly exposing the over estimation of the power and resilience of armed peasant militancy by Mazumdar (Banerjee, 1984).

Meanwhile the CPI(M) managed to come back to power as part of yet another coalition government in 1969 and release some of the Naxalite leaders and activists who had been jailed during President's rule. This opportunity was seized by the mostly urban activists of the Naxalite movement, which had been transformed into the full fledged CPI(ML) party in 1969 with Mazumdar as its General Secretary, to compensate for the failure of the peasant insurrection by carrying on their programme of annihilation of class enemies in Kolkata, letting loose a murderous free for all in which they also targeted the CPI(M) cadre. Things soon got out of hand leading to the United Front Government being dismissed and President's rule being imposed by the Congress government at the centre. Thereafter criminal gangs and a totally lawless police were given a free hand by the Central government for wiping out the Naxalites and their sympathisers. This urban terrorism and its repercussions in the form of heightened state repression resulted in alienating the CPI(ML) from the urban middle classes also which had provided it with much of its cadre and tacit support. Most of the cadre was either murdered or jailed by 1971 and with the arrest in 1972 and subsequent death in suspicious circumstances in jail of Mazumdar the first phase of the Naxalite movement came to a sorry end.

The CPI(M) leaders in West Bengal learnt their lessons from the deep ideological and tactical challenge that this movement had posed to its supremacy among the peasant masses and the left leaning intelligentsia and students. They were also concerned about the danger that the threat of such armed struggle posed to their practice of participating in parliamentary democracy. So while using force against the Naxalites they also carried out wide ranging land reforms by identifying and redistributing ceiling surplus land during both its limited stints in power in 1967 and 1969-70. The Naxalites protested vociferously against this legal land reform as it successfully weaned the peasants away from them but all to no avail as even Charu Mazumdar lost twelve acres of his ceiling surplus land for redistribution in this campaign (Bandyopadhyay, 2000)! Later when it came to power again in 1978 after a landslide victory in the elections held after the lifting of the internal emergency the CPI(M) launched "Operation Barga" a programme for the registration of the rights of the "bargadars" or tenant farmers to the cultivation of the land of the landlords. The CPI(M) also introduced a participatory Panchayati Raj, which considerably increased the political power of the peasants in the rural areas. These measures created a ground swell of long lasting support for it that has ensured that it has been returned to power consecutively for a record six more terms. More importantly this created so much dynamism in the agricultural sector in West

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Bengal that the overall economic growth momentum of the state was sustained for a long time despite an initial decline in industrial growth due to the burgeoning of trade union militancy during CPI(M) rule (Banerjee, et al 2002).

However, in the rest of India there was not much of a positive impact of the Naxalite movement towards bringing about land reforms. The deeply feudal control of the landlords over the peasants continued unabated. This was especially so in the neighbouring states of Bihar and Jharkhand, which had earlier seen the Bhoodan movement being reduced to a mockery. The subsequent Sampooran Kranti Andolan in the mid 1970s, which had considerable peasant support too was also crushed. This failure on the part of the Congress governments at the centre and in the states to pay serious attention to the problems of the peasantry in most parts of the country provided a fertile ground in the states of Bihar, Jharkhand and Andhra Pradesh which had witnessed some armed mobilisations in the initial phase for a rekindling of the Naxal rebellion from 1980 onwards. In the meantime during the decade of the 1970s the movement had remained alive in the form of many splintered groups scattered over the whole country. One such group the CPI(ML) Liberation began mobilising the peasants openly in Bihar and Jharkhand and also participating successfully in electoral politics. Two other groups in Bihar and Jharkhand, the CPI(ML) Party Unity and the Maoist Communist Centre opted for renewing the armed struggle. Similarly the CPI(ML) People's War Group and some other marginal groups too began the armed struggle in Andhra Pradesh.

This time round the movement began among the dalit and the adivasi peasants and with a clear-cut understanding that it would be subjected to heavy repression by the state. So right from the beginning armed squads were built up and provided with sophisticated weapons. These squads were extremely mobile and mostly stayed in the dense jungles only to essay forth to carry out armed actions and then retreat into their safety and anonymity once again. Simultaneously open mass organisations were built up among the peasants, workers, students, intellectuals and artistes, which worked towards raising the level of political consciousness of the masses and solving their immediate socio-economic problems arising from social and economic oppression. These mass organisations also provided the cadre for the armed squads and the underground party. Moreover realising that the state forces could easily ring in an isolated armed movement like they had done earlier in Naxalbari and Srikakulam the movement spread its wings early on into the contiguous states and so now it has a vast area of influence extending from Tamil Nadu and Kerala in the south through Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Jharkhand to Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Bihar in the north. It is interesting to note that in West Bengal the movement has struck roots among the impoverished adivasis. The adivasi regions of Bengal have been neglected by the CPI(M) which is dominated by the Bengalis and so there is a lot of discontent there which the Naxalites have capitalised on.

The armed Tamil separatist movement in Sri Lanka and the armed Maoist movement in Nepal too provide the Naxalites with considerable moral and military support. Thus when the going gets too hot in one place then the squads move out from there to concentrate their action on some other place where things are relatively easier and so keep the movement going. Consequently even though coordinated police action in Andhra Pradesh has put a lid on Naxalite activity there this has resulted in all the cadre and armed squads migrating to neighbouring states of Maharashtra and Orissa to intensify operations there. This mobility has become so crucial to their survival and effectiveness that all the major armed factions of the Naxalites patched up their ideological differences and came together to form the CPI (Maoist) in 2004. There is also a Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and

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Organisations of South Asia that includes the strongest of these, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), which is in effective control of most of rural Nepal and now with the sidelining of the royalty it has an open presence even in Kathmandu. It has not only survived despite all that the Indian state could do to facilitate the Nepal royalty's attempt to decimate it but has also in the end succeeded in getting very close to sharing power after the King's removal. Such is their strength that they have been able to retain their army and areas of influence as a parallel to the state till the elections to the Constituent Assembly to devise a new constitution are conducted. Consequently the spring thunder that first cracked in West Bengal in 1967 is still rolling ominously to the acute discomfort of the Indian ruling classes.

This ability to sustain an armed struggle against the state has earned it enough credibility among the poverty stricken youth mainly from among the dalits and adivasis and also from other sections of the masses to inspire them to sacrifice all for overthrowing a patently unjust politico-economic dispensation. The commitment to the overthrow of the bourgeois Indian state, though they themselves term it as being semi-feudal and semi-colonial, through the successful conduct of an armed New Democratic Revolution is so total in the movement that despite the killing of hundreds of its cadres in extra-judicial "encounters" after arrest and the jailing of thousands more of its cadres and supporters it continues to wax strong. Strong enough indeed to force the Indian state to plan a coordinated higher scale armed intervention against the movement spread across all the states in which it has an influence. Like a binkered horse the Indian state, dominated as it is by feudal elements and colonially minded bureaucrats, unlike the CPI(M) in West Bengal, is still refusing to address in any serious way the basic socio-economic injustices that have given rise to the movement in the first place (Bidwai, 2005). But there are limits to the violence that the state can resort to. While the state has been able to deploy the regular army to suppress to some extent the armed separatist movements in the peripheral areas in the Northeast, Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab it cannot so easily do the same in the very heart of the country without affecting its combat readiness for meeting external threats, which are of a far more menacing nature. There is also the problem of the human rights violations that the army will commit on the populace in general alienating them from whichever political party decides to launch full scale military operations against the naxalites over such a large swathe of the country.

However, this cycle of violence and counter violence has meant that the people in the areas of influence of the Naxalites have been caught in the crossfire between them and the state forces. The exigencies of a civil war like situation have led to both sides targeting those people whom they feel to be informers and sympathisers of the enemy. The scope for democratic mass action has as a result been severely curtailed and at present all the open mass organisations of the Naxalites are officially banned with their leading activists in jail. Moreover, to keep alive the false Maoist meta-narrative of the character of the Indian state being semi-feudal and semi-colonial in the face of the considerably stronger but equally false meta-narrative of modern market centred development the Naxalites have had to oppose modern development and the further penetration of the market in the areas of their influence and maintain them in a backward condition. All this has effectively put a brake on the spread of the Naxalite struggle beyond the really remote rural areas of the country and also led to disaffection among the masses and activists in these areas in some cases with a tiredness having set in due to the endless wait for the elusive revolution (Bhatia, 2005).

For instance in south Bastar which has now become the separate district of Dantewada there emerged some spontaneous protest among the adivasis against the Naxalites and the people got organised under the banner of an organisation named "Salwa Judum",

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meaning quite ominously purification hunt in the Gondi language, to oppose the way in which Naxalite activities had led to an increase in the isolation and backwardness of their areas (Zaidi, 2005). The state immediately pitched in, adopted this movement, armed the adivasis, dressed its policemen in plain clothes and made them its activists. In next to no time a low intensity conflict in the jungles of Bastar has been converted into a full scale civil war with the state having evacuated the villages in the interior to the roadsides under the pretext of providing the adivasis with protection but really to leave the field open for armed comb and kill operations against the Naxalites and deprive them of local sustenance. The state has even brought in Naga adivasi armed police trained in counter insurgency from the northeast to add to the miseries of the local people but this has not deterred the Naxalites as they have so perfected their guerrilla strategies that they still continue to operate albeit with higher losses. In a daring attack on a explosives dump of the NMDC in Kirandul the Naxalites killed eight personnel of the CISF and wounded nine others on February 10th 2006. They also looted a huge cache of weapons, ammunition and explosives (TOI, 2006).

Nevertheless, despite the boast that they have now spread their organisation to one hundred and forty districts across twelve states, the Naxalites' actual influence over the politics and consciousness of the vast masses of people in India is marginal. In fact their sole "liberated zone" in the southern part of Dantewara district is now under siege by paramilitary forces. The Naxalites had cleared this area of government servants completely and established their own "Janathana Sarkar" or people's government. But now a training school in jungle warfare has been established for the policemen and gradually this liberated zone is being recaptured by the Indian state. The state forces have evacuated most of the villages from inside the jungles into relief camps along the roadside to deprive the Naxalites of their people and sustenance. The Naxalites in desperation have begun attacking the soft targets of the adivasis in these camps who have been forced by the state to join the Salwa Judum and are wantonly killing them (Deshpande, 2006). Thus at present there seems to be little possibility of the ideological and military dominance of the Naxalites rising to the level where they can engineer a desertion by the regular armed forces of the Indian state to their side, which is a necessary pre-condition for bringing about a successful revolution. The net result is that the poor adivasis, the major residents of these areas, are slated to go on suffering as neither the Indian revolution nor total supremacy of the Indian state in the areas of Naxalite influence are anywhere in sight.

Ironically the second phase of the Naxalite uprising began just at the time when the Communist Party of China (CPC) from which it took its inspiration was itself jettisoning the meta-narrative of Maoism. The CPC was instead embarking on a "revisionist" journey towards the adoption of the globally dominant meta-narrative of market and private enterprise based centralised industrial development through the adoption of Deng Xiaoping's policy of four modernisations (Marti, 2002). Indeed the meta-narrative of Marxism of which Maoism was a Chinese variant lost the battle for the domination of the world to the capitalist meta-narrative of the market in the early years after the Russian Revolution of 1917 itself. Immediately after the revolution the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) led by Lenin still had to contend with the white counter revolutionary challenge sponsored by the western capitalist nations and so perforce had to implement a "military communism" of hard rationing supervised by a bureaucratic state apparatus so as to be able to produce the weapons and armour necessary to win the civil war and maintain the supply chain to the cities and towns (Trotsky, 1972). The Bolsheviks had eagerly hoped that the Communists who had some mass following in Germany would sooner or

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later bring about a proletarian revolution in that industrially more advanced country and so provide material and moral support thereafter to the precariously poised Russian revolution.

However, these hopes were dashed as the ill planned and ill timed Spartacist uprising of the German Communist Party was ruthlessly crushed in 1919 (Waldman, 1958). The situation in Germany in 1918 was somewhat similar to the one that had prevailed in Russia prior to the revolution there. The Kaiser's rule had been ended and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) had instituted bourgeois democratic rule in the form of the Weimar Republic. A group of militant communists led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg had earlier separated from the SPD over its policy of supporting the German war against Russia and had formed the Spartacus League naming themselves after the slave Spartacus who had mobilised the slaves in rebellion against the Roman Empire in the first century BCE. They later renamed it as the German Communist Party (KPD) in 1919 after joining the Comintern, the international communist forum, following the Russian revolution. A majority section of the KPD wanted to seize state power through an armed uprising in the same way as the Bolsheviks had done in Russia. Liebknecht and Luxemburg argued against this, as did Lenin saying that the German SPD was much more organised than the Russian Mensheviks had been and the German state was not in a state of collapse like the Russian state and so it would be difficult to get the armed forces to mutiny and come out in support of the revolution as they had done in Russia. These warnings were not heeded and the German revolution was launched by the KPD in 1919 only to be brutally suppressed ending in the execution of all its leaders and workers including Liebknecht and Luxemburg. Thus the German masses were left without any seasoned radical communist leadership during the crisis years that followed after World War I ended and Germany was burdened with paying exorbitant war reparations that crippled its economy. Consequently this premature uprising meant that instead of a Communist revolution taking place in the state of collapse that ensued in the late nineteen twenties in Germany the Nazis under Hitler came to power and put paid to the hopes of a more broad-based communist capture of state power in the advanced capitalist countries leaving the Russian communists to fend for themselves.

So by the time the Russian Communists overcame the counter-revolution by 1920 through their own devices, the nascent industrial sector in the largely agrarian and feudal economy of Russia was close to dissolution. The biggest problem therefore was how to revive industrial production in particular and the economy in general and "catch up" with the western industrialised capitalist nations. This is when the Bolsheviks decided to put socialist ideas on hold and instead adopt capitalist management techniques in the factories to revive production and also allow market forces to play so that the vast middle peasantry of kulaks could be included in the process of rebuilding the economy through the continued exploitation of the landless serfs who were converted into badly paid wage labourers. The anarchists who were in control of a large number of the workers' soviets and trade unions argued that the responsibility for the organisation of production in factories should be that of the freely elected workers' soviets and trade unions and this policy should be followed in the rural

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areas also (Kollontai, 1977). They argued that the workers had borne much hardship during the fight to overcome the counter-revolution and they should now reap the benefits instead of being subjected to more deprivation. Instead, they pointed out, bourgeois elements, which had no sympathy with the revolution had infiltrated the factory management, the bureaucracy and even the party during the earlier phase of military communism and were sabotaging the revolution. Dissatisfied by their living and working conditions the workers and peasants began to go on strikes in February 1921 demanding a more open democratic dispensation.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks would have none of this, however, as it constituted a challenge to the authority of the Bolshevik party and the tight control over the government, that it had developed in the course of the civil war. They advanced the need for maintaining party unity as an excuse for clamping down on the burgeoning open debates and the formation of factions representing alternative viewpoints so as to maintain their monopoly of power. Thus arguing speciously that the proletariat in Russia was not advanced enough to be able to control the economy and government on its own and so needed the party to guide it, Lenin came down hard on the anarchist opposition (Lenin, 1973). Punitive action was begun against the striking workers in Petrograd and Moscow. As things came to a head the naval unit stationed at the port of Kronstadt near Petrograd, which happened to be aligned with the anarchists came out in support of the workers' demands. This unit had earlier played a crucial role in the victory of the Bolsheviks in the revolution of 1917 as the professionally trained core of the final military assault on the seat of bourgeois power, the Winter Palace in Petrograd and so commanded immense respect among the working masses (Trotsky, 1980). The situation worsened as workers and peasants all over the country joined the workers in Petrograd and Moscow in demonstrations protesting against the bureaucratic and military control of the economy and polity. The Bolshevik government resorted to police and military repression to suppress this opposition. The sailors of Kronstadt mutinied against the Bolshevik government demanding an end to centralised party control of the economy and greater freedom of decision for the workers and peasants. So the Red Army in full force under the command of Trotsky was sent in to deal with them on March 7th 1921. After putting up a brave fight for ten days those anarchist sailors were massacred to the last man (Berkman, 1953). It was given out by the Bolsheviks that these sailors were counter-revolutionary agents bent on sabotaging the proletarian revolution.

Thus the decade of the nineteen twenties proved to be the crucial juncture in human history at which the direction of its future in favour of centralised industrial development along with the accompanying militarism was finally sealed. Earlier in the eighteenth century when capitalist industrial development had established itself then its foremost ideologue, the classical political economist Adam Smith had come up with the theory that if all persons, rich and poor, worked for their individual gain then by an "invisible hand" an economy would develop that would be for the good of all and there was no need for any government intervention (Smith, 2003). This concept was later extended by the neo-classical economists to the functioning of the market and it was averred that such an invisible hand

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mechanism would automatically adjust the pulls and pushes of demand and supply to reach an equilibrium that would be beneficial to all (Daal, 1993). In reality, however, the invisible hand worked negatively because the rich in greedily pursuing their own gain deprived the poor from doing so. There have never been free markets and consumers making free choices in them. From the beginning the rich capitalists of the industrialising countries forced their governments first to sequester their own markets against external competition and also to subsidise much of the expenditure in setting up the transport and financial infrastructure that is the bedrock on which capitalist development takes place. Simultaneously the capitalists used the governments to prevent labour from organising and demanding a greater share of the output. And all the while the natural resources, people and the markets of the colonies of these industrialising nations were forcefully exploited.

Thus an era ensued in which there was a free for all among the European nations and their independent settler states like the United States of America, for the spoils of the rest of the world in which for the first time " in human history the principle of gain (was) elevated to the organising principle of economic life " (Polanyi, 1968, p 43). The governments of these countries actively promoted this kind of monopolistic industrial development through provision of vast subsidies from state funds to develop the necessary infrastructure (Gorelick, 1998). As had been predicted by Marx this led to both internal problems of a collapse of demand within these imperialist economies as well as the collapse of the international system of trade and increasing inter-imperialist rivalry ending in war. The snapping of the world capitalist system at its weakest link in Russia in 1917 followed this. The success of the Russian revolution and the tenacity of the Soviet Union acted as a slap in the face of this orgy of the capitalists and prompted greater intervention by the governments of the imperialist countries to rein in the indiscriminate profit mongering of its capitalists and take on greater responsibility for the welfare and employment of the labouring classes and so prop up sagging demand (Bagchi, 2005).

Lenin had in the months of August and September 1917 just before the revolution written extensively on the probable post revolutionary political and economic dispensation (Lenin, 1951). He had approvingly concurred with the views of Marx and Engels that the bourgeois state apparatus would have to be "smashed" and in its place a new state apparatus manned by the workers would have to be put in place that would suppress the bourgeois elements and work for the further emancipation of the workers and other oppressed masses by putting in place a system of production and distribution organised by the toilers themselves. However, in practice these noble ideas were shelved and a highly centralised bureaucratic state was put in place staffed by many of the old bourgeois elements. Once the counter-revolution had been contained the urge to "catch up with the west" in industrial development led to the adoption of the New Economic Policy from 1921 onwards involving the forced extraction of huge surpluses from the toiling masses and the free play of market forces to ramp up industrial and agricultural production. Simultaneously the management of the economy and the government was given over to a bureaucracy staffed more and more by bourgeois elements. Though state control was re-imposed again in 1929 there was always a mixture of planning and market, the latter both open and black and so considerable material and ideological corruption

and confusion in the actual economy and society that came into existence in the Soviet Union (Mandel, 1952).

No doubt the Soviet Union was an improvement over what prevailed in Tsarist Russia before and was different and better in many respects from the western capitalist nations but essentially it too was subservient to the dominant post enlightenment meta-narrative of centralised industrialisation. The main problem in such centralised industrialisation based economic systems is that of the reconciliation of the contradiction between centralised production and decentralised consumption. Though theoretically this problem of synchronisation of supply and demand can be solved precisely through the construction of mathematical models of market economies, or planned economies or a mixture of both in reality this synchronisation does not take place due to a myriad unpredictable factors which are even less predictable in large mostly planned economies as compared to large mostly market economies because of the lesser flow of information in the former. Consequently the crises resulting from the mismatch of supply and demand which plague the capitalist system began to appear in even more virulent form in the socialist economies.

Moreover at the peak of the capitalist economic crisis in the late nineteen twenties John Logie Baird invented the television (Booksoe, 1986). This set the ball rolling for carrying advertising into people's homes and bombing them with audio-visual content urging them to spend not only their present income but also their future earnings for buying goods and services. Capitalism has since ridden a continuously rising wave of consumerism to expand existing markets and open new ones by titillating the baser instincts of humans all over the world and so continued to fuel economic growth without the recurrence of similar massive demand slumps. The medium as was noted earlier has become the message.

At about the same time Gramsci while incarcerated in prison by the Italian fascists began pondering over the conundrum that the oppressed masses in Germany, Italy and Spain refused to become acolytes of Marxism despite the objective conditions arising from the economic collapse being favourable for such a development and instead preferred to plump either for fascism or a capitalism rejuvenated by state sponsored demand boosting measures (Gramsci, 1971). He came to the conclusion that the bourgeoisie exert control over the masses not only overtly through the organs of the state but also covertly through their ideological "hegemony" over "civil society" constituted independently of the state by communitarian, cultural and religious associations. Gramsci stressed the important role of "organic" intellectuals coming up from the oppressed classes who would dispel this mesmerising hegemony of the ruling classes by formulating a liberating ideology of their own that could stand up to the dominant ideology of the latter. However, the scope for this kind of a liberating ideology emerging has been significantly decreased through the influence of television. Television has ensured that it is the sports and film stars selling everything from soap to sanitary napkins and the evangelical preachers of all religious denominations selling divine salvation who have become the gurus of the masses and not the austere radicals, whether communists, anarchists or libertarians,

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who are making a pitch for a fight against the machinations of neo-colonial capital. These messages, which have been beamed worldwide through satellites, first ensured the tearing down of the iron and bamboo curtains and the collapse of "actually existing socialism". Today the ever widening reach of television is ensuring that the masses remain engaged in song and dance instead of taking up cudgels against the ruling classes worldwide to end their misery.

The Russian anarchists, Mikhail Bakunin being the foremost among them, had from the time of Marx continually joined issue with the Marxists over their stress on the leadership of a centralised proletarian party in bringing about a revolution, the need for the continuation of the state after the revolution and the primacy of industrial development as opposed to communitarian agriculture (AAFAQ, 2006 & Shanin, 1985). As long as a centralised state exists they argued there could never be true democracy and freedom for the masses. A capture of state power by the vanguard party in the absence of a large mass of socially and politically conscious people who could force the vanguard to act in their interest would inevitably lead to a concentration of power in the hands of the former with the possibility of a return to authoritarianism and then capitalism. This is what has happened first in the Soviet Union and then also in China though in the latter case the CPC had a much wider mass base initially than the Bolsheviks. Thus the battle for a decentralised, environmentally sustainable and humanly just form of development was finally lost by the anarchists in that crucial decade of the nineteen twenties propelling the human race onto a destructive path whose serious consequences are becoming clearer with every passing day.

At present the colonisation of the minds of the masses all over the world resulting from the television propelled cultural imperialism of the West (Said, 1993) has pushed the meta-narrative of capitalist industrial development and its triplets of consumerism and militarism onto the centre stage of the post-modern world and with the dawn of the twenty-first century the repositories of various kinds of post modernist "difference" like the Naxalites and the anarcho-environmentalists are doomed to acting out peripheral micro-narratives. Nothing can be more evocative of this than the phenomenal box-office success of the Hindi film *Lagaan* released in 2001. The persistent problem of the extortionate levying of *lagaan* or land tax from peasants during British colonial rule in India, even in times of severe economic stress arising from crop failure, is the cause of dispute between the British and the peasants in a fictitious location in central India in this film. However, whereas in reality such conflicts gave rise to a myriad bloody mutinies during British rule, in the film, absurdly, the peasants are shown to score a bloodless victory and secure a moratorium on the payment of *lagaan* by winning a thrilling cricket match against the British. The film was later nominated to the short list of five for the presentation of the Oscar in the best foreign film category. This sparked off a nationalistic hysteria in the Indian media at the enticing prospect of actually winning the Oscar, which only cooled down when the voters of the American Motion Picture Academy chose a Bosnian film instead, thinking probably that it was more expedient to make up for the much more recent bloody deeds of their own imperialist forces in erstwhile Yugoslavia than that of the British a century earlier in India.

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It is not very difficult to imagine that given this level of readiness among the masses to suspend their disbelief, the chances of the Naxalites bringing about an agrarian revolution in India are remote indeed. Mao had said that power flows from the barrel of a gun but in today's milieu it flows more readily from the picture tube of a television set! The spring thunder, therefore, holds little promise of an emancipatory drenching for those it is ostensibly fighting for. Instead through their terrorist armed actions the Naxalites have succeeded in reducing the space for democratic mass action not only for their own mass organisations but also as we have seen for anarcho-environmentalist ones, which too are regarded by the police to be hand in glove with the Naxalites and so are subjected to extra-legal harassment. The Chhattisgarh government has legislated a new draconian Act to limit the civil liberties of those found to be supporting the Naxalites, which can easily be misused by the police.

The American anarchist Thoreau once wrote - " If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away" (Thoreau, 2000). This was a plaintive cry against the homogenising effects of modern industrialisation, which had begun to make themselves felt in the nineteenth century itself. As we have seen things have now become considerably more problematical for maintaining economic, social and cultural diversity in the post-modern era. The possibility of launching a concerted challenge to this all round hegemony of capitalist industrial development has diminished considerably. That is why the widespread limitation of the space for democratic dissent that the peripheral violence of the Naxalites is causing is a matter of concern. It brings down the number of drummers beating a different beat from that of the votaries of centralised industrial development. Of even greater concern is the fact that the Naxalite cadres are mostly from among the marginalised dalits and adivasis and these organic intellectuals who could have made a significant contribution to the fight for a better world are all dying an untimely death in the wild goose chase after the Indian revolution (Balagopal, 2006). Lesser and lesser are the numbers of people that are opting out from the destructive march that is being orchestrated by the followers of the meta-narrative of modern industrial development. Thoreau is as lonely as ever.

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Chapter 25 - Time for a Sabbatical

One day in the summer of 1998 Subhadra and I went to meet the Divisional Commissioner in Indore regarding the false propaganda being made by the police regarding our being Naxalites. The police in Barwah had sent out enquiries regarding our antecedents to Kolkata and Bastar. The police in Charama had gone to Subhadra's village and asked around about her. They had told the people there that Subhadra was a suspected Naxalite and this had created quite a stir of a negative kind among the people of the village. The Naxalites were considered to be some kind of marauding aliens by all and sundry in Kanker district. Even Subhadra's brother, a marginal farmer making do on half a hectare of land, thought nothing of their ideology and was instead angry with their violence which he considered to be wanton killing. The Commissioner, the same person who had earlier told the women of Katkut that they had caused a national loss by striking work against the landed farmers and letting their cotton crop decay, blandly said that since we had chosen to confront established power structures we should be prepared to face harassment. The police had their job to do, he said, if by chance we were indeed Naxalites and did do something violent then they and along with them he too would be held responsible for not having been alert. There was bound to be discontent given the fact that the government did not have enough resources to satisfy everybody, he said in matter of fact bureaucratese. The administration's job was to see that protests arising from this did not get out of hand. The fact that we had come to complain to him, he said superciliously, showed that we had failed in our mobilisational efforts and needed to work harder to strengthen our mass organisation so that it could better tackle the onslaught of the state!

This straight from the shoulder talk from this particularly obtuse Commissioner proved to be the last straw and had a profound impact on Subhadra. She had first drifted into social work a decade back and then gradually into political activism in search of a living. She had not made any conscious choice to fight for the rights of the poor and dispossessed. She had had no idea about the real character of the state and its bureaucracy even at the highest level. She had naively assumed that the state was indeed well disposed towards the poor and it was only the people at the lower level who were bad and corrupt. But especially over the past three years or so in Katkut she had learnt the hard fact that the state was itself biased in favour of the rich and powerful. This matter of fact statement from a senior IAS officer that it was more important for him to ensure that protests against injustice didn't get out of hand rather than trying to set right the wrongs that had caused them, disheartened her deeply. She decided she had had enough of beating her head against an unyielding wall and withdrew totally from activism for some time to concentrate on catching up with her studies instead.

The practical problems thrown up by her work had left her puzzled and directionless. She dismissed my attempts to bring light into her darkness by saying that the two bouts of hepatitis that I had suffered as a child had jaundiced my mind also! She turned towards reading books on social and political theory on her own for understanding. However, the education she had received in school she found was wholly inadequate for her to understand these books. So in 1997 she decided to start formal studies again by doing a bachelor's degree in Political Science. Searching around for a college to do it from she came upon a brochure of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), which offered distance-learning courses. The brochure said that the courses were tailor made for those who might have missed out on higher education after their high school. Impressed by this she had enrolled for the Bachelor's Degree Programme of the university. However, on receiving the course material she found that like all advertisement brochures IGNOU's too had overstated the

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easiness of the course to snare unsuspecting people into opting for it. She found that to pass the exams she would have to put in much more time than was possible while continuing with her work. This too acted as a spur for her to take a sabbatical from political activism to start studying in earnest.

The main reason for Subhadra being unprepared for higher studies of a tough standard was the poor quality of the basic education that she had received during her school years. This is in fact a common refrain in most rural areas and thereby hangs a sordid tale of education in India traditionally having been the privilege of a very few upper caste people. There is a quaint story in the Aitareya Brahmana of the Rig Veda in this regard (Sen, 2000). There was an upper caste brahmin sage who had two wives one a brahmin and the other a dalit. He had a son each by his two wives. In Vedic times the sages used to teach their disciples including their sons while chanting the Vedic verses during yagyas or fire sacrifices to the Gods. Both the wives sent their sons to their father for their lessons when he was in the midst of one such yagya. The sage fondly took his brahmin son onto his lap and began teaching him the verses but totally ignored his other son who was half dalit. The dalit son came away crying and complained to his mother that his father had ignored him and so he would not be able to study. The mother initially was very depressed but later she said that she was a shudra or the daughter of mother earth and so she would ask her mother for a way out of this impasse. Vasundhara the Earth Goddess told her not to worry and said that she would herself teach her grandson. Thus it was that this son of a shudra, taught by the Earth Goddess became a very learned sage.

This dalit sage then took his revenge. Sanskrit is a language in which words have many meanings and there can be different interpretations of a sequence of words. Moreover the verses are sung in a particular meter and so often the words are juxtaposed in such a manner as to ensure that the total number of syllables fits into the meter regardless of the effect it has on the meaning of the sentence. Thus any particular verse can have many meanings some nonsensical and some highly philosophical. So to understand the true philosophical import of the verses in the Samhita portion of the Vedas it is necessary to know which meanings of words and which syntax of sentence to pick. This key has been given in the Brahmana portion of the Vedas. The dalit sage composed the Brahmana for the Rig Veda and then named it after himself. The name he chose was Aitareya or son of an itar or dalit person. So the most sacred of the brahminical Hindu texts can only be understood with the help of the key written by a dalit.

The parallel between the ancient dalit sage Aitareya and his modern counterpart Babasaheb Ambedkar is too striking to be missed. Not only did both of them acquire immense learning through their own perseverance in the face of difficulties but also similar to Aitareya's enlightening contribution to the understanding of the philosophical import of the Vedic verses, Babasaheb as the Chairperson of the Constituent Assembly was the guiding light behind the libertarian and affirmative portions of the Constitution of India, which are its only redeeming features. But in the same way as the high spiritual philosophy of the Vedas has been drowned out in the crass materialistic rituals of the actual Hindu religious practice of the priests so also the emancipating and egalitarian liberal and socialistic principles of our Constitution have been smothered under the colonial anti-people policies of the priests of the temples of modern India, the mainstream politicians and bureaucrats. Nowhere is this more so than in the sphere of education.

The British very cleverly reinforced the divisive and oppressive character of the Brahminical social order so as to minimise the chances of widespread revolt by the masses

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against their rule as Babasaheb petulantly noted in the presidential address to the All India Depressed Classes Congress in 1930 "... the British Government has accepted the arrangements as it found them and has preserved them faithfully in the manner of the Chinese tailor who, when given an old coat as a pattern, produced with pride an exact replica rents, patches and all." (cited in Ghosh, 1985 p 142). The British introduced a stunted education system for training native Indians to man the newer kinds of clerical jobs that were emerging as a consequence of their expanding imperial interests. They, however, discouraged the spread of scientific and technical education and so these remained the preserve of the rich upper castes, who could afford to go abroad to Britain and the United States for higher education. Almost all of the luminaries of the independence movement including Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar went abroad for their higher education as did the collaborators of British rule in India. Thus in the same way as the economy in India was stunted to bolster the development of the economy in Britain so also the education system in India was stunted to force people seeking better education to fill the universities and colleges of Britain. The net result was that the education system in India right from the primary schools to the universities " did little to promote analytic capacity or independent thinking and produced a group of graduates with a half-baked knowledge of English, but sufficiently westernised to be alienated from their own culture" (Maddison, 1971 p 42).

The upper castes who largely collaborated with the British took advantage of this restriction of modern education facilities to extend their sway over Indian society and monopolise the English medium education system introduced by them. Thus the upper castes have been enjoying a far greater share of the state funded education system right from the British times to add to the monopoly they had of traditional education. It is this monopoly over the state funded education system that remains grossly inadequate in reach and spread in comparison to the vast population even today that has given the upper castes effective control of the Indian state and economy. That is why they are trying their level best to hold on to this monopoly and have come out so vociferously against the introduction of increased reservations for the backward castes in the state funded education system (Raina, 2006). The American philosopher and educational activist John Dewey had taught Baba Saheb during his stint at the Columbia University in New York. He learnt from his teacher that the most effective way to break the hold of superstition and irrationalism was to impart a critical and empirical education to the masses. So Babasaheb had joined the independent Indian Government in 1947 in the belief that as a minister he would be able to expedite this but found he could do very little in the face of covert upper caste opposition. This too was one of the reasons for his resignation from the government in 1951 along with his failure to get the act ensuring equal inheritance rights for women passed.

This active opposition of the upper castes in British times to the spread of school education to the lower castes acted as a further brake upon the number of people from the lower castes getting educated and so there was always an unsatisfied demand for educated people in colonial India. This meant that a low level job of some kind or other in the colonial economy and administration was always available to a lower caste product of this system, which assured a much better and easier lifestyle than that of a peasant or artisan. Consequently even this half-baked education was prized and a model that mostly consisted of mechanical learning by rote of useless information having little relevance to the social, economic and technological problems that the majority of Indians faced became yet another albatross around their necks. Gandhi, wanting to make a break with this nefarious legacy, had talked of "Nai Talim" or a new education system to train youngsters in their own language

and idiom and in matters more suited to reviving the rural economy which had been devastated by the British colonialists (Rammurthy, 1990). Like much else of Gandhi, however, Nehru jettisoned this also and instead continued with the half-baked British pattern of school education for the expanding government education system in rural areas after independence. Thus even today uninspiring and unsuitable syllabi written in an alien language are taught by poorly qualified teachers and learned by rote by masses of rural children without a proper development of their cognitive and analytical skills. The teachers pass the students from class to class unless they are particularly inept. Examinations, which are supposed to be checks on the relevance of the system, have in most schools been reduced to an absurd farce as there is mass copying in which the teachers themselves help the students. A common joke in Madhya Pradesh is that the State Education Board Examinations are so named because in these the teachers write down the answers to the question paper on the black board for students to copy from! Even so a majority of the students are unable to pass since most of them are incapable of doing even that.

Even this faulty system worked for sometime in the initial two decades after independence as its products were absorbed into the expanding state system of production, marketing and services which began filling up the massive gap left by two centuries of colonial rule. But from about the time that Subhadra passed out of school the demand and supply mismatch, which had remained favourable to the students for nearly two centuries turned unfavourable. Globalisation and technological development rendered redundant the huge number of mostly poorly trained products of the school education system. The need was for a much less number of highly qualified personnel in specialised disciplines. The government school system, which was never properly equipped in pedagogical and human resources, found itself even more of an obsolescent remnant from an earlier era. Just when a huge infusion of funds and ideas was required for the revamping of education, the state and central governments lacked both. Thus the state education system right from the primary to the highest levels has very few quality institutions and so there is now a political battle on between various sections of society to try and corner as much of this as possible.

Even paying the teachers already on the payroll their salaries has become a problem for most states let alone the recruitment and training of newer ones in large numbers. The new Congress Government of Madhya Pradesh in 1994 decided to overcome this hurdle by palming off the responsibility for school education to the panchayats with minimal salaries for teachers and almost no funds for infrastructure and so expanding its reach substantially. It then publicised this as a revolution in the provision of education to hitherto underprivileged sections like the adivasis and dalits in remote rural areas under the rubric of the "Education Guarantee Scheme" (EGS) as has been mentioned earlier. It was aided in this by a loan from the World Bank under the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) for the design of better learning materials, training of teachers and provision of basic infrastructure like buildings, blackboards and other teaching aids. However, the government through both the DPEP (Kumar, et al, 2001) and the EGS (Leclerc, 2003) has not been able to do much more than provide rudimentary schools where there were none while at the same time diluting even further, like the homoeopaths do with their medicines, the quality of pedagogy in the government schooling system, hoping like them that this will increase the curative power of the schooling solution provided! As a result in urban areas the government school system in Madhya Pradesh has been almost totally superseded by private schools and even in rural areas this is slowly becoming the norm.

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Once I spent the night with a friend who was the head master of a government school in a market village in Jhabua district. He spent the whole night sitting with a pile of answer sheets of students from EGS schools in front of him re-marking the answer papers so as to make them eligible for passing. He said he was the coordinator for the EGS schools in his area and there were strict orders from above that more than fifty percent of the students from these schools should get pass marks otherwise he would be penalised with a skipping of an increment in his salary! Similarly during the census of 2001 the government teachers who did the enumeration work were given orders to put down as many people as possible as literate regardless of their actual reading and writing abilities and this is what has resulted in the phenomenal increase in literacy in the state from 44 percent in 1991 to 64 percent in 2001! Indeed some spot checks that I conducted of the Census 2001 data with regard to the characteristics of the work they were doing in a few villages in the course of some research work that I was engaged in revealed that they were completely cockeyed with respect to the actual situation prevailing. This is the kind of spurious data on the basis of which planning and research takes place in this country and little wonder that they fail to address the burning issues that affect the poor and marginalised.

Realising that relevant education of good quality was a sine qua non for building up a sustainable mass movement the KMCS set up primary schools in remote villages in Alirajpur tehsil as early as 1987. Reading, writing and arithmetic were taught in the Devnagari script but using the Bhili language. Initially there were no textbooks. Instead, the teachers and the students used to conduct surveys of various kinds of their immediate surroundings and then analyse the results. The data and understanding gained from this were used to create textbooks for language, arithmetic, science, geography and history in Bhili. The teachers and the students together participated in the creation of learning material. Later a primer for learning in Hindi was developed in the same way. Learning by doing was the watchword. The stress was on building up a primary education system that would teach and inspire children to manage their own surroundings in a sustainable manner in accordance with their culture rather than incline them towards graduating to the mainstream education system that alienated them from their roots. However, this attempt did not carry on due to our preoccupation with the increasing struggles against the state.

Later on when in the mid nineteen nineties it became clear that political struggles were up against a wall that stifled creativity, many activists began seeking newer avenues in which to work. As mentioned earlier some of the KMCS activists left to pursue other opportunities. Amit and Jayashree wanted to continue working among the Bhils but with two toddlers to take care of they could not continue to live the topsy turvy life of political activists anymore. Feeling that serious work needed to be done in the sphere of education to build up a long term cadre of people committed to an alternative vision of society they decided to devote themselves to this. They thought of concentrating on the systematic development of education materials and an alternative pedagogy in accordance with the ideology of village-centred adivasi self-rule for the establishment of a socially equitable and environmentally sustainable society. The members of the Adivasi Mukti Sangathan supported the setting up of a training centre cum school called the Adharshila School in village Sakar near Sendhwa in Barwani district on a five acre piece of minimally productive agricultural land.

The experience of having run schools earlier had shown that effective teaching of adivasi children of illiterate parents require that they be drilled even after regular schooling hours. Since this was not possible with day scholars it was decided to run a residential school. Secondly it was decided, as far as possible, to make the parents pay in cash and kind for the

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education of their children so as to make the everyday running of the school financially self-sustaining. This, in turn, meant that the school would have to make the children proficient enough to perform well in the board examinations at the class five level to accord with the expectations of the parents most of whom would naturally be paying for an education that could get their children jobs later on. Thus the syllabus and teaching had to take care of both the needs of inculcating a critical attitude towards modern development in the children as well as providing them with the skills to make it good in the modern sector. Obviously, this is a tall order and requires a lot of hard and committed innovative work on the part of the teachers. So funds were collected from various external sources including SRUTI for the costs of curriculum development, teaching aids and part of the salaries of the teachers.

The school started from scratch without textbooks and the language used was Bareli a dialect of Bhili. Once again the earlier method of the KMCS of conducting surveys and writing down the rich oral literature of the Bhili creation myths was used to acquaint the children with the basics of language and arithmetic and in the process create primers. One such survey, which was both entertaining and educative, was conducted to find out how, if at all, the teachers were teaching in the government schools and then comparing the results with the procedures being followed in the Adharshila School. The local environment provided the material for scientific learning through observation and analysis and local history as related by the elders was recorded to prepare the history lessons. In addition to their studies the children have to put in two hours of labour everyday on the five- acre farm of the school so as to ensure that they do not lose touch with their peasant farmer roots. Possibly for the first time academic learning has become fun for Bhil children in a systematically run school environment.

The biggest problem confronting the teachers is that of reconciling the contradictory goals of developing and teaching a curriculum that critiques modern development and simultaneously prepares children to take the board examinations of the government school system. Commensurate with the high levels of technological development, the learning load of students in the mainstream schools has been increased phenomenally. Even children of families, which have had education for generations together find the syllabus tough and have to put in long hours after school and take special coaching to be able to perform well in examinations. Under the circumstances it is unrealistic to expect first or second generation literates coming from a pre-modern culture to digest the heavy syllabus. Just acquiring language, mathematical and analytical skills are not sufficient to ensure good results in examinations. A considerable amount of additional cramming has to be done to remember the massive amount of information. This forces the child towards an uncritical acceptance of the modernist assumptions on which the syllabus is based. This in turn considerably reduces the possibilities of a generalised revolt against modernism. Once again this is a Catch 22 situation. Most of the students leave after passing the class eight board examinations with flying colours to join a mainstream school for further studies instead of continuing in the Adharshila school.

Amit and Jayashree in fact have to contend with multiple problems like sourcing of funds, recruiting, training and then retaining teachers, developing curricula, envisioning inspiring and enjoyable extra curricular activities and managing the day-to-day operation of the school. While doing this they have also to look after their two young children who live with them and study in the Adharshila school along with the adivasi children. Most importantly they have stuck to the basic principle that the school should be run on the strength of the fees paid by the students and voluntary contributions made by individuals who

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agree with the style of schooling being provided rather than take large funds from institutional sources and so have to follow their dictates. Over the past seven years a barren piece of hilltop land has become a green arbour and a fountain of knowledge for a people who have never had the privilege of good education. It is a drop in the ocean perhaps but one that nevertheless sparkles with hope for the future. Subhadra and I have bowed to circumstances and shifted out from our residence in Machla village to drop anchor in Indore city despite our distaste for the urban environment so as to be able to educate our son in a mainstream school. Under the circumstances I have unending respect for Amit and Jayashree as they struggle on to improve the quality of education available to adivasi children, in a remote village like Sakar, which does not even have regular electricity supply.

The NGO Kishore Bharati had in the early nineteen seventies begun experimenting on the same lines as the Nuffield Program for popularising science education among school children that had been tried out in Britain by introducing activity and discovery based learning, tailored to the child's physical, social and cultural environment but with the difference that it was being tried out in a rural area (Raina, 2002). Later this became a full-fledged programme named the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme (HSTP) involving the central and state governments and various educational institutions. After a review of its operations a decision was taken to extend it beyond Hoshangabad district and some of the people involved in it set up the NGO Eklavya in 1982 to oversee this expansion. Later this innovation was extended to social science teaching both at the middle and primary levels from 1986 onwards. One important and novel aspect of this experiment was that it tried to work within the government school system and reform it rather than set up a parallel system outside of it.

Despite having secured high level governmental support over a fairly long period of time Eklavya too has had to contend with the tension between the demand for mainstream science education, which requires cramming and is examination oriented and the adoption of innovative teaching methods for rural children. The majority of teachers in the government schools are either not convinced about child and culture friendly pedagogy or are not prepared to put in the additional effort required to make learning fun for rural children. In all these thirty years only a hundred odd teachers have become committed proponents of this alternative pedagogy. Finally the educational bureaucracy is loath to relinquish its control over teachers, syllabi and examinations and allow wide-ranging innovation to take place. Despite some of the teachers of the HSTP having earned international accolades the government has not awarded them by giving them promotions or salary increments. Thus, despite having developed alternative texts and teaching methods of high quality which have gained worldwide recognition and conducted umpteen teacher trainings, Eklavya has failed to develop a sustainable school educational system with enough support from the parents who can effectively demand that this new mode of teaching continue and spread.

The net result is that in a bizarre development the HSTP was scrapped by the Government of Madhya Pradesh in 2002 (Menon, 2002). A local BJP MLA in Hoshangabad district had been trying ever since he got elected in 1990 to get the programme scrapped because it went against the obscurantist ideology of his party. Luckily the BJP government was dismissed in 1992 following the demolition of the Babri Masjid and so Eklavya got a reprieve. Thereafter the Congress Government of Digvijay Singh came to power and things became smooth once again. However, problems arose a second time because of a new set of circumstances. The high flying bureaucrats in charge of the EGS in their efforts to try and promote it as a revolutionary achievement of the Government of Madhya Pradesh in the

sphere of primary education tried to get it certified as such by scholars of repute. They managed to get some commissioned laudatory evaluations done by economists and management academics (Vyasulu, 2000, Kothari et al, 2000) but failed totally in their attempts to get well known scholars of education to certify a basically fraudulent exercise. The bureaucrats in question angered by this rejection combined with the educational bureaucracy, which had for long been loath to continue with this radical programme and the persistent BJP MLA who had been continually petitioning the government against it and scuttled the HSTP. It is the tragic fate of this country that even after more than half a century of independence the manger of the state still remains the prerogative of political and bureaucratic dogs. So its second class citizens who cannot afford to pay for quality education have to remain satisfied with what has come to be called "second track schooling facilities" of dubious quality provided by the government (Dreze & Sen, 2002).

Meanwhile Subhadra found herself all at sea in the deep waters of the IGNOU course material. The problem was compounded by the fact that the texts had been originally written in English by the leading Indian scholars in their fields and then translated into Hindi. The normal practice for translation of arcane technical terms is to break up the English word into its Latin or Greek roots and then construct a Hindi word by combining the corresponding Sanskrit roots. This artificially created term being a specialised one is not found in any of the standard Hindi dictionaries. Moreover since the main words are in Sanskrit the sentences constructed with these also use a high Sanskritised Hindi, which has little relation to the colloquial Hindi that is popularly spoken. Thus making sense of the IGNOU course material is almost as difficult an exercise as deciphering the true meanings of the Vedas. Since this was beyond the capacity of Subhadra I had to assist her in a big way not only in understanding the meaning of the texts but also in doing the assignments which too had to be written in high quality Sanskritised Hindi. The crunch came in the examinations. The papers were set in such a way that they thoroughly tested whether the student had read and assimilated the course material properly and wholly. A study of past question papers revealed that there is no pattern discernible in the questions asked. So it is very difficult to predict the possible questions and prepare accordingly as is the custom in most universities in this country.

The inevitable result of all this was that in the initial stages Subhadra mostly passed her examinations by the skin of her teeth or sometimes failed. Even though I prepared the answers for a wide range of questions it was just beyond her capacity to cram all of them. So she had to write off the cuff answers to questions for which she had not prepared and obviously she did not have the proficiency to do so. The only saving grace is that a student could take as many as eight years at that time to pass the three-year course and so failed papers could be reappeared for or a lesser number of papers could be taken per semester. Just when Subhadra had begun to get a hang of things after about two years she conceived accidentally. We had initially planned not to have any children because this would have hampered our work in the field. We used to rely on a mixture of the use of condoms and the natural method to keep the baby away. The latter of course is highly unreliable, we had slipped up on two occasions earlier and Subhadra had had to get herself aborted. However, this time Subhadra said that since she had decided not to work in the field anymore for sometime she would like to go through with the pregnancy and so free herself from the accusation that she faced continually from women in the villages that she was infertile! "Baanjh kya jaane prasav ka dard" meaning what does an infertile woman know about the pains of childbirth, goes a common taunt that is used in rural settings. So Subhadra decided to

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pick up this knowledge and set her pursuit of academic knowledge in abeyance for two years till our son Ishaan was born and weaned into walking around on his own.

She took up her studies again and passed her papers without much trouble till only one paper remained. This was the foundation course in English. She had already failed in this once. We had decided then that after she had finished her other papers we would concentrate for one whole year on preparing for the English paper. In tune with the rest of the subjects in this too the question paper is extremely tough. There is an unseen passage on which questions are asked. There are extremely difficult questions on grammar, which I can only label as sadistic as even I had to think for sometime to answer them. Finally there are an essay and a dialogue to be written on subjects, which can be anything under the sun. Once again being totally unpredictable these question papers can be answered successfully only by a student who has a very good command of the English language. So even after a year of practice it was quite clear to us that Subhadra's passing the paper would depend totally on chance. I did a review of the question papers of a decade and prepared four sets of essays and dialogues on topics that I thought were the most likely and had Subhadra mug them up. Given the toughness of the other questions and the low number of marks she would get in them the only way she could pass her paper was that one of the topics for which she had prepared came in the essay and dialogue sections.

Obviously Subhadra was very nervous before the examination and constantly asked me whether she would be able to pass or not. On seeing her distress and searching around for something to comfort her with I suddenly had a brainwave. One of the topics I had prepared was one that had come the most often in some form or other - " Write about the person who has influenced you the most". I had prepared an essay on Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar for this topic. One of the salutations that members of the Bahujan Samaj Party frequently use is "Jai Bhim", Long live Bhim, acknowledging the contribution of Ambedkar to the cause of the dalits. So I told Subhadra to forget everything else and just go on repeating Jai Bhim to herself till she got the question paper and hope that a topic would come on which she could spew out an essay she had prepared. Not having much choice this is what she began to do and lo and behold when she opened the question paper and went straight to the essay portion she found a variation of a topic, which allowed her to write on Babasaheb Ambedkar! She passed the examination by a whisker on the strength of this essay and finally became a graduate all of seven years after she had first enrolled.

Once this IGNOU odyssey was over I began wondering as to how many people actually passed the BA examination given the toughness of the course and the exacting examination standards. The BA being the most basic graduation level course would be opted for mostly by people like Subhadra, coming from a disadvantaged background that had lost touch with education for a long time and wanted to catch up on it. But the fact of the matter is that Subhadra had been able to stay the course and become a graduate of IGNOU only because I was there to help her throughout. Not everyone is so lucky and so I surmised that very few people were actually successfully completing the course. I asked around in Indore and found that all the people whom I traced had dropped out of the course after enrolment having been frustrated by the toughness of the course and the examinations. This prompted me to write to IGNOU for statistics regarding the pass percentages disaggregated by caste category in the BA course over the past decade. There was no reply. I then got some of my journalist friends in Delhi to inquire about this and they too got fobbed off with vague replies. I then wrote to the Principal Secretary Higher Education of the Government of India who is

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an IAS officer from the Madhya Pradesh cadre that I know personally to get this information and once again drew a blank.

I then filed an application with the Public Information Officer of IGNOU under the Right to Information Act for this information. A subordinate of this officer replied and tried to fob me off with some vague excuse. I sent a stern letter to the Vice Chancellor who is the Designated Appellate Authority for IGNOU under the RTI Act, pointing out that the Public Information Officer was liable for penal action for having wilfully obstructed the furnishing of the information that I had demanded. This had some effect and the officer sent me the data but it was for only seven years from 1996 to 2002. There are still a lot of problems with the veracity and logical consistency of the data that has been sent and so I have now appealed to the Central Information Commission to direct IGNOU to furnish me with correct and detailed data for the whole decade from 1996 to 2005 so that I can carry out a thorough statistical analysis of the same. However, whatever data has been sent to me so far has overwhelmingly confirmed my suspicion that IGNOU has failed miserably in its self professed mission of "....knowledge ... dissemination through sustainable open and distance learning systems seamlessly accessible to all, including hitherto unreached, from among whom the leaders and innovators of tomorrow will emerge." (IGNOU, 2006)

The fact that students enrolled in a particular year do not all pass out or finally get struck off the rolls for non-completion of the course in the stipulated time together means that the data for enrolled, passed and failed students for a particular year are not for the same students. But by 2002 fourteen years had elapsed since the first batch passed out in 1988 and the data for 2002 reflect more or less a similar pattern as the data for the previous years from 1996 onwards and provide a fair indication of the substandard performance of IGNOU with regard to the BA degree course that it offers. A total of 35,844 students enrolled in 2002 of whom 63.4 % were females and 36.6% were males. The Scheduled Castes constituted only 6.2 % whereas their percentage in the population as a whole is 15%. Their female to male ratio was about the same as that for the total students enrolled. The Scheduled Tribes constituted 5.9 % whereas their proportion in the population as a whole is 7%. Their female to male ratio was again about the same as the total. The number of students who passed was a miniscule 1490, which if compared to the number enrolling is just 4.2 %. This percentage has secularly come down from 15.9 % in 1996. This is because while the numbers enrolling have gone up by 257 %, the numbers passing out have decreased by 32.2 % over this period of seven years. The numbers of students who have failed to complete the course in the stipulated time and so been struck off the rolls have increased in the same period by 204 % to 21178 in 2002. This resulted in the ratio of students struck off the rolls to those freshly enrolled going down from 74.3 % to 59.1 % in the same period. This means that given the continually decreasing numbers of students passing out there must be a big backlog of students who have to be struck off the rolls. Possibly they have been so struck off in the years subsequent to 2002 and so the disturbing data for those years have been withheld from me!

The most striking feature of the results is that of the considerably fewer number of female students passing as compared to male students. Thus in 1996 even though females constituted 67.1% of those enrolling their proportion in those passing out was just 29.5%. Similarly in 2002 while females constituted 63.4% of those enrolling their proportion in those passing out was just 31.6%. The proportions for the years in between are more or less the same. This means that there are a lot of women like Subhadra with a poor schooling background and unable to take admission in colleges which require regular attendance who are enrolling in IGNOU with the fond hope of getting a BA degree. However, the toughness

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of the course, the examination papers and their evaluation coupled with inadequate coaching are putting paid to their dreams leading to these women not being able to pass out.

No wonder then that these standard statistics regarding pass percentages, that are easily made available by most universities, are such a closely guarded secret in IGNOU and not readily disclosed to anyone. The dismal statistics mentioned above clearly indicate that IGNOU contrary to its professed mission has not disseminated knowledge through sustainable learning systems to the hitherto unreached. Not only has it failed to help the underprivileged students who have taken admission in the BA degree course to emerge as leaders and innovators of tomorrow but it has instead severely dented their self respect by making them into failures. This criminal negligence assumes an even more serious hue when we consider the fact that an overwhelming two-thirds majority of those aspiring and then failing to make something of themselves due to this insensitivity of IGNOU are women. What is most galling is that an institution that projects itself as the best distance learning university in the world does not have the honesty to review the continually deteriorating performance of its most basic BA degree programme.

After a long wait of eight months the appeal to Central Information Commission finally came up for hearing on 18th of December 2006. The Information Commissioner instead of taking the IGNOU PIO to task for not supplying the complete information and penalising him said that since he had given some information I should not be intolerant and should sit with the PIO and sort out the remaining differences. My argument that enrolment and pass statistics are basic information and the Information Commissioner should order IGNOU to put them up compulsorily on their website so that they would have to sit up and do something to improve matters as a result of public scrutiny of such a dismal performance cut no ice with the Information Commissioner who said that the staff of IGNOU were over worked anyway. I finally left in disgust leaving the IGNOU PIO and the Information Commissioner to their mutual backslapping. When this is the level of mendacity practiced by a premiere educational institution of higher learning set up specifically with the aim of helping the disadvantaged and the ineffectiveness of the RTI Act because of the tendency of bureaucrats to shield each other what hope is there for the adivasis and dalits and especially their women even with affirmative action legislated in their favour. Babasaheb Ambedkar must not just be turning but doing a few revolutions in his grave! Jai Bhim.

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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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Chapter 27 - Cry, My Beloved Mehendikhera

A hot summer afternoon in the month of April 2001 saw Motiabhai the Bhilala adivasi Patel of Katukia village in Bagli Tehsil of Dewas district in Madhya Pradesh sitting among the ruins of his house under the burning sun and angrily asking the then Chairman of the National Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Commission, Shri Dilip Singh Bhuria, whether as a citizen of India he did not have the right to live with dignity under his own roof and could only live like the mice in their holes on his farm. Prior to this in a secretly planned "Operation Clean" the Government of Madhya Pradesh had carried out a sudden week long campaign of mass destruction and loot of the houses of adivasis who belonged to the Adivasi Morcha Sangathan without giving them any prior notice whatsoever. This had resulted in the death of four members of the sangathan in unwarranted police firing when they protested en-masse against this blatantly illegal operation in Mehendikhera village on 2nd April 2001 (IPT, 2001). Shri Bhuria was too dumbstruck by the scale of destruction to say anything other than some words in consolation.

Why is it that adivasis like Motia Patel are consistently denied full citizenship rights in India? Why is it that despite constitutional safeguards and other ameliorative legislation adivasis continue to face the iron hand of state repression whenever they demand their legally sanctioned rights in an organised manner? Why has the Panchayat Provisions (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act 1996 (PESA), which had initially been hailed as the long awaited panacea for all the ills of adivasi mal-development, also been unable to deliver the goods to the adivasis in the past decade in which it has been in force? Why indeed does the demand for adivasi self-rule remain a cry in the wilderness even after nearly six decades of independence and why is this demand suppressed brutally by the state whenever it is voiced in a concerted manner? The events of the three years in the Katkut-Udainagar region culminating in the tragic killings in Mehendikhera after Subhadra and I withdrew from the area, when the adivasis continued to mobilise on their own with only advisory support from me, provide the sad answers to these questions.

The main rallying point of the people was the fact that in Fifth Schedule Areas the amended Madhya Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act had made the adivasi Gram Sabhas the paramount executive power in their territorial domain. Due to some mischievous stratagems of the upper castes in the nineteen fifties, the Nimar portion of Dewas district adjoining the Narmada river which had an overwhelming majority adivasi population had not been declared as a separate tehsil but had been divided up into three parts and each part had been joined to the much more populous non-adivasi areas of the Malwa plateau to form three separate tehsils in all of which the adivasis were in a small minority. As a result these tehsils and the development blocks within them had not been declared as scheduled areas depriving the adivasis residing there of the political and developmental benefits that accrue from such a declaration. This became the major grouse of the people of the area. They began demanding that a separate new tehsil consisting of the adivasi majority areas in the Nimar plains be carved out and it be declared a scheduled area so that they could get the benefits that were being denied them. Massive demonstrations began to be held in support of this demand.

Given the ways of the state in India and the tremendous opposition from the non-adivasis to this demand there was little chance of its being met easily. So the people decided that they would go ahead anyway with establishing the paramountcy of the Gram Sabha in their villages. This immediately brought them into conflict with the Forest Department. The Forest Department has traditionally claimed that it was the sole controller of the reserved forests under the provisions of the Indian Forest Act. The forefathers of the adivasis in this

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area had migrated from Dhar and Khargone districts about sixty years ago. They were brought and settled there by the Jagirdar in Bagli so as to clear the forests and begin cultivation of the land. However, almost immediately thereafter, the coming of independence in 1947 put a stop to this process of bringing forest land under plough and following a settlement survey the people of the area were restricted to cultivating only some of the land that they had been able to clear and the rest was taken over by the Forest Department. So over the years as their population increased this land proved to be too little for providing a decent livelihood. Not only that the provisions of the Indian Forest Act 1927 prevented the adivasis from even collecting the wood and timber needed for basic functions like cooking, housing and farming and so put them at the mercy of the forest department staff.

Bondar Singh an adivasi from Hirapur village had gone as usual to the forest in 1990 to collect timber for fencing in his farm. When he was returning with the timber in a bullock cart he was accosted by a forest guard and his helper. The tacit understanding under the moral economy (Thompson, 1968) prevailing at that time between the adivasis and the local staff of the forest department in such circumstances is for the forest guard to take a bribe and look the other way. But this particular guard decided to seize Bondar's cart and asked his helper to take it along with the bullocks to the Range office in Udainagar. When Bondar protested the forest guard hit him with his lathi. This violation of the moral economy by the forest guard angered Bondar and he hit him with a piece of wood seriously wounding him. Bondar was later arrested by the police and sent to jail. He was released on bail after his brothers engaged a lawyer by borrowing money at an usurious interest rate from a sahuakar. Later still he was sentenced by the sessions court in Dewas to a jail term of three years. He once again had to borrow money from his sahuakar to appeal against this verdict in the High Court.

Stories like that of Bondar abounded in the area and so when they got the opportunity the people grabbed it and organised themselves to express their anger in a more legal way than the one in which Bondar had done. The people contested the monopoly of the Forest Department saying that the forests situated within their village boundary were to be managed and used by them. Seeing that the local forest officials were unable to withstand the mass strength of the Sangathan, the administration brought in forces from outside and teams of forest officials in vehicles began touring the area arresting unsuspecting people in the forest and beating them up before sending them to jail after falsely charging them of having contravened some section or other of the IFA.

Getting bolder the forest officials began raiding the villages themselves early in the morning to increase the chances of catching people unawares and arresting them. On 23rd September 1999 a team of forest officials raided the village of Katukya at 6 am in the morning and fired on and killed Roopsingh who was returning from answering nature's call. The forest officials had gone ostensibly to arrest one Balu for allegedly having cut timber from the forest (Banerjee, 2005). The murder of Roopsingh evoked an immediate protest response from the sangathan members as they amassed in thousands in front of the Police Station in Udainagar with his dead body demanding the immediate filing of a case of murder and the arrest of the guilty officials. Tension had been building up for quite some time among the people against the arbitrary and illegal manner in which the state was trying to suppress their legitimate aspirations. So there was a tremendous outpouring of anger. The administration had to yield to the demands under public pressure, a case of murder was registered against the forest officials and they were arrested and sent to jail. The Sangathan became very powerful at the local level after this victory and the de facto rule of the Gram Sabhas was established.

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However, since the forest officials had been acting at the behest of the administration, the police did not file the charge sheet in the case within the stipulated ninety days and so the accused were let out on bail and their suspensions revoked. Indeed the charge sheet has not yet been filed even after more than six years having elapsed and the case has not been sent to the courts for trial yet. According to the provisions of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Rules 1995, which supplement the provisions of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989, the state has to provide monetary compensation to the heirs of the deceased when an adivasi is murdered by a non-adivasi. So the Sangathan had pressed for this compensation to be paid to Roopsingh's widow Sagarbai. Despite all the formalities being completed the District Magistrate did not pay the compensation making the specious plea that since the forest guard who had fired on Roopsingh was an adivasi, the provisions of the Atrocities Act did not apply. The counter arguments by the Sangathan that all the members of the team, which included and was led by non-adivasis, had gone together and had illegally killed Roopsingh in contravention of all legal norms and so they were all together along with the state responsible for the crime were summarily brushed aside.

The Sangathan then went to the High Court in Indore against this arbitrary decision of the District Magistrate in September 2000. The petition was admitted and quickly came up for final disposal at the admission stage because the government prosecutor was not foolish enough to make the plea that the murderer not being an adivasi the provisions of the Act did not apply in this case. However, on the day of the final hearing the honourable judge gave the astounding excuse that since the rules for Madhya Pradesh were framed in Hindi he could not give a judgment as this latter had to be written in English. No amount of pleading that the rules in question had been published in the gazette of Madhya Pradesh in Hindi only could make the judge budge. In two hearings thereafter the judge gave the same excuse for not giving his final judgment on the matter and then he moved the case out from the fast track admission stage onto the motion hearing stage where it had to wait its turn behind the pile of cases already in line there. Then the administration came down on the Sangathan like a ton of bricks and severely crippled it during Operation Clean in 2001. Thereafter the main concentration of the Sangathan became the fighting of the numerous false cases that were registered against it at that time and the Roopsingh case took a backseat.

Nevertheless efforts were made from time to time to get things expedited but the government prosecutor would make some plea or other and get the case postponed. Things would have continued in this frustrating manner had not the Supreme Court sent strict orders to the High Court that during the summer vacation of 2005 a special bench should be constituted to dispose of the 1000 oldest cases that were still pending in the court. Roopsingh's case happened to be in this list and so it came up for hearing on 19.5.2005. This time the government prosecutor made the weird plea that since the District Magistrate had not passed any written order refusing to give the relief that was demanded there was no cause for action by the High Court. Surprisingly the learned judge despite protests from the petitioner's lawyer went along with this to some extent but had the grace to admit that the District Magistrate had no business not to give a written order even after so much time had elapsed. So he passed an order directing that the District Magistrate should give the relief to the petitioner in accordance with the rules and write a reasoned order based on the facts of the case within two months of a repeat application being made by the petitioner along with the certified copy of the High Court's order.

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When Roopsingh's widow Sagarbai met the District Magistrate and gave him this new application along with the High Court's order, the first comment that he made after reading it was that in his opinion this was not a fit case as the forest guard who had fired and killed Roopsingh was an adivasi! This was a different person from the District Magistrate who had initially given this same idiotic excuse some six years back but such is the consistency of the training in stonewalling given to the bureaucracy in this country that they invariably come out with the same checkmating answers regardless of the person. One must remember that these officers are all members of the hallowed Indian Administrative Service the so-called "Steel Frame of the Indian Executive". Sagarbai with the help of the Sangathan once again went to the High Court against the written order this time of the District Magistrate denying her the compensation. The inexorable Sisyphean curse was in action yet again! However as has been mentioned earlier Sagarbai finally did get justice with the help of the High Court.

Meanwhile, the Sangathan, prior to the tragic climax of Operation Clean had began using its strength to expedite matters in various cases where the bureaucracy was hell bent on preventing justice being given to the adivasis. One example was the recovery of adivasi lands that had been alienated by non-adivasi moneylenders. The attempts on the part of the Sangathan to institute proceedings for the return of such illegally usurped adivasi land under the provisions of section 170(b) of the Madhya Pradesh Land Revenue Code 1959 had met with bureaucratic intransigence. In one such notable case Dhansingh Ramsingh of Udainagar village and his brothers had lodged a complaint with the SDM in Bagli against Gopal Maheshwari for the return of the land that the latter had forced them to formally sell to him for a pittance as payment for a loan that their father had taken. They won the case in Bagli but the moneylender went in appeal to the Collector in Dewas. There too the case went in favour of the adivasis. The sahukar then appealed to the Commissioner in Ujjain. The Commissioner struck down the Collector's decision arguing a moot technical point that the Bhilala tribe had not been declared a scheduled tribe in 1961 at the time of the purchase. The case has since been pending in the court of the Revenue Commissioner in Gwalior. The Sangathan used force to recover the land from the moneylender and give it to its rightful owner for sometime before the crackdown by the state.

Then in 2000 after the Roopsingh murder we all sat down for a two-day workshop in Mehendikhera village to think of a way to build up a comprehensive ideological challenge to the developmental discourse being peddled by the state. We felt that just the slogan of "hamara gaon mein hamara raj" was not enough and that we must have some evocative symbol or focal point around which a more widespread mobilisation of the adivasis of the whole western Madhya Pradesh region could take place. Deepsingh of Bisali, who is a widely respected burwa, then said that we should take up a programme for mass celebration of the martyrdom day of Tantiya Bhil at his Gatha or memorial at Patalpani near Indore. Traditionally adivasis construct stone bas relief memorials to their heroic ancestors and then celebrate their memory in communitarian festivals similar to indals. Deepsingh ruefully said that no one celebrated the martyrdom of Tantiya at his Gatha anymore. He said the great Tantiya had fought to his death for precisely the same things that we were demanding and we could do no better than invoke his memory to give us strength in our current struggles. Everyone at once agreed and said that Tantiya was revered by the Bhils over the whole of the western Madhya Pradesh region and so a massive mobilisation for the establishment of true adivasi self rule could be built up in future taking heart from his legendary exploits.

A programme was finalised whose main action was to be a three daylong mass march from the Narmada River to the memorial site in Patalpani. Apart from the members of the Sangathan people from all over the western Madhya Pradesh region and the neighbouring

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states too were invited. Posters and pamphlets were published and a small booklet on the history of Tantia's struggles was brought out and these were distributed and sold in a big way to publicise the impending programme to be held in January 2001. On the appointed day thousands of adivasis congregated at Patalpani and there were nightlong meetings and celebrations. A traditional Gatha worship was done by Deepsingh burwa at the memorial of Tantia where goats were sacrificed and this was followed by the traditional feast next morning. This celebration was widely covered in the media and its news spread far and wide. Just after this I was traveling to Bhopal by bus and I had an adivasi who was migrating there for seasonal work on the seat beside me. In the course of the conversation that we struck up he mentioned to me that he had heard that the great Tantia Mama had come alive once again and so the adivasis, his bhanjas or nephews, could hope for a better deal in future! Such is the belief among common Bhil adivasis in the magical powers of the great Tantia.

One incident will amply describe the tremendous powers of inspiration that the memory of Tantia has for common adivasis. The adivasis in Potla village in Dewas district were held in thrall by the only sahuکار in the village who used to rule their lives in all respects. Some of them heard of the plans for holding the martyrdom celebrations of Tantia Bhil and came and told the rest of the villagers about it and distributed the pamphlets and booklets on Tantia's brave deeds to the educated adivasi youth. The result was that the villagers decided to participate in the yatra to Tantia's memorial. For this they needed to hire a truck to carry their possessions and they contacted their sahuکار who initially agreed to give them his truck on hire. But on the day of their setting out the sahuکار declined to give them the truck and also threatened not to give them any loans for the forthcoming cropping season. This incensed the villagers so much that they decided to socially boycott the sahuکار and his family and made alternative arrangements to participate in the yatra. There was no need for activists to go and organise the people as it just took a few pamphlets and a general milieu of cultural revival to bring about the end to generations of servitude. This village unit of the Sangathan became so militant within the space of just two months that it was specially targeted for elimination during Operation Clean later with even women being implicated in false cases and jailed. This incident sparked off a new movement against the sahuکار with the people refusing to pay them any interest on the loans they had taken from them in view of the difficult drought situation.

The response of the state was typical in that it labelled this new phase of mobilisation as a ploy to introduce Naxalism in the western Madhya Pradesh region (Singh, 2000). Immediately after this, things began to come to a head. Since 1999 there had been deficient rainfall in the whole western Madhya Pradesh region. Whereas some tehsils of Barwani and Jhabua districts had been officially declared drought hit others had not been so fortunate as the harvest there had not been less than the statutory level of 37% of the normal harvest required for declaring a district or tehsil as being drought hit. Even after being declared drought hit paltry amounts of between Rupees three and four crores each had been sanctioned for these two districts for relief works over and above the minimal amounts that are normally available through various Central Government schemes. The rest of the region had not even got these crumbs. The adivasi mass organisations had launched a massive campaign for putting pressure on the government to carry out sufficient relief works. Plans for soil and water conservation works were prepared by the people and sanctioned by the Gram Sabhas and forwarded to the administration for action. Subsequently rallies, dharnas and even blocking of roads was undertaken. The Adivasi Mukti Sangathan organised a month long dharna in January 2000 in Barwani and later in Bhopal pressing for relief works to be started but could get extra sanction of only Rupees one crore for the district. Even the allocations of

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cheap food grains for distribution to the poor families through the public distribution system were not increased.

This failure on the part of the government to provide adequate relief work resulted in more number of adivasis having to migrate for work to far off places than was normally the case as with the man who had travelled with me to Bhopal on the bus. The problem was that the whole western Indian region had been groaning under drought conditions for the past three years or so. So even the places that normally offered work to the adivasis like the towns and cities of Gujarat and Indore and the intensively cultivated agricultural areas of the Malwa plateau and Gujarat had less work to offer. This combination of less available work and a higher number of migrant workers depressed wages to well below subsistence levels all over the region. The net result was that the sahumars were having a field day. The adivasis were forced to go to these sahumars in the absence of any other support system and bear the burden of usurious interest rates that had shot up to levels of 10% per month and more. In Alirajpur tehsil of Jhabua district when the adivasis did not have even the money for the bus fare to migrate they went to the sahumar and borrowed the money from him. When they returned after a fortnight or a month they paid back double the money borrowed. The government announced support prices for soybean, maize and wheat each year and ordered the cooperative societies to purchase the produce of the farmers. However, the finances of the cooperative societies being in a bad shape these had adopted the policy of adjusting the payments due to the farmers for the crops bought from them against their loan dues. Consequently the farmers who were in need of hard cash did not go to these societies and sold their produce to the sahumars at the much lower prevailing market prices. Retiring the high cost debt of the sahumars was more of a priority than repaying the cheaper loans taken from the cooperative societies when it came to a trade off.

The adivasi mass organisations reviewing the situation found that the only way in which things could be improved was for the government to take action under the various laws at its disposal against the sahumars. Since this was unlikely given the political power of the sahumars plans were finalised for launching a mass action programme pressing for punitive action against them. This campaign was to piggy-back on the other ongoing campaigns for access to and control over the main natural resources of forests and water that were already underway. Given the persistent drought conditions the pressure on these resources had increased and so had the confrontation with the agencies of the state regarding their proper utilisation. In the Udainagar area the Gram Sabhas stopped the logging of timber by the Forest Department saying that if the government could not find resources to provide them with relief works to tide them over their livelihood crisis then it had no right to take resources out of the area to finance its other activities.

This decision of the Sangathan brought it into direct conflict with the deep-rooted resource extractive character not only of the Indian state but also of global capital. The state through the forest department has continually tried to increase the extraction from forests and the first major new initiative in the post independence era was the setting up of the MP Forest Development Corporation in 1975 to encourage industrial forestry, which would yield high returns in a short time, both in terms of timber output and revenue. But whereas bamboo was supplied to industry by the Corporation at 54 paise per 4 meters of bamboo the rate for the villagers was Rs 2. (Sundar *et al*, 2001). After this at the behest of the World Bank a social forestry programme was then implemented between 1981 and 1985 but this too was unsuccessful in meeting people's needs for fuel wood and fodder because of the lack of sincerity on the part of the forest department.

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Perhaps the most distinctive feature of forest policy in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh since the colonial period has been the *nistar* system, giving all bona fide village residents the right to take forest produce for non-commercial household use. The *nistar* facility was continued after independence, albeit, with some changes. The gap between demand and supply, however led to several abuses of the system and the forest officials using their arbitrary powers encouraged the sale of *nistari* materials in the open market (cited in Sundar *et al* op cit). Thus *Nistar* became an area of strong contestation (Sundar *et al*, op cit), with villagers seeing changes in the policy and the increase in rates as encroachments on their customary rights and forest officers blaming the villagers' alleged overuse of *nistar* as the cause of the deforestation which had actually resulted from the state's extractive policies and their own corrupt practices. This was in fact a worldwide phenomenon with forests being decimated to provide for the needs of industrial development both in the developing countries themselves and also in the developed countries, which are comparatively poorly endowed in natural resources leading to an environmental crisis from the nineteen seventies onwards that has become increasingly intractable over time.

The reaction of the hardliners among the developed nations to this new environmental crisis was to blame it on the population explosion in the third world countries and suggest that the poor in these countries living at subsistence levels degraded the environment as they did not have sufficient monetary incomes and this degradation further increased their poverty thus creating a vicious circle and so strict laws must be enforced to sequester environmental niches (Hardin, 1968). This thinking was reflected in India in the enactment of the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972, which totally dispossesses the forestdwellers who are mostly adivasis from the rights to the forests in which they have lived for centuries by the formation of national parks and sanctuaries. As we have seen, the adivasis in western Madhya Pradesh have in fact faced such a mindset right from the time of independence.

To address these problems a scheme was started in pursuance of the World Bank agenda of diffusing conflict arising from such resource extraction with financial help from the World Food Programme to provide employment to poor adivasis residing in forest areas ostensibly to improve their livelihood options and reduce the conflicts between them and the forest department. The first formal resolution on joint forest management (JFM) was passed in 1991 and was later revised in 1995 and again in 2000. A number of amendments have been issued, indicative of the attention paid to the programme by state level policymakers as a handy modus operandi for legitimising the continuing extraction of forest resources by the state. JFM activities in Harda division set the wheel of JFM in motion and it was followed in many more forest areas of the state. Eco-development programmes were also taken up. This involved supporting village development – agriculture, cattle, veterinary inputs, schools, health, water and roads to elicit more effective community involvement.

However, the real spurt in JFM came after the 1995 resolution and the launching of the Madhya Pradesh Forestry Project, funded by the World Bank. The Madhya Pradesh Forestry Project was launched as part of a pattern of such projects initiated all over the country by the World Bank to throw a few crumbs to the poor adivasis and fool them into saving the forests as ecological niches and carbon sinks to compensate for the tremendous destruction of forests and emissions of greenhouse gases being caused by the industrial development. The project, worth US\$ 67.3 million, was conceived as a part of the 10-year strategic investment plan of the World Bank and Government of India, in the forestry sector in Madhya Pradesh. The 4-year long Phase I was launched on 29th September, 1995 and closed on 31 December, 1999. Under this scheme Van Suraksha Samitis or forest protection

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committees were to be set up and given some minimal funds or just the promise of funds without any actual disbursements. The control of these funds, however, remained with the forest department. In areas where there were active adivasi mass organisations as in Dewas the forest department used these funds to try and buy out people and form Van Suraksha Samitis to counter the influence of these organisations and stifle their demands for more control over their habitats.

The adivasi mass organisations began a vociferous campaign against the way in which the project had been implemented and began agitating against the World Bank demanding that it terminate the project and not fund its second phase. This was when the Mehendikhera massacre took place and gave point to the complaints of the mass organisations. The tremendous international hue and cry following the incident forced the World Bank to invite a number of people from the adivasi mass organisations to participate in a Joint Review Mission with representatives of the World Bank and of the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department (MPFD) to examine cases of the violation of human rights of indigenous people and of the World Bank's Operational Directives in this regard. The joint mission gave a very critical report underlining human rights violations, lack of sustainability and equity and displacement of people and concluded that there was an urgent need for staying the Madhya Pradesh Forestry Project. This led to the cancellation of the second phase of the project by the World Bank in the later part of 2001.

Naturally the Madhya Pradesh government was extremely angry at the adivasi mass organisations for their opposition to the continuation of the World Bank Forestry Project. The situation became very tense in the areas of influence of the mass organisations by December 2000. A delegation of adivasi members from various organisations went to meet the deputy chief minister Jamuna Devi on 2nd December to invite her to participate in the martyrdom celebrations of Tantiya and try and cool down matters. However, the minister categorically told them that they should give up their agitational methods and distance themselves from the non-adivasi activists who she alleged were Naxalites out to destabilise the state. She advised them to disband their separate organisations and join the Congress party instead like she herself had done a few decades earlier!

The government at that time used to carry out a mass contact programme each year in the month of January called the Jan Sampark Abhiyan ostensibly to take note of the problems being faced by the people. Led by the Chief Minister all the ministers, secretaries and other government staff used to go to the villages in a weeklong programme to record the grievances of the people. Apart from a few symbolic actions this charade did not result in any widespread improvement in the quality of governance in the state and in the end it became just a publicity stunt. In the cabinet meeting held in January 2001 to review the Jan Sampark Abhiyan the spreading influence of the Adivasi Morcha Sangathan was commented on and a decision was taken to crackdown on its members.

Matters were not helped by the fact that the Naxalites had in the meanwhile in December 1999 murdered an adivasi minister of the Madhya Pradesh Government, Likhiram Kavre, in Balaghat after dragging him away from his house in his ancestral village where he had been sleeping. They left posters behind saying that this had been done in revenge for the extra judicial killing, subsequent to their arrest in an undercover operation, of three of their senior leaders in Andhra Pradesh by the police there. This shook up the government and the bureaucracy in Madhya Pradesh no end (The Hindu, 2000). They began to see a red under every bed and began shrilly chorusing the false propaganda that the Adivasi Morcha

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Sangathan was also a front organisation of the Naxalites and was secretly plotting to wage a war against the state.

Consequently a high level meeting chaired by the Chief Secretary was held on February 17th 2001 in Bhopal to work out the modalities of conducting what was ominously named "Operation Clean". It was admitted in this meeting that the lack of development and the corruption in government services had led to rising disaffection among the adivasis in the Udainagar area, which were snowballing into organised protests of massive proportions. However, it was categorically stated that the might of the state apparatus and its rule over the people of the area could not be allowed to weaken in the face of such protests even if they were spurred by valid grievances and so force should be applied to crush the organisations and recourse should be taken of such laws as the National Security Act and externment proceedings instituted if required to put a stop to the activities of the activists of these organisations. Full support was pledged by the government to the district administration with police forces from outside to carry out the operation to its logical conclusion - that of wiping out the Adivasi Morcha Sangathan and making the region "clean" for the state's dirty governance once again !(IPT, op cit).

The MLAs of the region held public meetings in various places along with the collectors, superintendents of police and other officers. Open threats were given in these meetings that unless the adivasi sangathans disbanded themselves and joined the World Bank sponsored Van Suraksha Samitis, punitive action would be taken against their members. I had all along played a supportive role during this period providing advice and legal support to the adivasis. I came to know from my sources that a severe crackdown was being planned and so in a secret meeting sat down with the members of the central committee of the Sangathan to discuss this imminent attack. I told them of my previous experience of such situations, especially the Anjanbara incidents of a decade earlier and warned them that the power of the state was such that it could move in massive forces to crush the Sangathan.

Nevertheless the people said that there was no option but to put up resistance as the administration and the government had clearly said that they wanted the organisation to be disbanded and this is what would be repeated if the Sangathan now wanted to parley with the government. What would remain of their honour, so soon after having held the martyrdom celebrations of the great Tantia, the people asked, if they meekly disbanded the organisation because of the fear of repression. Deepsingh got up and said melodramatically "I will utter a mantra in Tantia Mama's name and just slap my buttocks and that will make the police run away" to a roar of approval from all those present! My suggestion that a delegation should be sent to talk with the government was overruled and the stage was set for a confrontation between the primitive animism of the poor unarmed adivasis and the modern animism of the heavily armed state in yet another unequal battle like the many that had been fought earlier by adivasis not only in India but also all over the world and I a non-animist was left a helpless bystander.

"Operation Clean" started in the village of Kadoriya on the morning of the 28th of March 2001 as hundreds of armed policemen and forest officials accompanied by hired adivasis and led by the District Collector, Superintendent of Police and Divisional Forest Officer descended on the unsuspecting people there. So that no one should know of this beforehand the state forces had got together in Dewas early before daybreak and then made the four hour journey to Kadoriya village and taken the people there by surprise just when they were letting their cattle out for grazing. Even though the people were taken by surprise they put up a stiff resistance to this illegal raid but were overwhelmed by the might and

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numbers of the state forces. A series of houses were demolished and the timber taken away by the raiding team and their belongings looted. The grain and water was poisoned with pesticides. Thereafter this team went to other villages, which were strongholds of the Sangathan, including the newly enrolled Potla village where the women put up a stiff resistance, systematically destroying houses, pillaging, looting and poisoning the grain and water, including the village of Katukiya on April 1st, All Fools Day, where Roopsingh had been killed two years before.

That night the marauding team came back to Udainagar and camped on the banks of the Luhar River readying itself to cross it and attack the core area of the Sangathan the next day. The members of the Sangathan had begun a peaceful sit in on the road leading from Udainagar to Katkut stopping all traffic demanding that the administration stop its illegal campaign from the 30th of March. The administration of course had not paid any attention bent as it was on wiping out the organisation altogether. It was clear that a confrontation would take place as soon as the government forces crossed over the next day. I desperately wanted to go down to be with the adivasis but could not do so because my seven month old son was down with an attack of dysentery and there was no one to take care of Subhadra and him in Machla in my absence. The long drought had resulted in the well in the ashram drying up to such an extent that I had to get up even before it was dawn to draw the little water that accumulated overnight with a rope and bucket before it was pumped up for the girl students staying in the hostel there. Anyway I had not thought that the administration would go to the extent of killing adivasis in cold blood.

Mehendikhera village is situated picturesquely on the banks of the Luhar River on the other side from Udainagar. The river, like many others descending the escarpment of the Vindhyas from the Malwa plateau and flowing to the Narmada goes dry in summer but there are some deep pools in it near the village, which brim with water throughout summer and are full of fish. The children and youth enjoy themselves swimming and catching fish in the summer months. This was one of the reasons for this village being a favourite meeting place of the Sangathan. But on April 2nd 2001 the village was devoid of any people, who had all left to join the roadblock further down the road. So at ten am in the morning when a long cavalcade of cars, jeeps and vans made its way into the village they found no one there. The cavalcade instead of going down the road towards the hundreds of people amassed a kilometre or two further down and engaging in a dialogue with them cavalierly swerved into the village and immediately set about with power driven saws and axes cutting down the timber poles on which the houses had been constructed. While the poles were being cut these marauders went about catching the chicken and looting the grains and other possessions that were there in these houses. The District Collector, Superintendent of Police and Divisional Forest Officer all looked on as this grossly illegal looting went on.

The people waiting down the road were angered by this callous attitude of the officials and rushed to the village to prevent this outrage only to be met by a hail of bullets as they came within range. Nevertheless they tried to press on towards the marauders only to face more bullets, which killed four of their comrades. Seeing the futility of pressing on against an inhuman dispensation they withdrew with three of the bodies of the dead while one was taken away by the marauders. They brought the dead to Indore in a tractor trolley for post mortem and to tell the world about the depths which the administration in this country had plumbed to stamp out the rising tide of protest against its unjust functioning. I went along to the hospital with the people who were too deeply shocked and scared to be able to do anything to ensure that the post mortem did take place. I will never forget the crying wizened

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old face of Jermabhai a senior leader of the Sangathan whose son Balram had been killed as he said to me "What kind of a government is this that always wants to take away what little we adivasis have. Now they have taken away my son."

I was picked up by the police from the hospital and shunted into jail and the whole area near Udainagar was overrun with armed police. Tens of false cases were slapped on the main workers of the Sangathan and they had to go underground. That effectively put an end to the protests of the Sangathan. There was a lot of flak for the government as human rights organisations and the press reported the atrocities committed by the administration resulting in a lot of public censure. Other mass organisations in Madhya Pradesh too rallied round to try and provide support. But the sheer level of repression was so much that it scared most of the rank and file of the Sangathan in the absence of their leaders and it buckled under. In earlier such crackdowns I had always managed to avoid arrest and organised the counter protests but this time I was absolutely alone and the adivasis were in no shape to even talk to the administration and so I had to come forward which resulted in my immediate arrest and that put paid to any chances of organising mass protests against the illegal and murderous operation carried out by the state. Subhadra herself was under threat of arrest and for the sake of the safety of our seriously ill infant son she had to go underground instead of taking on the Herculean responsibility of tackling the state on her own at such a crucial juncture and that drove the final nail into the coffin of an inspiring and innovative burst of anarchist adivasi mass mobilisation that capped two decades of militant struggles in the western Madhya Pradesh region that had been initially kicked off with the strike of the labourers in Atthava village in Alirajpur tehsil way back in 1983.

Once in jail I was initially disconsolate that events had played themselves out in such a way that I could not give of my best at a time when I was most required to do so. Recalling the immense enthusiasm with which the people had greeted Deepsingh's suggestion just a few months ago in the meeting at Mehendikhera that we celebrate Tantia's martyrdom day and the tremendous groundswell of enthusiasm that celebration had created in the whole region and comparing it with the desolation that was bound to follow after the crushing blow delivered by the state at the same Mehendikhera, I could not help remembering the tragic circumstances of Alan Paton's heart rending novel on the grim reality of racist oppression in South Africa - "Cry, the Beloved Country" (Paton, 2003). There may not be de jure racism in India as there was in South Africa during the apartheid era but for the really poor adivasis who have not had any advantage of the meagre affirmative provisions and enabling laws and policies that are in place and have instead been forced to bear the huge environmental, economic and social costs of modern industrial development, the sad ground reality is that of a de facto racist rule. What else can be said of a political dispensation in which even at the highest levels of decision-making there is no understanding or sympathy for the desperate circumstances in which the Bhil adivasis are eking out their lives and their legitimate protests against their marginalisation are considered as a serious threat that needs to be snuffed out through such a cynical "Operation Clean".

The administration was shameless in its efforts to cover up its lawlessness. It first tried to pass off the illegality of its actions by claiming that the adivasis had planned to wage a war against the state inspired by Naxalites and had laid out mines to blow up the government force. When these accusations were proved to be patently false it said that the adivasis had been destroying the jungles and so the operation had to be carried out when in reality it was the adivasis who had blocked the logging of trees by the forest department. Despite various independent commissions of inquiry indicting the administration for having

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committed unwarranted atrocities no official judicial enquiry was instituted to investigate the incident. Instead an administrative inquiry by a senior IAS officer was conducted in a totally partisan manner absolving the district administration of all blame saying that since it had been given the order to "clean" the area of the Sangathan it had no choice but to adopt such draconian measures! It even said that the operation could have been carried out better if the adivasis had not been allowed to organise in protest (Bose, 2002)!

An organisation of adivasis, working within the legal limits set by the laws of the land, is first declared to be waging a war against the state without any legal procedure being followed to factually establish such a serious charge and then it is obliterated through a sudden secret armed operation without being given a chance to refute the charges being brought against it. And the highest decision makers in the state sanctioned these illegal actions. The preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of which the Indian Government is a signatory says "... it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law "(Morsink, 2000). The politicians of all hues, the civil service bureaucrats, the police and the local level judiciary all combined to facilitate a gross violation of the rule of law in Mehendikhera. No wonder then that adivasis in independent India have been and continue to be in perpetual rebellion against various mining, dam and industrialisation projects that have been and are continuing to be implemented at a breakneck speed all over the country regardless of the brute force they have faced in the many Mehendikheras that have taken place.

Just after this Bondar was finally given a lighter sentence of a fine of five thousand rupees by the High Court instead of the three-year jail sentence given earlier by the sessions court in Dewas. He did not have the money to pay the fine and so he had to go to a sahukar, who once again charged him a very high interest rate, as the countervailing force of the sangathan was there no more. He had to send his son off to work as a servant in the fields of an upper caste landlord in the Malwa region to pay off the sahukar and avoid piling up a huge debt. So things have come back to square one after a brief adivasi interregnum in Udainagar.

Mhendikhera means a field of Mehendi plants from which an organic colouring is extracted for decorating the palms of women on auspicious and happy occasions. There are a lot of big mango trees in one of its fields which made this village the favourite spot for holding many a meeting and workshop when the Sangathan was building up. The women in fact formalised their attempts at colouring their own drab lives by constituting the first adivasi women's mass organisation, Kansari Nu Vadavno, under these trees. Well it has now become a blood coloured graveyard in which my anarchist dreams have finally been laid to rest under the worldwide web of greed and rapacity that fuels modern industrial development. The Bhil adivasis have a proverb that says that one should never catch a tiger by its tail because then it will turn around and eat you up with its mouth. In retrospect our attempt to wag the tiger of the modern Indian state by organising its adivasi tail was equally foolhardy and so we ended up being devoured by the state!

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Chapter 28 - The Treasure of Terra Madre

The yawning gap between the traditional adivasi worldview and that of modern humans is most succinctly brought out by a quaint story set in Mexico. There was an indigenous tribal there who used to weave eye-catching baskets out of a weed dyed in organically prepared colours. An American businessman on seeing these baskets immediately saw a market for them back home in New York as containers for chocolates. Since the baskets were selling at a cent a piece, he expected to make a commercial kill and asked the tribal to weave him ten thousand baskets at a discounted price. The tribal after some thought answered that he would sell the baskets at a hundred dollars a piece. When the startled American asked why he was asking such a high price the tribal replied that in making ten thousand baskets in so short a time he would permanently exhaust the sources of the weeds and dyes and so lose his livelihood. So to make up for this permanent loss he would have to charge the higher price.

The answer of modern humans to this sound environmental logic of the adivasis has been to forcibly dispossess them of the natural wealth they have so wisely husbanded and then use it up recklessly disregarding the future consequences. The tragedy in Mehendikhera came in a long line of such tragedies that first began with the Columbian encounter between these conflicting worldviews in the Bahamas all of five centuries ago. The Europeans came out victors in that first fateful confrontation because of two crucial developments that occurred at about that time that gave them a clear advantage over the rest of the world. The first was the invention of a better flintlock gun using "corned" gunpowder (Wakeman, 2006). Even though gunpowder had been invented long back its reliability and power remained low and the guns and cannons that used it too were inefficient. While the process of corning improved the quality of gunpowder, the flintlock mechanism increased the efficiency of guns and the two together gave the Europeans a tremendous advantage over their opponents in warfare. The second was the Polish scientist Copernicus's revolutionary hypothesis that the earth moved round the sun (Vollmann, 2006) which set off the modern observation and analysis based method of scientific enquiry into the working of the universe, challenging the animistic conception of it being controlled by divine forces and culminating in Newton's laws of mechanics later in the seventeenth century.

The imperial mastery of European nations over their colonies resulted in huge amounts of capital accumulation in these countries for the funding of industrial production with the help of machines invented with the application of scientific methods which also improved hygiene and medicinal practices and freed human beings from the fatal grasp of killer diseases like small pox, malaria, cholera, plague and the like. Thus from the eighteenth century onwards there began a phenomenal spurt in world population and economic wealth, the former growing from about 500 million in 1600 to 1.5 billion in 1900 and 6.5 billion in 2000 and the latter from an average annual per capita income of 700 \$ (International Value of 1990) in 1600 to 1000 \$ (International Value of 1990) in 1900 and 5700 \$ (International Value of 1990) in 2000 (Maddison, 2001). The immense resources required for this phenomenal growth considerably increased the devastation of nature by leaps and bounds. Thus an exploitative world system developed, that continues to this day, in which these processes had an uneven effect with the excess population of Europe being exported to the other continents and the latter economies being forced into a relationship of unequal exchange wherein their human and natural resources were bought cheaply by the European economies which sold their manufactures and services dearly to these colonies. Later the

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settlers in North America and Australia freed themselves from European domination and joined them in exploiting the rest of the world (Wallerstein, 2004).

The two crucial factors responsible for sustaining this developmental surge over the past four centuries or so have been the supply of cheap food in adequate quantity for the vastly increased population and natural resources for the ever-increasing needs of industry and trade. The most important natural resources were fossil fuels, which provided the energy to run the machines, which tremendously improved the productivity of human labour. Crude oil and natural gas have now become the most important of natural resources as they not only are the main providers of energy but are also the raw materials for a variety of other products like plastics, fibres, chemical fertilisers, pesticides and drugs that have become indispensable to the modern industrial economy. Europe in this expansionary developmental phase was deficient in both food and natural resources and also in providing a big enough market for the products of industrialisation and so relied heavily on its military control of the rest of the world. As we have seen this led to inter-imperialist rivalry between European countries for the control of the colonies beginning with the Anglo-Spanish wars of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the Anglo-French wars of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and ending with the two World Wars of the twentieth century.

Indeed military power is so indispensable for the continuance of modern industrial development that despite Japan being on the verge of defeat at the fag end of World War II, the United States of America dropped two nuclear bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 to cynically underline its superiority in the emerging world order. This sparked off a nuclear arms race subsequently with more and more nations including India and Pakistan gradually acquiring nuclear arms capability. Thus it ill befits the US now to threaten action against Iran and North Korea because they too want to follow suit and put the whole planet in risk of extinction. Robert Oppenheimer, one of the scientists who were part of the team that designed the first test nuclear bomb that was set off in Los Alamos in Nevada, is reported to have been so overawed by the sight of the flames pluming into the sky as to have uttered a couplet from the Bhagvad Gita - "Brighter than a thousand suns is the effulgence of the supreme spirit"(Jungk, 1970). Unfortunately this radiant brightness of the modern God of industrial development also has an equally dark shadow of a probable nuclear winter that can shut out the sun's rays from the earth for months on end in case of a world wide nuclear war. While the rest of us must keep our fingers crossed that this does not happen, the indigenous tribals living near the Nevada test site and the Utah waste nuclear fuel site in the USA and those in the remote South Pacific atolls have already been forced into a hell of deadly nuclear irradiation from the fallout of hundreds of nuclear test bombs that have been set off over the years by the USA, UK and France in what is perhaps the most blatant exhibition of the racism that has been part and parcel of modern industrial development ever since the Columbian encounter (Salvador, 1999).

The Second World War saw the USA amassing huge surpluses from the sale of food and arms and ammunitions to its European allies, which along with the axis powers were devastated totally at the end of it. Thus the military - industrial - agricultural complex that emerged in the United States of America during the war was in danger of collapsing in the post war era unless the shattered economies of Europe and Japan were boosted up again. Moreover, the way in which the Soviet Union had overrun Eastern Europe and established a socialist bastion also preyed on the minds of the capitalists in Europe and America. So a massive transfer of resources through outright grants were made by the USA to its allies and to the defeated axis powers to rebuild the world capitalist economy (Milward, 1984). Trade

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and not imperial preference was to be the new watchword of capitalist development and so many countries including India were gradually given freedom and they were sold the spiel that they were on a lower stage of growth than the developed nations of the capitalist world and all they had to do was open up their economies and follow the path of market led and high mass consumption driven development being prescribed by the developed capitalist nations (Rostow, 1960). The "unholy trinity" of The World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which was later to become the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1994, were set up to oversee this reworked capitalist world system and ensure that the exploitation of human and natural resources continued unabated (Peet, 2003).

So the ground rules for a new kind of colonialism orchestrated by the Multinational Corporations and backed by the military might of the USA were put in place with international institutions to oversee their implementation and the worldview of consumerist modern development personified by the American wanting to buy colourful weed baskets to sell chocolates in was popularised throughout the world. Unlike the wise Mexican tribal in our story the leaders of the poor countries, like our own Jawaharlal Nehru, happily became acolytes of this new religion and started their modern temple building with gusto. The MNCs of the capitalist countries led by the American ones crisscrossed the globe penetrating hitherto untouched areas and buying off the baskets of the adivasis cheaply and selling them all kinds of products and services from the cities at an exorbitant price. Aid and loans were given to the poor countries so that they could buy these goods and services but this was in miniscule proportion to the surpluses that were taken out by the MNCs through trade and other financial skulduggery (George, 1990).

Initially immediately after the war the USA was faced with the problem of reorienting the production of its massive war oriented industry and agriculture. This was done on the one hand by making civilian cars, trucks, planes and cargo ships instead of armoured vehicles and on the other by transforming the explosive manufacturing units into fertiliser and pesticide producing units. Obviously so many cars, planes and ships and so much fertiliser and pesticide could not be consumed by the Americans alone and so the high flying consumerist lifestyle of cars and private jets and heavy eating of processed meat and cereals was spread all over the world and a market created for these products. Cattle can eat much more cereals than human beings and so the people of the developed world were encouraged to eat the former and the people of the poorer countries were fed the excess cereals resulting from increased use of fertilisers and pesticides along with the cattle (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989). A significant development was the worldwide adoption of soybean at the behest of the Americans who pushed its exports and cultivation through cheap aid to developing countries so as to provide cheap feed for beef production and also cheap edible oil for processing this food into ready to eat marketable forms. Thus an artificially highly productive and environmentally unsustainable agricultural system was established worldwide backed by massive state subsidies. A golden era of capitalist development, booming on the production and sale of the "world car" and the "world steer" by MNCs, ensued in the nineteen fifties and nineteen sixties.

The party came to an end in the nineteen seventies with a double whammy being delivered by nature. Firstly the biologist Rachel Carson sounded the first warning cry in 1962 about the way in which chemicals and especially pesticides were causing immense environmental and health hazards thus sparking off the modern environmental movement and seriously questioning of the excessive gorging of the world steer (Carson, 2002). The

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tremendous groundswell of protests that followed led to the problem of environmental pollution resulting from modern development becoming a burning issue by the early nineteen seventies with the holding of the first United Nations Conference on Environment in Stockholm in 1972. Secondly the finiteness of the natural resources that were being so wantonly used up was driven home with the Arab crude oil producing countries increasing its price by a whopping four times in 1974 thus pushing the capitalist world economy into a deep recession by undermining the very basis of the world car. The ghost of nature which is being indiscriminately slaughtered to facilitate modern development and which had been seen but wished away by all the classical political economist Horatios from Adam Smith to Karl Marx has finally come back to haunt the modern Princes of Denmark with the demand that they stop this "foul and most unnatural murder"! (Shakespeare, 2003)

Ever since then our modern day princes whether from the sphere of politics or from that of business have been confronted with a situation, which is characterised in political economy as a prisoner's dilemma (Poundstone, 1992). In the classical form it goes like this - two suspects are arrested by the police who have insufficient evidence for a conviction and having separated both prisoners, visit each of them to offer the same deal: if one testifies for the prosecution against the other and the other remains silent, the betrayer goes free and the silent accomplice receives the full 10-year sentence. If each betrays the other, each will receive a two-year sentence. If both stay silent, the police cannot get the prisoners sentenced because of lack of sufficient evidence but they do not reveal this to the prisoners. Each prisoner must make the choice of whether to betray the other or to remain silent. However, neither prisoner knows for sure what choice the other prisoner will make and also that they will both go scot free if they both keep mum. So the question this dilemma poses is: How should the prisoners act? Since one prisoner does not know what the other is going to do and the prisoner who remains silent will be made to bear the whole prison term if the other prisoner squeals, the tendency is for both prisoners to betray and so get sentenced.

In the case of modern humans faced with the choice between environmental sustainability and modern development this dilemma takes a form in which if all people cooperate and keep their consumption within safe limits and redistribute drastically the immense wealth that has already been created instead of blindly going on accumulating further wealth then both nature and human beings will survive. If, however, some people limit their consumption while others go on satisfying their greed then those taking the saner environmentalist path will be the losers as they will be pauperised even more by the rapacious policies being followed by the greedy ones. The best example of this of course are the adivasis who have been continuously dispossessed of their lands for the purpose of modern development. Faced with the serious economic and environmental crisis brought on in the nineteen seventies the MNCs which straddle global production, finance and trade put pressure on the US Government, the World Bank and the IMF to push a policy, known as the "Washington Consensus" that would further open up the economies of the developing countries to exploitation through free flows of finance and commodities which has plunged most of these economies further into debt and stagnation (Williamson, 2003).

Since the MNCs and the world's rich people are refusing to follow a saner environmental path and pushing the world towards an inevitable environmental disaster which will kill everyone anyway the tendency is for all people rich and poor, even the once environmentally wise adivasis, to consume as much as they can lay their hands on leading to ever increasing and irreparable environmental damage. We are all borrowing indiscriminately from the future and spending in the present and so sentencing ourselves to rocking in the

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jailhouse! Thus despite the overwhelming rhetoric of bringing about environmental sustainability that has been piously mouthed by the modern day Hamlets at the environment conferences held by the United Nations at the beginning of every decade, there is little real cooperation between them on the ground to limit consumption and collectively "be" and instead they are all merrily competing with each other to bring about the "quietus" of the human race with the "bare bodkin" of environmental destruction! Whereas the Prince of Denmark had only feigned madness our modern Hamlets are well and truly insane!

So enamoured are the global decision makers of the market led profit oriented capitalist system which is now being followed worldwide with the exception of Cuba that markets have now been created for trading carbon and water credits under the Clean Development Mechanism through which MNCs of the developed countries can compensate for the pollution and devastation they cause by buying these credits from companies or NGOs in the developing countries who do positive things like tree planting and building water and soil conservation structures to absorb the polluting gases or compensate for the water and soil depletion (Baumert et al, 2000). Earlier to this an effort was initiated through the Global Environment Facility involving the United Nations and the World Bank to provide funds to tackle the problems arising from global warming, biodiversity loss, maritime pollution and ozone layer depletion once again without questioning the paramountcy of the market led growth paradigm (GEF, 1998). Earlier still the trend started of calculating the economic costs of environmental pollution and degradation and working them into the calculations of overall costs before determining profits (Dasgupta & Heal, 1979). All these approaches give primacy to the competitive and environmentally wasteful market mechanism and relegate cooperative activity to the peripheral work done by NGOs and are flawed by the inevitable play of economic power in the marketplace which leads to cooked up calculations of costs and skewed terms of trade against the poor making the latter the recipients of not more than a subsistence dole or not even that in lieu of which they have to bear with such environmental disasters as the Bhopal Gas Leak apart from the continuing displacement due to big dams and forest sequestration. Anyone who dares to step out of line is given the stick in no uncertain terms as we have seen.

All this has had a devastating effect on Indian agriculture and the millions of people who are dependent on it for their livelihoods. The vast majority of farmers in India cultivate small plots of land on terrain that is unsuitable for flood irrigation and they have traditionally been driven by the desire to produce for subsistence rather than for profit. They have over thousands of years developed a system of agriculture that makes the most of the locally available resources in terms of seeds, organic fertilisers, soil moisture and natural pest management. This led Sir Albert Howard, the pioneer of modern organic farming who did most of his work in Indore, to remark some sixty years ago, "What is happening today in the small fields of India ... took place many centuries ago. The agricultural practices of the orient have passed the supreme test, they are as permanent as those of the primeval forest, of the prairie, or of the ocean" (Howard, 1940). The clever use of rotation of a bewildering variety of crops ensured that despite flood and drought some part of the harvest was always saved. Famines occurred not because of the failure of agriculture but because of socio-economic factors such as excessive levies by kings and colonial rulers or due to usury and hoarding by *sahukars* (Patnaik, 1991). Indeed the levying of excessive taxes and usury have been a severe constraining factor on the development of agriculture all over the world from ancient times and in India this was intensified greatly because the *sahukar* doubled up as the tax-collector

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also, resulting in one Bhili proverb that goes - "I love the Sahukar so much that I have given him a fat belly" (Hardiman, 2000).

Thus what was necessary after independence in India was to remove the obstacles in the path of development of this traditional agriculture and strengthen it with further research, extensive land reforms, cheap institutionalised credit and market support. Studies have shown that the indigenous agricultural practices of India, which have been honed by farmers over the centuries, are as productive as the HYV seeds and artificial input based green revolution agriculture (Richharia & Govindaswamy, 1990). But this was not to be because the Americans had in the meanwhile since the nineteen thirties devised a new model of industrial agriculture in which hybrid seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, big dam irrigation and machines were used to ramp up agricultural production with huge state subsidies which eventually went to the corporations which not only supplied these inputs but also owned most of the farms and traded in the outputs. So farm gate prices remained low leaving the actual small farmers who had always struggled against usury like elsewhere in the world no alternative but to gradually sell out and become unemployed leading to tremendous destitution (Wessel & Hantman, 1983). Moreover, the post World War II urgency to sell the excess production of fertilisers, pesticides, tractors and trucks arising from the reorientation of production in plants from explosives and armoured vehicles necessitated the replication of the American agricultural system worldwide.

So at the behest of the research foundations set up by American MNCs and with financial support provided by the World Bank and the money from the exports of American wheat to India which were recycled for this purpose the American agricultural pattern was promoted with the introduction of foreign hybrid varieties of wheat and rice as green revolution agriculture in the late nineteen sixties in a few pockets in the country leaving the other areas literally high and dry. The Americans forced the Indian government to forcibly sideline Indian agricultural scientists who had developed indigenous strains and opposed this introduction of foreign hybrids (Richharia, 1986). This form of agriculture has now become problematical throughout the world because of reasons to be discussed a little later and can be continued only through the provision of massive state subsidies to the MNCs that produce its inputs and trade in its outputs. The direct government subsidy to agriculture in the USA peaked in the year 2000 to US\$ 30 billion and constituted about 40% of the net cash income derived by it. The biggest 10% of the recipients of these state subsidies, which are big corporations, which included billionaires like the media mogul Ted Turner, cornered 65% of this huge amount (Riedl, 2004). Somewhat in the same way as our own movie star Amitabh Bacchan has got himself recorded as a farmer to be able to own large tracts of agricultural land that he does not himself cultivate. A less dramatic but similar state of affairs prevails in Europe. In this way the comparative advantage that the third world countries have in the agricultural sector is not only neutralised but the excess production thus achieved is dumped in those countries devastating their agriculture. In fact the current Doha round of trade negotiations of the WTO has brought out as never before the hollowness and hypocrisy of the WTO's claims of promoting "free trade" and it is deadlocked at the moment because the developed countries are refusing to reduce these subsidies.

According to an estimate the input subsidies in India's case had reached the unsustainable level of 164.02% of the central government's planned annual expenditure on agriculture by 1992 (Gulati & Sharma, 1995). When the subsidy that was being given in the form of free electricity and free water from dams and for the procurement of the produce of the farmers at artificially supported high prices is also taken into account the long-term

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economic un-sustainability of this agriculture was inevitable. Unlike in the USA a greater proportion of the subsidies in India were going to the actual farmers big and small. The pursuit of economic liberalisation from the nineteen nineties and financial constraints forced the Indian Government to drastically reduce the quantum of subsidies in agriculture, investment in irrigation, price support and budgetary support for cheap institutional credit to the farmers (Vaidyanathan, 2000). This withdrawal of support came precisely at the time when green revolution agriculture was beginning to fail. The main problem with artificial input agriculture is that there is a natural limit to the artificial inputs that the soil can take and so the amount of fertilisers, pesticides and water to be applied goes on increasing while the yields go on falling and sometimes the crop fails altogether. Consequently the economic costs go on increasing while the realisation of the value of agricultural products in the market does not keep pace (Rahul & Nellithanam, 1998). Inevitably this leads to farmers falling into the clutches of saukars and spiralling debt. The crisis has now assumed serious proportions with thousands upon thousands of farmers having committed suicides, sold their lands, houses and even their kidneys (Bhagwat, 2006). Things have come to such a sorry pass that forty percent of the respondent farmers expressed the desire to give up farming and take up other professions in a survey conducted by the National Sample Survey Organisation of the Government of India in 2003 (NSSO, 2005).

This collapse of the agricultural sector, not only in India but also all over the developing world, has created a parallel problem of massive seasonal or permanent migration from the rural areas to the cities which offer comparatively better livelihood opportunities due to the greater investments taking place there. However, once there these migrants occupy the base of the occupational pyramid earning only subsistence wages. So even after working for a considerable time these people cannot afford to buy legal accommodation and other civic amenities and so have to live in illegal slums without proper drinking water and sanitation facilities continually under the threat of eviction. Given the severe lack of resources with governments for the provision of proper infrastructure in these slums and the pressures from private property developers to displace them and build high value buildings instead, urban sustainability has become the newest challenge for development planners (UN HABITAT, 2003). In the developed countries on the other hand there is the problem of inner city decay as regular manufacturing jobs are decreasing due to the shift of manufacture from these countries to the developing countries leaving the once comfortable working class in dire straits doing casual menial jobs for a living and unable to maintain their homes any more. The affluent people are moving out of the cities to the suburbs thus reducing the tax base of urban governments and their capacity to renew the inner city areas (Harvey, 1989). So the movement of capital is creating problems in both the rural as well as the urban areas all over the world by changing the structure of the global economy in ways that harm the poor.

The tremendous economic and political power of MNCs like Monsanto, Dupont, Syngenta, Dow and Bayer, which are directly or indirectly in control of the input industries, the agricultural processing industry and marketing entities that make up the agriculture cum food chain has meant that instead of turning to more sustainable agricultural practices the crisis in modern agriculture is being sought to be solved through the application of even higher and far more costly bio-technology (Hendrickson, 2005). This involves further state subsidies given the higher levels of funding required for the expensive research and application techniques involved and also uncharted environmental dangers resulting from gene tampering. The American MNCs' maniacal obsession with promoting more and more beef eating worldwide as the panacea for the ills of the inevitable market slumps that hound

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capitalism has now manifested itself in the development of genetically engineered Bovine Growth Hormones to push up beef production which has driven the cows also mad! The continuing loss of natural bio-diversity, the concentration of genes of landraces in the hands of MNCs and patenting of life forms by them have together created a serious danger of the future of the planet being permanently mortgaged to their greed for profits (Shiva, 2001).

While the Americans have become obese from this over consumption of beef and are suffering from a number of physical and mental disorders as a result, the Bhil adivasis in Madhya Pradesh have become proportionately under nourished so as to be able to provide for this overeating of the former. With the reduction in the acreage under coarser cereals and pulses which have been replaced by soybean and the greater monetisation of the rural economy, the marginal adivasi farmers have had to buy their food from the market instead of getting it cheaply from their farms and this has reduced their nutritional levels well below healthy standards (Khaperde, 2001). Thus they have become sufferers of the problem of chronic hunger that today engulfs the poor in much of the developing world and even in the developed countries because the shrinking of livelihood opportunities has meant that they are not able to earn enough to buy wholesome and adequate food (Dreze & Sen, 1989). So the supply of cheap food to all, which is a basic requirement of running a capitalist economy is in jeopardy because nature has been ravaged beyond repair by the artificial input based agriculture for profit that has been intensively practised since the Second World War.

This deep tragedy of the ever-present hunger of the poor has been cynically parodied in a farce that is being enacted in Madhya Pradesh under the auspices of the cigarette manufacturer, Indian Tobacco Company (ITC). Faced with severe and increasing restrictions on the sale of cigarettes the company has diversified into the processed food and hospitality businesses. As a support to these ventures it has an International Business Division, which trades along with other agricultural unprocessed and processed products in soybean feed and soy oil in the international markets. To cut down on the costs of procuring soybeans through middlemen it launched a direct purchasing initiative called "e-choupal" or electronic agricultural markets in Madhya Pradesh. It set up Internet kiosks in villages where the farmers could get to know the price being offered for their soybean crop on a particular day by ITC. This price was more than what the farmers would get from the traders but considerably less than what the ITC would have had to pay to these traders to procure soybean from them. The catch was that the farmers would have to book their sale at that price with the agent running the kiosk and then transport their produce to the collecting centre, which was far away and get their payment there. This meant that only large farmers could avail of this opportunity as for small farmers the transportation cost would be prohibitive. So effectively what has happened is that the small farmers have continued to sell to the local traders at lower prices and the latter have then sold to the ITC! The big traders in the cities who used to supply to ITC earlier have lost out and so have raised Cain about this system. Moreover the e-choupals are now being used as platforms for marketing various products and services of the industrial sector including genetically modified seeds, pesticides and fertilisers. Thus the e-choupal has benefited ITC the most with windfall profits, the big farmers too have benefited somewhat and also the chemical and food sector MNCs who have now been able to integrate a peripheral agricultural region into the international capitalist economy while the small farmer adivasis have been left in a bigger lurch than before as the acreage under soybean has gone on increasing making them more and more dependent on the market for their food. The black comedy is that this fraud being perpetrated in the name of benefiting small farmers, has been hailed by a management guru as a great new rural

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development initiative that will solve their problems (Prahlad, 2006). This is a typical example of Corporations spending miniscule amounts in ostensibly developmental initiatives that actually increase their access to remoter and remoter areas and so increase their profits. The e-choupal initiative has been awarded a prize of 100,000 US \$ in 2005 by the Development Gateway Foundation in the USA for having supposedly used information technology to enhance the incomes of poor farmers. Since in reality the incomes of poor farmers has not increased the prize must actually have been given to ITC for having ensured the supply of soymeal and uninterrupted gorging of roasted beef by the Americans!

The biggest problem arising from the adoption of green revolution agriculture, however, has been that of the increasing scarcity of water. Most of the water needed for irrigation in India is being provided by groundwater extraction and this has led to a situation of "water mining" wherein water collected in the deep confined aquifers over hundreds of thousands of years were used up in the space of a decade and large parts of the country have been facing a ground water drought from the nineteen nineties onwards (CGWB, 1995). Since then there has been less and less ground water available for not only irrigation but also for drinking and the cost of its extraction is continually going up. Big dams, however, are the environmentally and socially most harmful component of the green revolution package and have come in for serious criticism in recent years and dam construction has been totally halted in the developed countries with some dams even having been broken in the USA to limit environmental damage. The World Bank, which has been a major funder of dams worldwide, was forced by public criticism arising from the fiasco of its funding of the Sardar Sarovar Dam to constitute a World Commission on Dams to review the performance of big dams, which has submitted a comprehensive report (WCD, 2000). The report brings out the fact that the benefits in terms of irrigation and power gained from big dam construction have been at an unacceptable and unnecessary higher cost in terms of environmental destruction and human displacement. There has been lack of equity in both the distribution of benefits and costs with the poor having lost out on both counts. Considering the increasing importance of conservation and harvesting of water resources the WCD has recommended that in future people's participation in these processes should be made mandatory so that more effective and less harmful solutions to the problems in this sphere can be worked out.

Worldwide there is a burgeoning movement in ecological farming combined with local area watershed development that has come up as a reaction to the deleterious effects of modern agriculture. This movement is theoretically underpinned by the green ideology of development in harmony with nature and at its own leisurely pace. Many localised efforts have thrown up viable solutions to the intransigent problems created by unsustainable agricultural production and inequity in the distribution of benefits and costs of water resource development (TWN, 1990). In the western Madhya Pradesh region too there have been successful localised experiments in this sphere and a blueprint for the development of sustainable dry-land agriculture backed up by local area watershed development involving the poor in project formulation and implementation has been drawn up (Shah et al, 1998). Thus the comprehensive decentralised solutions to the problems of agricultural sustainability and the resulting threat to food and livelihood security of the poor are there, waiting to be adopted on a large scale. However, the World Bank acting as a front for the interests of the MNCs sees decentralised natural resource management only as a tool for the mitigation of the harmful effects of globalised industrial development and participatory group formation as a means of deflecting the discontent arising from this (World Bank, 1996). Given its near total hegemony over development thinking it is not surprising that governments and institutions all

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over the world follow its lead in not questioning the centrality of capitalist industrial development and only pursue decentralisation and sustainable development as a safety valve to let off the steam that is continually boiling up as a result of the former.

Faced with the reality of the destitution of billions of people and not being prepared to jettison the centralised industrial development paradigm the World Bank has embarked on yet another fraudulent game of wishing away the extent of this poverty by arbitrarily defining a poverty line consumption expenditure equivalent to the value of US \$ 1 in 1986 and then doing some dubious statistical estimating of the number of people below it from time to time to show that over the decade of the nineteen nineties the absolute numbers of people below this poverty line has decreased (Pogge & Reddy, 2006). The Indian Government too has not remained behind in this game. Dubious assumptions and calculations have been resorted to by the Planning Commission so as to show a decline in the poverty head count over the period of economic liberalisation in the nineteen nineties (Ray & Lancaster, 2005). This theatre of the absurd has reached the stage where the results of the actual household survey carried out for the purpose of the distribution of Below Poverty Line Ration Cards to those who are eligible for cheaper food grains from the Public Food Distribution System in accordance with the orders of the Supreme Court has been doctored so as to make the actual poverty head count tally with that calculated by the Planning Commission!

All this statistical jugglery was not able to hide the stark reality of increasing poverty due to the failure of structural adjustment policies adopted by developing countries in consonance with the Washington Consensus in the nineteen eighties which became evident by the end of that decade (Zuckerman, 1991). This led the World Bank to review these policies and search for ways in which “growth with equity” could be ensured and poverty “attacked” (World Bank, 2000). One major failure that was pinpointed was the inability of financial institutions like banks and credit cooperative societies to address the credit needs of those living in poverty. This led to the search for alternative modes of credit delivery. The initial success of some NGO initiatives in providing easy access to credit to the poor in Bangladesh and Indonesia and a consequent reduction in their economic vulnerability, was picked up and modified by the World Bank and formalised into a model to be replicated worldwide and so the micro-finance boom of the nineteen nineties was kicked off.

Informal rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCA) have existed from medieval times for meeting the short-term credit needs of the poor. However, they cannot build up a continually increasing fund that can over time address the heavier long-term credit needs and so obviate the need to go to the usurer. In this respect the self-help groups (SHG) formed under the micro-finance initiatives are definitely an improvement as they have an accumulative component. Moreover, by linking up with banks these groups can access greater amounts of credit than would have been possible on the strength of their own savings. This linking up with banks and the consequent reduction in the transaction costs of credit delivery by financial institutions to a marginal clientele and better loan recovery through the use of group pressure has been publicised as the distinguishing feature of the micro-finance movement of the nineteen nineties (CGAP, 2003). However, unlike as in the case of the informal ROSCA the operation of SHGs requires formal rules and paperwork which increases with time as do the legal requirements. So while the former can easily be run on their own by communities of people who are illiterate or semi-literate the successful operation of the latter by such groups and especially by adivasis requires the intermediation of NGOs with adequate socially oriented financial expertise. Moreover, the basic economic weakness of the poor and their inability to cope with the expanding market system means that

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micro-finance by itself has not been a self sustaining intervention for bringing about an improvement in the condition of the poor (Dichter, 2006).

The experience of the operation of micro-finance worldwide has shown that with proper intermediation by NGOs this paradigm does improve the access of previously deprived poor populations to institutionalised credit with the reduction of transaction costs and so reduces their economic vulnerability (NABARD, 1999). However, if the costs of this crucial intermediation by NGOs in the formation and operation of SHGs, which is at present being met by outright grants or by the supply of subsidised credit from funding agencies, are factored in, then the economics of micro-finance begins to wobble. Thus without grant support the long-term viability of micro-finance is in doubt and with it micro-finance stands in danger of being overwhelmed by self-defeating bureaucratisation through its institutionalisation. The SHG members have little control over the actions of the NGOs and their sponsors. Without proper regulation there have already been cases of the funds saved by the poor from their meagre earnings being misappropriated by unscrupulous NGOs and non-banking financial companies who have resorted to disguised usury (BL, 2006).

The net result of this massive propaganda and funding by the World Bank and the central and state governments of a revamped version of green revolution agriculture has been that the ordinary farmers in this country are unable to pursue more sustainable agricultural alternatives as the switch from the one to the other takes time and money. The ground reality in the western Madhya Pradesh region is that the bigger farmers are still trying to continue in the green revolution regime and diversifying into the farming of fruits, horticulture and other cash crops and then storing the produce in cold storages with the intention of trading through the national commodity exchange but as yet with uncertain incomes. The smaller farmers and especially the adivasis have followed suit in a half-baked manner by switching to soybean cultivation at the behest of ITC and are contributing to the environmentally destructive production of the world steer. Bava of Jalsindhi, despite the moving deep ecological letter he wrote to the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, has in reality become a shrewd man who has perforce to cleverly exploit the market to his advantage to survive. The market is inexorably penetrating into every corner of the world and hastening the depletion and pollution of nature.

After getting control of her share of her ancestral land in Jepra in 1999 Subhadra decided to revive the cultivation of the highly tasty, nutritious and scented indigenous Dubraj rice on it. After the first harvest came in, I packed two bags of twenty-five kilograms each with the rice and I took them with me to Indore. When I got down from the bus in Raipur and lugged these bags on to a cycle rickshaw to take them to the railway station, the rickshaw puller said to me " Babuji, you are taking Dubraj rice in these bags." I was surprised because the bags had been double packed and there was no outward sign that they contained rice. So I asked the rickshaw puller how he knew and he replied that he had got the scent of the rice. My city-bred nose had missed what this rickshaw-puller could scent and he went on to lament that he too had once grown Dubraj rice on his land but had been forced to sell out because of debt and now he was pulling a rickshaw for a living. Not many people grew Dubraj any more he said because it required a lot of tending and its yield was low compared to other varieties. He wondered how I, who obviously was a city dweller and could not even recognise the scent, had laid my hands on this rice little knowing that I was married to a person made of more earthy stuff! Unfortunately in later years Subhadra could not go to Jepra regularly to supervise the cultivation of her land because of the birth of our son and so her brother promptly switched to a hybrid variety, which was easier to cultivate and sell. This is what the market has done to agriculture and rural society in India. To break this destructive march

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towards environmental and social collapse it is necessary to proceed towards an “economy of permanence” (Kumarappa, 1984), which respects both nature and the human being and prioritises leisurely decentralised communitarian living based on the collective local consumption and husbanding of renewable resources over the frenetic non-renewable resource guzzling pulls of globalised market led industrialisation.

This can provide the rural poor with sustainable livelihood opportunities for wholesome living while at the same time reorienting centralised industrialisation to the fulfilling of the needs of the majority and so deciding the kind of science and technology to be pursued. This will in turn ensure a much more peaceful world than at present and obviate the heavy and wasteful expenditures being incurred worldwide on the military and the police. Expecting this to happen, however, is as distant a dream as that of really finding a Mexican tribal who could answer the American businessman like the one in our story. The author of the story Berick Traven, was a mysterious German revolutionary anarchist and novelist who from the nineteen twenties onwards led a reclusive life in the Chiapas jungles of Mexico which were later in the nineteen nineties to witness the uprising of the Zapatista National Liberation Army. He is best known for his allegorical novel "The Treasure of the Sierra Madre" (Traven, 1980), which was later made into an Oscar winning film in 1948 by the American director John Huston and has been acclaimed as the best portrayal ever of what greed can do to human beings. Three down and out Americans in Mexico go to the Sierra Madre Mountain to search for gold and strike it rich. Then begins the drama as one of the prospectors, Dobbs, becomes greedy and wants to take more of the gold than the others. This makes the other two also greedy and they all begin distrusting each other in a typical playing out of the prisoner's dilemma. Then Dobbs runs away with all the gold dust after shooting and wounding one of his fellows while the other has gone away on some work. But he meets Mexican bandits on the way who kill him for his pants, boots and guns but throw away the gold dust thinking it to be sand. These bandits are later apprehended by the police and shot to death. A dust storm rises and disperses the gold dust all over the earth from where it had been extracted. All the treasure accumulated is lost and the greedy men die violent deaths.

Like Dobbs and his mates the modern tycoons have been accumulating the treasure of mother earth, Terra Madre, over the past three centuries at an increasingly more hectic pace and have been killing the common people in the millions to do so either directly through war or indirectly through lack of employment and food. Today this accumulated wealth amounts to hundreds of trillions of dollars and is being traded non-stop round the clock with the help of Internet connectivity between stock and currency markets around the world. Indeed the value of this virtual trading, supported solidly as it is by the unholy trinity, exceeds by quite a few multiples the value of the trade in goods and services (Clairmont, 1994). In a typically cynical prisoner's dilemma response the world's biggest currency speculator George Soros, confronted with his actions having caused financial collapses in England, Eastern Europe and Thailand is reputed to have said that if he didn't do what he was doing then someone else would and that "As a market participant, I don't need to be concerned with the consequences of my actions."!(Soros, 2006). If, as is claimed, the sun never set over the British Empire, then currency trading never stops in the present day American one. This latter is imperialism of quite a few orders higher pedigree since in today's greedy world the radiance of money is brighter than that of a thousand suns! Speculating and mining for real gold pales in comparison to the speculation involved in this trading of virtual gold accumulated from mining nature.

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Unlike the dumb witted Dobbs who met his nemesis for being too greedy and not wanting to share anything with his partners and lost both his gold and his life, the modern tycoons have been cleverer by half and have thrown a few crumbs here and there, notably by funding NGOs, and so they continue to thrive by co-opting opposition. However, the ominous portents are not very encouraging regarding the indiscriminate mining of natural resources and the pollution of the biosphere which has now begun to threaten the two basic requirements of capitalist industrial development - the adequate and assured supply of cheap food and industrial raw materials. This has resulted in the emergence of what has been termed as the second contradiction of capitalism between the need to go on increasing production to maintain the level of profit and the limited supply of natural resources (O'Connor, 1997). While the first orthodox Marxist contradiction between the need to increase production and reduce labour costs leads to the periodic crises of overproduction due to demand getting constrained this second neo-Marxist contradiction gives rise to crises of production itself because of the supply of food and natural raw materials getting constrained. For those not inclined towards Marxist theories there is the Gaia hypothesis that is influential among environmentalists, named after the Greek Goddess of Earth, which posits that the earth is a live system like any living plant or animal and tries to control its various components so as to stay alive in the same way as a living organism does. According to this theory the earth has through the millennia acted in such a way as to keep itself alive even if it has meant sacrificing some of the living organisms on it (Lovelock, 2006). These theories may be debatable but their prognosis of revenge by mother earth on a profligate human race may well come true. Since nature cannot be co-opted by bribing, there is every chance of the environmental backlash that has begun in agriculture spreading to other spheres of the economy creating a situation wherein the future of the human race falls in jeopardy as Terra Madre begins to reclaim all the treasure that has been looted from her.

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Chapter 29 - Obsolescence of the Art of Daydreaming

One of the most tragic characters of twentieth century fiction is that of Rubashov in Arthur Koestler's disturbing novel "Darkness At Noon" (Koestler, 1984). Rubashov is a revolutionary who believes deeply in the Bolshevik project of bringing about a society free of exploitation to the extent that he not only supports the adoption of dubious means for achieving this end but also does in some of his close friends in the years after the revolution is successfully brought about before he is finally arrested himself and after a long interrogation executed. During the long incarceration before his execution he has a chance to reflect on his life. He remembers fondly his youth on his father's estate when he used to lie on the lawns and dream of bringing about a revolution followed by the establishing of an egalitarian socio-economic order. I read this novel in 1982 at a time when I was trying to find my future path and it was this romantic dreaming of the young Rubashov that impressed me most. I too began dreaming of doing something to improve matters for the poor and down trodden and eventually found my way to Jhabua.

Indeed in the modern era right from the sixteenth century political thinkers and activists have dreamt of establishing ideal societies. All the main political philosophies of our time - Liberalism, Marxism and Anarchism, of which last Gandhism is an Indian variant, were more or less well developed by the early years of the twentieth century and had the whole of that century to work themselves out in. In their ideal forms all these philosophies claim to be able to free humanity from the tyranny arising from the arbitrary use of power in centralised societies resulting essentially out of inequality of all kinds and most importantly of the economic kind. They have all, however, to a lesser or greater extent been blind to the exploitation and oppression of women by men leading the former to develop their own liberating philosophy of feminism. This promise of salvation from the purgatory of poverty and powerlessness for the vast majority has inspired generations of political activists to dream. However, like Rubashov, dreamers of all political hues, ending as we have seen with the activists of the mass environmental movements that began in India in the late nineteen seventies, have found the stark socio-economic reality to be extremely stubborn and not amenable to moulding in accordance with their dreams. Consequently one can't help wondering at the beginning of a new millennium whether the art of daydreaming hasn't finally become obsolete.

This tendency to daydream on the part of philosophers and political radicals is nothing but a subtler manifestation of the animism that has been a part of the human psyche for millions of years ever since language developed to the extent where human beings began to ponder on their separateness from the rest of nature and could not face up to the awesome thought that they and they alone were responsible for their destiny. In primitive times the inanimate winds, mountains, rivers and seas were all imbued with anthropomorphic spirits and colourful myths were created about their supernatural powers that controlled the destiny of the universe and so of human beings. Zeus in Greek and Rama in Hindu mythology are prime examples. This myth making has been the dominant trend in religion, art and literature through the ages and also in a more subtle form in philosophy and science where it is termed as teleology or the study of purpose or intelligent design in nature and human beings. But there has also been a philosophical counter current of myth breaking, which has held the key to human freedom over the millennia termed as naturalism, which denies the existence of Gods or any overarching purpose or design in nature. A brief tour of the history of the fascinating struggle that has waged through the ages between the mythmakers and myth

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breakers will help us in deciding whether the time hasn't come for the latter to take centre stage as far as radical socio-political activism is concerned.

Complications in history forcing human beings to abandon an anarchistic "state of nature" existence and begin travelling on the path of social development arose with the idea of property first communitarian and then private making an entry into the human realm. This for the first time pitted groups of humans against each other and led to murderous combats and even genocides. Later with the development of private property this conflict spread to individuals. Thus the institution of the state developed for groups to carry out military campaigns against each other and to arbitrate the conflicts arising out of property disputes between individuals within the group. The gradual marginalisation of women to being only child bearers and carers, which had begun earlier, increased with the need for specialised fighting skills to protect property. Later the need to ensure inheritance of property resulted in the institution of marriage both for the control of the sexuality of women to determine the parentage of children and their restriction within the home to take care of them till they became adults. This in turn gave rise to the institution of patriarchy, which formalised the domination and exploitation of women by men (Lerner, 1986). The Gods were then brought in to provide divine sanction to the new repressive institutions of the state, marriage and patriarchy and organised religion made its debut along with its priests.

The initial radical reactions to this false legitimisation through organised religion of the holding of property and the consequent bloodletting were from within the animist tradition and were included in the religious texts as an idealistic alternative - "they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Bible, Old Testament, Isaiah ii). Later still this idealism manifested itself in mystic spiritualism as in that of the Vedas (Sharma, 2000) and in idealistic philosophy as in that of Plato (Cooper & Hutchinson, 1997) in all of which the paramount nature of a supreme spirit or ideal, which directs the destiny of the world is acknowledged. Confucius in China too was part of this tradition advocating unselfishness, non-accumulation of property and compassion towards others while acknowledging the supremacy of God. However, these radical ideas, basically centred on reining in one's desires, were no match for the grosser idea of capricious Gods who were as greedy as human beings were and who could be supplicated for help in the fulfilment of this greed. Not surprisingly murder and mayhem in pursuit of property accumulation has continued in the name of religion with spiritualism and idealism having taken a back seat as far as influence over the average human mind is concerned.

There were other thinkers, however, who, about half a millennium before Christ, broke with the animist tradition, refused to accept the existence or direction of Gods and plumped for naturalism instead. Socrates was the first such person in the ancient Greek philosophical tradition (Taylor, 1999). He developed the dialectical question and answer method of enquiry through dialogues between a student and himself wherein all received wisdom was to be subjected to analysis as to whether it accorded with reality or not. He is reputed to have said - "One thing only I know and that is that I know nothing"! He had to die because he angered the elders by drawing the youth away from the temples with his agnosticism. Plato even though he was a student of Socrates and wrote down the dialogues later for posterity did not continue this wise critical tradition and instead plumped for "forms" that would provide ideal examples for human behaviour and conceived of an idealistic Republic where there would be no faults whatsoever. Plato in fact surreptitiously put down his own animistic ideas as being those of Socrates in the later dialogues giving rise to what is

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known as the "Socratic problem" of discrepancy between what was originally said by Socrates and something diametrically opposite that was later attributed to him by Plato. However, another student of Socrates, Antisthenes, who was not a voting citizen of Athens because he was either the son of a slave or a prostitute, not only carried forward this critical tradition but considerably enhanced it and handed it down to Diogenes of Sinope who gave it a definitive philosophical form (Branham & Goulet-Cazé eds, 1996).

Diogenes not only inveighed against Gods and received wisdom but also more importantly stressed that human beings should lead a life of hard labour in harmony with nature and not accumulate property. Thus Diogenes used to scrounge around, beg and because private property had no sanctity for him, even steal to get food and shout out at the better-heeled citizens of Athens for living in luxury. His aversion to anything private extended even to his body and so he would bathe and masturbate in public! He used to publicly say that the priests in the temple of Olympia were the "big thieves" and the rulers and the philosophers who went there to ask them to supplicate the Gods on their behalf were the "little thieves". This behaviour of his led the people of Athens to call him a "kunikos" or dog and this is how his philosophical tradition has come to be called "Cynicism". Diogenes went an important step further than Socrates in denying the paramount power of the state. Socrates had believed that while everything else could be questioned the power of the state to make laws and dispense justice could not and so despite offers by his acolytes to arrange for his escape from Athens after the death sentence was pronounced on him he refused and bore a slow death through drinking the poison hemlock instead. But Diogenes not only refused to acknowledge the power of the state he also berated people for owing allegiance to some state or other. He declared that he was a free citizen of the Cosmos meaning the whole of nature and the whole of the human race. So Diogenes can be said to be the first conscious atheistic environmental anarchist.

There are a whole host of colourful stories woven around this iconoclastic philosopher (Hicks, 1979). On one occasion Diogenes was washing lettuce to prepare a meal when Plato came along and told him that if he had paid court to the ruler Dionysius he would not have had to wash lettuces. To this Diogenes replied that if Plato had washed lettuces then he would not have had to pay court to the ruler! On another occasion Alexander the Great came and stood next to where he was sun bathing in the street and said to him, "I am Alexander the Great ask any boon of me". Diogenes is reported to have said "I am Diogenes the Dog please get out of my sunlight". He once went round the streets with a lighted lantern in broad daylight and when people asked him why he was doing this he replied that he was searching for one true human being. Two millennia later another atheist the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche alluded to this story and slightly modified it to have a mad man enter a market with a lighted lamp searching for God and then announce that God was dead (Nietzsche, 1974). Needless to say such a physically and intellectually tough lifestyle and worldview did not find many takers among the people in general. However, there were some philosopher followers of Diogenes for a few centuries after him, including possibly the only woman philosopher of ancient times, Hipparchia, who in typical cynical fashion consummated her marriage to the fellow cynic Crates in public.

The Stoic philosophers coming after them drew some inspiration from the Cynics about the hard life that should be lived. But they put God back in the centre of things and so with time this atheistic and anarchistic school of thought gradually fell into oblivion. There was another distinct naturalistic trend in Greek philosophy beginning with Heraclitus which matured with the philosophy of Epicureanism which while not denying the existence of Gods

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posited that they had nothing to do with the workings of nature and human beings which depended on the motion and interaction of atoms that make up the material world. This philosophy that battled the idealism of the Stoics insisted that the soul too was made up of atoms, which dissociated at the time of death, so there was no question of after life and people should live their lives without the fear of retribution in the hereafter. Like the Cynics the original Epicureans advocated a life of abstinence in close concordance with nature (Hicks, op cit). This radical philosophy, which is mostly known through the later work of the Roman poet Lucretius was ridiculed by the Church and trivialised falsely for obvious reasons into the popular dictum of "eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die" which is the hedonistic connotation that the common meaning of Epicureanism still has. This philosophy too became dormant till it was revived again when modern scientists drew inspiration from it in their battle against the Church many centuries later.

The Charvaks, a long line of anonymous materialistic philosophers, mounted the challenge to animism in India from the time of the Vedas. They denied the existence of God and the doctrine of rebirth and after life and like the Epicureans insisted that instead of wasting time in prayers people should busy themselves with living simply in harmony with nature. They were persecuted by the Brahminical orthodoxy and their philosophy too was distorted and trivialised into the popular dictum of "rhinang krityam ghritam pibet" - borrow and drink clarified butter (Sharma, op cit). They could not make much of an impact and gradually faded away. A much more significant challenge to animism and Brahminism was launched later by the Buddha about a century before Socrates. He said that all the miseries of humans arose from their desires. The desires of innumerable people from time immemorial had given rise to an intricate web of cause and effect creating the world as people saw it. There is no God who controls the destiny of human beings and instead they should rein in their desires and live a life of moderation if they want to end their sufferings (Kalupahana, 1992).

Thus Buddha like Diogenes and Epicurus places squarely on the individual the onus for his destiny. Unlike Diogenes and Epicurus, however, the Buddha was a mystic. He did not believe in the existence of a supreme spirit but he believed that the only way to know the absolute truth and so be completely liberated from desires and achieve a state of "Nirvana" was through inward meditation on nothingness. While he went around propagating his path of atheistic moderation among the common people against the prevailing Brahminical orthodoxy he also built up a democratic order of "Bhikkhus" or meditative mendicants who would give up all their desires in the search for absolute truth. So democratic was the Buddha that even though initially he was averse to having women as Bhikkhunis in his order because of the problems it might cause for the practice of celibacy he bowed to the pressure of his fellow male Bhikkhus and allowed them in too. His criterion for acceptance of true knowledge remains unsurpassed even today - "Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumour; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, 'The monk is our teacher.' When you yourselves know, 'These things are good; these things are not blamable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness,' enter on and abide in them (Thera, 1987)

Another great naturalist who was a contemporary of the Buddha was the Chinese Lao Tzu who came up with the idea that the basic natural principle of Tao should be allowed to operate freely without the imposition of human desires on it. He averred that it was because

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human beings obstructed the natural processes with their desires that they suffered so much misery and he wrote this all down in a long poem called the Tao Te Ching (Lao Tsu, 1997). I love one particularly cogent anarchistic excerpt from this poem immensely -

Why are people starving?
Because the rulers eat up the money in taxes.
Therefore the people are starving.
Why are the people rebellious?
Because the rulers interfere too much.
Therefore they are rebellious.
Why do people think so little of death?
Because the rulers demand too much of life.
Therefore the people take life lightly.

Like the Buddha, Lao Tzu was a mystic and his Tao is a mystic principle. So Taoism did not find many takers among the generally animistic populace of China of that time and remained an obscure mystical cult instead of evolving into a mass political movement.

After the Buddha's death atheism slowly receded among his followers and mysticism took an upper hand with the Buddha himself being converted into a God. All kinds of myths were built up around him and Buddhism became a religion. This animistic inversion not only resulted in Buddhism losing its radical and atheistic anti-Brahminical character but also some of its mysticism degenerated into the prevailing Indian black art of "Tantrism" which involves playing around with soul transference between persons, animals and even dead bodies. There is a lovely story in this regard about a prince who along with his friend learned the practice of soul transference and was later tricked by the friend into being trapped in the body of a cuckoo, while the friend entered the prince's body and usurped his place. The cuckoo-prince like a true Buddhist accepts his new situation as an opportunity to benefit others and finding himself able to communicate not only with human beings but also with the birds and animals he lives among, he remains in the forest to teach them the Buddha's path of liberation (Lo Dro, 1982).

Liberation, in reality, was at a discount as both the idealistic animism and the atheistic naturalism of ancient times were buried under the grosser forms of organised religion throughout the world which tended to support the greed of human beings and the oppressive state structure developed to protect the property accumulated as a consequence of this greed. In Europe the teaching of Jesus Christ which was unabashedly against the accumulation of property and for compassion towards fellow human beings was itself subverted once the institutionalised Church set up in his name became the official religion of the rulers. Radical thinking was ruthlessly suppressed to prevent any possibility of revolt against the prevailing order. Even in the heyday of the Greek philosophers and the Buddha, society was based on slavery with democracy being limited to an aristocratic few and women firmly confined to the home. Xanthippe the wife of Socrates had to bear all the troubles of bringing up their children and she never failed to berate him for being a good for nothing idler who brought more notoriety to his family than bread! (Durant, 1967) The eclipse of idealism and rationalism and the increasing superstitious dogmatism of the Church in the Christian era strengthened patriarchal structures and pushed women further and further inside the home dehumanising most of them into being just child bearing and rearing machines.

Religious fanaticism in fact has proved to be a convenient cover for disputes over property and power and been a major cause of murderous conflicts between communities throughout history down to the present day. The suppression of rational thinking combined

with greed automatically leads to the blind acceptance of religious canons by the majority of people. This blind allegiance is then used to flame the passions of the followers of a particular religion around supposed violation of their canons or places of worship and provoke them to attack the followers of another religion. Often these murderous conflicts have taken place between two sects of the same religion. The worst instance of course is that of the Medieval Crusades which were spurred by the Roman Catholic Church with the intention of establishing its supremacy over the lay kings of Europe, a victory in its feud with the Eastern Orthodox Church and victory over the Muslims which not only led to massacres of Christians, Jews and Muslims then but provoked deepseated enmities and cultural biases that vitiate the middle east to this day (Armstrong, 2001). We in India have suffered and continue to suffer murder and mayhem arising from religious bigotry.

Another major casualty of religious obscurantism was science. Science based on rational interpretation of observed reality had made good progress in the time of the Greeks. Aristotle, the philosopher of philosophers, even though he too believed in a God as the initial cause of the universe, nevertheless put Greek science which had proceeded in an ad hoc manner before him on a firm basis by systematising the scientific method of experimentation and logical interpretation for getting at the truth (McKeon, 2001). However, later the theistic aspects of his philosophy which went counter to his scientific thoughts were showcased by the Church and so science took a backseat. The extent of the brake that the belief in God put on scientific inquiry can be gauged from the fact that the Greek mathematician and astronomer Aristarchus had postulated from a study of the movement of the stars and the moon that the earth moved round the sun and not vice versa in the third century BCE (Crowe, 1990) but this was discarded by his contemporaries because of the Platonic belief supported later by Aristotle that the earth, where the Gods were housed, had to be fixed at the centre of the universe. Some people tried later to follow up this literally earth moving postulate but were suppressed by the Church till almost two millennia later Copernicus, despite being a cleric of the Church, once again revived it and kicked off the modern scientific revolution with his mathematical proof of it.

Thereafter science progressed inexorably, if hesitantly at first, as its practitioners began conducting experiments and deducing inferences from them that clearly contradicted the theistic views of the Church. The Italian scientist Galileo was hauled up by the Church for supporting the helio centric theory of Copernicus and forced to retract at the peril of death. This considerably unnerved his French contemporary Descartes who suppressed the publication of his own treatise on the same subject and went about writing more cautiously about the sources of knowledge instead (Cottingham, 1992). Descartes provided what has come to be called the Cartesian Framework of modern philosophical and scientific thinking by stressing that everything in the universe could be doubted until proved to be true through observation and analysis. The first truth thus arrived at by him was the fact that he himself existed because he doubted - cogito ergo sum. Thereafter by logical analysis of the external world perceived through the senses all other truths could be determined. This duality between the observer and the observed and the observation and analysis by the former of the latter is the basis for knowing all objective truth to this day.

This posed the crucial problem for Descartes of proving the existence of God as otherwise he would be going against the Church and risking its wrath. To get round this he advanced the argument that he is able to perceive "clear and evident truths" because God exists, who being a perfect being would not deceive him and who had also given him the capacity to discern the true from the untrue. But this then created the problem that in order to

argue that the existence of God is also a clear and evident truth, Descartes requires God to exist beforehand in order to guarantee the certainty of what to him is a clear and evident truth. In other words Descartes assumes a priori the existence of God without any proof so as to be able to say later through a logical sleight of hand that God exists. So Descartes failed to provide any independent objective proof of the existence of God. This logical fallacy is known as the Cartesian Circle for the circularity of argument involved in assuming beforehand what is to be proved and it arose because of Descartes' attempt to do the impossible - objectively prove the existence of God!

Descartes thus stood at the critical juncture in human development when the battle between naturalism and animism was to commence anew from where it had been suppressed two millennia earlier. The English philosopher Thomas More who had published *Utopia*, which was a rehash of Plato's idealistic Republic and had God firmly at its centre, had just preceded him (More, 2003) while the equally English empirical materialism of Hobbes and Locke immediately followed finding literary expression a little later in the brilliant socio-political satire of the towering French rationalist Voltaire who dominated the intellectual firmament throughout the entire eighteenth century. Early on in adult life, the irreverent Voltaire fell foul of the Regent of France and it is reported that the former said to him, "I will wager that I can show you something that you have never seen before". When Voltaire asked what it was the Regent replied "The inside of the Bastille!" (Durant, op cit). Thus began a long career of incarcerations and exile, which only sharpened Voltaire's opposition to intellectual and material tyranny. In his novelette *L'Ingenu* an American Indian comes back to France with some explorers and has to be converted to Christianity. He is given a copy of the New Testament and after reading it he says that he must first be circumcised as he did not find in this scripture a single person who was not circumcised and so he must make this sacrifice to Hebrew custom! Then when he is confessed by a priest he drags him down and sits on the seat himself asking the priest to confess in turn because the relevant dictate in the New Testament is "Confess your fault one to another" (Bible, New Testament, James 5:16). The Indian says to the priest "Come, my friend, I have related my sins to you and you shall not stir till you recount yours"!

Descartes came in a long line of people who had tried to objectively prove the existence of God and he was not the last. The stark knowledge that there is no God driving the world with a central purpose and that human beings are indeed the masters of their own destiny was too scary a thought for even the leading practitioners of science. The German philosopher and mathematician Leibniz came to the optimistic conclusion that God was basically benevolent and that human beings were living in the best of all possible worlds despite its many evils. A school of thought that has come to be called theodicy after the essay in which Leibniz coined this term (Leibniz, 1989). On November 1st 1755 a devastating earthquake struck in Portugal. It being All Saints Day the Churches in Lisbon were packed with worshippers and the Devil finding his victims in close formation reaped a rich harvest as sixty thousand people were killed. The French clergy then explained this disaster as a punishment from God for the sins of the people of Lisbon. This angered Voltaire and in a passionate poem he asserted that either God despite being able to prevent evil had not done so in which case he was equivalent to the devil or despite wishing to prevent evil he could not do so in which case he was no God at all. Rousseau the other great French rationalist of the eighteenth century, who was like Descartes and Leibniz loathe to let go of his comforting belief in God, responded to this poem by saying that humans were to be blamed for the disaster and not God because if they had stayed in villages and not in towns and in the fields under the sky and not in houses then this tragedy would not have occurred! (Durant, op cit)

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This prompted Voltaire to write the short novel *Candide*, arguably the best satire of all time, in which he tears to shreds Leibniz's optimistic theodicy, parodying him in the character of the innocent *Candide*'s teacher Pangloss, with a riotously comic pen - "Pangloss was professor of metaphysicotheologicocosmonigology....'it is demonstrable' said he, 'that all is necessarily for the best end. Observe that the nose has been formed to bear spectacles.... legs were visibly designed for stockings.... stones were designed to construct castles.... pigs were made so that we might have pork all the year round. Consequently they who assert that all is well have said a foolish thing; they should have said all is for the best'!(Voltaire, 1950) Voltaire not only battled throughout his life against the animism of the Church but he was also a feisty votary of the freedom of speech and expression, which is the most basic requirement of democratic governance, as encapsulated in his pithy saying "I do not agree with a word you say but I will defend to the death your right to say it". Finally across the English Channel it was the Scottish philosopher David Hume, nicknamed the "Great Infidel" for his atheistic views, who drove the last nail into the old God centred animism of the Church by declaring that the only knowledge that was true was that inferred from empirical experience through a process of reasoning free from Cartesian circularity (Graham, 2005).

However, Rousseau, by introducing the concept of the General Will in political philosophy, started a new and subtler kind of animism replacing God with a deterministic intelligent design that directed the destinies of men. He argued that all the problems of governance would be solved if the people entered into a Social Contract to reduce the physical freedom that they would have enjoyed in a state of nature without any social formation in exchange for the advantages of living in a society and cooperating with each other. This society would then have a General Will that would function for the good of society rather than only for that of the individual and so overcome the individual recalcitrants who might want to upset the system (Gourevitch, 1997). At about the same time Adam Smith as we have seen introduced the similar concept of the invisible hand in economics and the German philosopher Kant the concept of an absolute and supreme inner moral law that operated for the ultimate good of humanity. This trend continued with Hegel's Absolute Idea and the progress of humanity through a dialectical process of negation and synthesis towards perfection, Marx's conception of the inevitability of the movement of history through a similar dialectical process in the material world to a communist society free of exploitation and finally the currently widely held belief that science and technology can by themselves through the discovery of natural laws based on empirical observation solve the problems arising out of the cupidity of human beings. There is a circularity of reasoning involved in all these propositions because they assume a priori without any objective proof the existence of a deterministic law or principle that then ensures through logical sleight of hand the inevitability of utopian end results ignoring the grim fact that human beings are in reality greedy people who throughout history haven't stopped at murder to further their own ends.

The English philosopher Bernard Mandeville, another great naturalist of the prolific eighteenth century, parodied this logical fallacy in a hilarious satirical poem and commentary called the "Fable of the Bees" which deserves quoting at length (Mandeville, 1997) -

..... As Sharpers, Parasites, Pimps, Players,
Pick-Pockets, Coiners, Quacks, Sooth-Sayers, [50]
And all those, that, in Enmity
With down-right Working, cunningly
Convert to their own Use the Labour
Of their good-natur'd heedless Neighbour:
These were called Knaves; but, bar the Name, [55]

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The grave Industrious were the Same.
All Trades and Places knew some Cheat,
No Calling was without Deceit.
..... Thus every Part was full of Vice, [155]
Yet the whole Mass a Paradise;
..... Such were the Blessings of that State;
Their Crimes conspired to make 'em Great;
And Vertue, who from Politicks
Had learn'd a Thousand cunning Tricks,
Was, by their happy Influence, [165]
Made Friends with Vice: And ever since
The worst of all the Multitude
Did something for the common Good.....
.....Then leave Complaints: Fools only strive
To make a Great, an honest Hive. [410]
T'enjoy the World's Conveniencies,
Be famed in War, yet live in Ease
Without great Vices, is a vain
Eutopia seated in the Brain.
Fraud, Luxury, and Pride must live; [415]
And We the Benefits receive.

Mandeville begins his lengthy commentary to the poem by saying - "One of the greatest reasons why so few people understand themselves is that most writers are always teaching men what they should be, and hardly ever trouble their heads with telling them what they really are. As for my part, without any compliment to the courteous reader, or myself, I believe man (besides skin, flesh, bones, etc., that are obvious to the eye) to be a compound of various passions, that all of them as they are provoked and come uppermost, govern him by turns, whether he will or no. To show that these qualifications, which we all pretend to be ashamed of, are the great support of a flourishing society has been the subject of the foregoing poem." Not surprisingly the clergy called him the "Man- Devil"!

Thus a new set of comforting myths have developed from the subtler animistic propositions mentioned above - the liberal one that the centralised liberal democratic state and parliamentary democracy constitute the best form of government or the Marxist one that such a state is in reality the executive committee of the bourgeoisie, which will unerringly be overthrown by a revolution and be replaced with a state that is a dictatorship of the proletariat which in turn will eventually wither away with the formation of a communist society, the universal modernist one that centralised industrial development is the only path of economic progress for human beings and the capitalist one that the market is the best and most efficient institution for the allocation of resources and incomes. These myths try to either complement or replace the original myth of Gods running this world and being amenable to supplication to improve the fate of human beings, which holds sway over the minds and hearts of a large majority of people even today. Indeed as we have seen in India the metaphors from this original religious myth have been used to justify the injustices meted out in the name of bringing about modern development. Thus some myth or other or a combination of myths directs the affairs of human beings because the efforts made over thousands of years within both the animist and naturalist traditions to rein in desires, greed and the tendency to accumulate property have failed miserably. Today with capitalism in full swing these desires are being fanned more than ever before, as greed is the fundamental basis of capitalism.

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The anarchists have underestimated the tremendous hold that myths of various kinds have on the human mind and so not surprisingly have remained on the fringe of the real political world with their austere anti-statist dictums forever caught up in frustrating Catch 22s of all kinds. Indeed the anarchist postulate of a state less social system is itself a utopian myth. The American philosopher Robert Nozick has shown how, given that conflicts are inevitable over private property which most people want to possess, an invisible hand mechanism will lead to a minimal state system developing from a state of nature in a particular geographical area to ensure that violation of the rights of people do not occur (Nozick, 1974). However, like in all invisible hand models he too assumes that the people will be acting rationally in accordance with a central principle. This is - "from each as they choose and to each as they are chosen". That is that people will contribute to society the products and services they want to and they will be compensated in accordance with what others are prepared to pay for what they have to offer in the market. Since the operation of this principle is dependent on the market, in reality rational choices are prevented from being made because some players distort the functioning of the market in order to further their own greed as we have seen earlier. These players get more and more powerful and so instead of the utopian minimal state of Nozick's theory we have top-heavy states the world over that exploit and oppress a majority of their citizens on behalf of the powerful few. In the case of the USA, the rich Americans' insatiable taste for beefsteaks done rare has not only left the Afro-Americans in the slums of Washington without decent living conditions but has even forced the Bhil adivasis in far away Madhya Pradesh to do without two square meals a day!

Thus while the old myth making around Gods had given rise to the powerful institution of the Church which ruthlessly trampled on individual freedoms so also the new teleological myths have given rise to the institutions of the State which as we have seen are much more powerful in comparison to the individual and civil society. As the French sociologist Foucault has perceptively noted the modern state, regardless of its political ideology, has become a gargantuan power machine that "automatises and disindividualises power. Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up" (Foucault, 1977, p 202). So as we have seen there is not much of a difference between the pre-revolutionary and the post-revolutionary states in Russia and between the colonial and post-colonial states in India as far as suppressing the protests of the masses is concerned. In the present day world there are even more powerful institutions than nation states in the form of the unholy trinity of the IMF, World Bank and WTO and the MNCs, backed by tremendous military power and ideological hegemony, which make the individual and civil society even more power less in comparison. This powerlessness of modern human beings has been vividly and disturbingly portrayed in the tragi-comic allegorical novels and short stories of Franz Kafka who wrote in the crucial first two decades of the twentieth century when anarchist, Marxist and libertarian dreams of liberation were gradually being buried in the quagmire of capitalist greed (Preece, 2002).

So while the Cartesian framework has, through the development of science and technology, given human beings immense treasures and power the Cartesian circle has, through the proliferation of modern teleological myths, ensured that these bounties have been wasted in driving human beings deeper into an irrational morass of myth, militarism, super affluence for some and poverty and oppression for the many. The strong new myth of science being the font of all knowledge in fact rose from the teleological belief that the process of observation and reductionist inference within the Cartesian framework would one day reveal all the eternally valid laws that govern nature. With the dawn of the twentieth century,

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however, this certainty of the Cartesian framework and the Newtonian physics built on it was fundamentally shaken with two major developments. First the positing of the theory of relativity by Albert Einstein resulted in space and time losing their absolute and independent character and becoming dependent on the size and velocity of objects. Matter from which all objects were formed was not indestructible but was an intensification of force fields in this relativistic space-time that could be expressed as energy also (Einstein, 1988). As if this was not enough starting with Planck and later with the contributions of Einstein, Bohr, Schroedinger, Pauli and Heisenberg, to name just a few of the scientists involved, a new quantum theory was simultaneously developed which stated that at the subatomic level these force fields exhibited a dual wave and particle nature and their exact character at any point of time could be only given as a probability function (Griffiths, 1995). These discoveries made it clear that human observation within the Cartesian framework could only make a very poor approximation of reality. Natural processes were based totally on chance without being guided by any all-encompassing deterministic law.

Charles Darwin struck the first blow against animism in biology in the second half of the nineteenth century with his theory that the evolution of species took place by a combination of chance and the pressures created by the natural environment and hinted that men too had evolved in this way (Desmond & Moore, 1994). Later advances in molecular biology in the twentieth century have shown that the actual probability of life and later human beings coming into existence was nil as was the probability of all later evolution and so it is just by chance that these have occurred and that the future too is governed solely by chance and that many epoch making changes have followed from events whose prior probability of occurrence was nil (Monod, 1971). Then in the nineteen eighties it became clear through the maturing of the new science of Chaos that the linear determinism of the Newtonian framework did not hold even in the macroscopic world as even a simple system like that of a swinging pendulum in reality exhibited a complex pattern of movement. Even though the system did remain deterministic its actual movements were unpredictable as they varied with even a minute change in the initial conditions. Thus from small random events massive unpredictable phenomena could develop resulting in say the flap of a butterfly's wings in one location causing a storm in another far away location (Gleick, 1988). These discoveries about the supreme randomness and consequent unpredictability of events anywhere in the universe have pulled the rug completely from below the feet of philosophers and political activists prone to daydreaming about utopias evolving in accordance with deterministic laws, firmly underlining the obsolescence of this art.

Yet the disappearance of the neat reductionist logic of determinism and the triumph of randomness as a result of these discoveries was so unpalatable to the human mind accustomed for millions of years to teleological animism that even Einstein was led to say "God does not play dice" (Hooft et al, 2005). Little wonder then that lesser minds have refused to give up their deep seated animism and instead continue to use the powers unleashed by science for the furtherance of their greed and the concomitant murder, mayhem and destruction of nature. The great scientists of the early twentieth century led by Einstein not only did not actively oppose this perennially lethal cocktail of greed and animism but also collaborated with the believers in making the atom bomb piously stating that "We helped in creating this new weapon in order to prevent the enemies of mankind from achieving it ahead of us, which given the mentality of the Nazis, would have meant inconceivable destruction and the enslavement of the rest of the world" (Einstein, 1998, p 115). Nazism and the subsequent World War II as we have seen were direct fallouts of the greedy bickering of the imperialist countries over the control of colonies and crude oil resources. Thus even a person

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of Einstein's intellectual stature could not escape the typical destructive choice that is made by lesser mortals when confronted with a prisoner's dilemma.

The coming to power of the Nazis and a lot of the miseries from which humanity has subsequently suffered and is continuing to suffer could in fact have been averted, as mentioned earlier, if the majority of the German Communist Party had heeded Rosa Luxemburg's advice and not embarked on the foolish adventure of the Spartacist Uprising in 1919 and so escaped from being decimated in toto. Unlike the orthodox Marxists, Luxemburg held the somewhat anarchistic and supremely naturalist view that mass organization should not be a product of an animistic belief in the historical imperative of revolution but rather be a conscious product of the struggles of the working classes - "The modern proletarian class doesn't carry out its struggle according to a plan set out in some book or theory; the modern workers' struggle is a part of history, a part of social progress, and in the middle of history, in the middle of progress, in the middle of the fight, we learn how we must fight... That's exactly what is laudable about it, that's exactly why this colossal piece of culture, within the modern workers' movement, is epoch-defining: that the great masses of the working people first forge from their own consciousness, from their own belief, and even from their own understanding the weapons of their own liberation" (Hudis & Anderson, 2004). Luxemburg was also critical of the Bolsheviks for the way in which they had gone about suppressing the workers soviets and enhanced the bureaucratic powers of the party in the immediate post revolutionary phase. She represented in herself the best that could be culled from the Marxist, anarchist and feminist traditions and her untimely demise was undoubtedly one of the great tragedies of modern history that has been inadequately mourned by a blinkered humanity bent on racing to fill their pockets and killing each other to do so.

The second longest serving myth after that of the existence of God is that men are superior to women. So deep rooted is this myth that even Mary Wollstonecraft who began the modern movement for the liberation of women from patriarchal oppression could not free herself from it entirely and so she considered men to be the ideal toward which women should aspire. Following her women had fought for equality with men but always with an eye to catching up with them. This myth was finally challenged in its entirety by the French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir in the immediate post World War II era. She argued that women had been historically considered to be deviant and inferior by men and that to break this myth women had to discover their own unique strengths and pursue them instead of imitating men. Women must create their own identity from scratch without reference to men and their oppressive social structures (De Beauvoir, 1993). The great surge of radical feminism in the post World War II era initially drew its inspiration from the ideas of De Beauvoir. Thus the current stress on the importance of women's work and sexuality by feminists and the militant positing of women's separate identities free from oppressive patriarchal structures owes a lot to the path breaking intellectual rebellion of De Beauvoir.

De Beauvoir was part of a tradition of thinking that had from the beginning opposed the absoluteness of the Cartesian framework of observer-observed duality and the objective rationality built up from it. Philosophers in this tradition struggled with the problem of trying to find the meaning of human existence without reference to the outside world. Some like the Danish philosopher Kierkegaard were forced to acknowledge the existence of a God within while others remained steadfastly atheist like the German philosopher Nietzsche and yet others like Kafka and Dostoevsky produced a new literary genre detailing the agony of the effort to impart meaning to a human existence devoid of animistic props. This tradition came to fruition in the bold naturalism of Beauvoir and her partner French philosopher Jean Paul

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Sartre. Sartre averred that human beings existed without any pre-determined purpose and had to define the meaning of their existence and construct their own identity. So human beings are totally free and fully responsible for the choices they make and the values and norms they create (Sartre, 1993). This philosophical peak of naturalism was achieved by Sartre during World War II but subsequently he could not sustain himself there and became associated with Marxism and also a kind of messianic Judaism. This led to his estrangement later from his one time friend, the other great exponent of this tradition, the philosopher Albert Camus.

In the aftermath of World War II, the Holocaust of the Jews and the inhuman excesses of the Stalinist dictatorship in the Soviet Union, Camus pondered over the futility of an "absurd" life that has to be lived under the mindless oppression of mythmakers and their institutions, whether of the state and the church or of the political parties ostensibly fighting for liberation. Camus came to the conclusion that the naturalist myth breaker, whom he called the absurd hero, would have to carry on an endless struggle against the power of the mythmakers in pursuit of human freedom. To this end, as mentioned earlier, he reinterpreted the Hellenic myth of Sisyphus suitably in what is possibly the most eloquent philosophical statement in support of myth breaking ever - "At that subtle moment when man glances backward over this life, Sisyphus returning toward his rock, in that slight pivoting he contemplates that series of unrelated actions which becomes his fate, created by him, combined under his memory's eye and soon sealed by his death. Thus convinced of the wholly human origin of all that is human, a blind man eager to see who knows that the night has no end, he is still on the go. The rock is still rolling. I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (Camus, 1955).

As we have seen the destructive mythmaking power of religions, television channels, modern industrial development, nation states, super states and MNCs has increased manifold in comparison to civil society over the past half a century since Camus reinterpreted the Sisyphean myth. So that the role and attitude he prescribed for them has become even more relevant for modern political activists. Naturalistic myth breaking must take precedence in their minds if the human race along with the rest of the earth is to survive. Camus being an anarchist conceived of this struggle only in individual terms. But to be really effective the modern Sisyphus' struggle cannot just be an individual one but must involve the masses in large numbers. This as mentioned earlier is the central problem of anarchism - the near impossibility of organising the masses to fight the tyranny of centralised institutions without setting up massive counter institutions of their own based on some animistic ideology or other. Matters are compounded by the fact that while the naturalist activist may decide to shed all ideologies and stop dreaming of utopias, the masses being mostly animistic and also, a la Mandeville, greedy, would continue to be under the influence of religion or some ideology or other or just politically inert. So the environmental activists must accept that centralised states, super states like the World Bank and the MNCs are here to stay. The only course left for activists is to endlessly roll the stone up the hill organising and strengthening civil society as much as possible to resist the onslaught of these destructive centralising institutions on the rights of citizens and on nature. Thus there was a need in the post World War II era for some other means in which the masses could be mobilised than those being used by leftist and liberal parties. These latter follow their own teleological myths with

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consequent problems for individual freedom. What was needed was a new mode of struggle that could involve the masses without the dangers of centralisation and myth making.

The crucial break came in 1961 as a group of lawyers, journalists, writers and others in London, formed Appeal for Amnesty, 1961 against the sentencing of two Portuguese college students to twenty years in prison for having raised their glasses in a toast to "freedom" in a bar. The appeal was published on May 28th in the London Observer's Sunday Supplement. The appeal related the stories of six "prisoners of conscience" from different countries and of different political and religious backgrounds. They had all been jailed for peacefully expressing their political or religious beliefs and the appeal called on governments everywhere to free such prisoners. It set forth a simple plan of action, calling for strictly impartial, non-partisan appeals to be made on behalf of these prisoners and any who, like them, had been imprisoned for peacefully expressed beliefs (Power, 2001). The response to this appeal was much more enthusiastic than anyone had expected. The one-year appeal grew, was extended beyond the year and Amnesty International and the modern human rights movement were born. No new principles were set forth but the crucial difference from previous anti-statist action was the explicit rejection of political ideology and partisanship and the demand that governments everywhere, regardless of ideology, adhere to certain basic principles of human rights in their treatment of their citizens. This appealed to a large group of people, mostly politically inactive, not interested in joining a political movement, not ideologically motivated and not bothered about the creation of an utopian society but nevertheless concerned about the way in which modern states were encroaching on the rights of individuals. They were simply protesting that any government should abuse, imprison, torture, and often kill human beings whose only crime was in believing differently from their government and saying so in public.

This was followed in the nineteen sixties by Martin Luther King's Civil Rights Movement in the USA and later still by the movement against the Vietnam War in that country. This was also the time when the German-American philosopher Herbert Marcuse came out with his first trenchant criticism of modern technological development and the myth of consumerism that it was spawning. Modern states hand in hand with corporate interests were controlling civil society by the creation of false needs to ensure the continuation of capitalist profit making he wrote. Marcuse criticised the straitjacketing of human beings into an artificially created "One Dimensionality" and the destruction of the huge social diversity, which had been an asset of human survival for millennia (Marcuse, 1969). This sparked off the wide spread counter culture protests of the late nineteen sixties with students at the forefront of the battle to break the myth of consumerism and the consequent homogenisation. This rebellion of the youth was echoed in Europe too with the tremendous youth and labour movement in France in 1968, which inspired Sartre also to take to the streets in protest (Cohn-Bendit, 2000). Even though the overwhelming power of the state system and the MNCs weathered all these protests at that time their essence has remained and continues to manifest itself in the ongoing worldwide protests against globalisation (Klein, 2002).

The floodgates of non-party social and political action were thus opened worldwide and in India we had the Sampoorana Kranti Andolan led by Jayaprakash Narayan in 1975. This mode of action has subsequently inspired numerous small groups to organise themselves around various kinds of rights issues and today all over the world there is a vibrant civil society as a result. Even though these small organisations cannot match the power of the states or MNCs they have been able to make their presence felt in many ways. That the grassroots movements in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh have survived and are still

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making an impact, however marginal, despite heavy state repression is testimony to this. In every corner of the world there are grassroots protest movements afoot and they have support from various sources. In India there are a thousand mutinies in the form of innumerable small movements under way that are challenging the hegemony of the state and the MNCs. In the world at large too there are such movements afoot working variously towards a more humane and environment friendly socio-economic order that inspires confidence that all is not lost yet (Fernandes, 2006). It is not grand ideologies and elaborate revolutionary programmes that guide these small efforts but the desire to bring about justice through small actions.

These diverse protest movements are not being able to substantially subvert the present world system of destructive development because of the shrewd machinations of the villain of the piece - the World Bank! The World Bank has led the international foundations set up by various MNCs in co-opting grassroots action as mentioned earlier. It has trumpeted the devious and logically circular concept of "social capital" to defuse the radical political challenge that non-party grassroots movements can pose to modern industrial development (Harris, 2001). The concept had originally been mooted by the French left leaning sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to describe the phenomenon of smaller social groupings like the family and kinship relations which help in forming a social class and he argued that the more articulated this is the more are the chances of its being converted into economic and political capital and vice versa in a virtuous circle that has worked well for the upper classes but not for the lower classes because of their initial lack of economic and political capital (Bourdieu, 1993). The use of the term social capital by Bourdieu for what are basically social connections was itself a dilution of the sharply politico-economic meaning of capital but it still retained some of its political flavour. The American political scientist Robert Putnam winked away this crucial two way linkage between politico-economic capital on the one hand and social capital on the other and posited the circular argument that social associations make economic cooperation possible which in turn strengthens social associations conveniently ignoring the fundamental problem of politico-economic power inequalities that prevent economic cooperation in the first place. Thus Putnam suggested that cross class social formations like Sports Clubs and Birdwatchers Associations were ideal means of building up economic and political cooperation between people across classes (Putnam, 1993)! The World Bank has seized on this theory of depoliticised social action and made it the basis of its thrust for apolitical people's participation in development through self help groups, water user associations, forest management committees and what have you (World Bank, 2000). "To attack poverty watch birds" is the new slogan!

What then should the myth breaker do? Who should he turn to for inspiration? At the time when Camus was reinterpreting the myth of Sisyphus, Babaheb Ambedkar was busying himself with reworking the teachings of the Buddha. Ambedkar heeded the advice of the Buddha regarding not blindly trusting received wisdom and instead testing it out in real life. Thus he questioned the mystic aspects of Buddhism and much of the myth surrounding the Buddha and instead opted for an activist and naturalist Buddhism aimed at bringing about social peace rather than only the peace of mind of the individual (Ambedkar, 1977). Consequently for Ambedkar the concept of "Dukha" or sorrow became the exploitation of the poor and Nirvana became not a metaphysical state or attainment, but a real society founded in peace and justice. He had first announced in 1935 that even though he was born one he would not die a Hindu. He realised, however, that the dalits at large would not be able to discard their animism so easily. So he searched around for a religion that was at once naturalistic and also provided a set of beliefs that people could hold on to. His searches led him to Buddhism, which he reinterpreted to the extent that he could compare it favourably with Marxism

Recovering the Lost Tongue - A Manifesto of Anarcho-Environmentalism

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(Ambedkar, 1987). Despite being terminally ill from diabetes he organised in 1956 a massive ceremony in Nagpur in Maharashtra in which he converted some four hundred thousand people to his version of Buddhism (Queen, 1998). Such was the impact of this conversion that Subhadra's parents and many others in Dargahan too converted to this Ambedkarite Buddhism even though they were situated hundreds of kilometers away from Nagpur. Subhadra remembers that there were never any idols or prayers in their house.

Given the likes of the World Bank the task of recovering lost tongues is always fraught with a danger that is quaintly termed by Bengalis as the cool wind from the River Ganges blowing on one's back. Whenever a mass movement reaches its peak there are a lot of people lending their active support to it. However, as state repression gradually intensifies, most of the supporters melt away preferring to watch birds instead. So the cool wind from the Ganges, which earlier had been kept at bay by their once numerous supporters, begins to uncomfortably caress the backs of the activist leaders and deters them from fighting on! That is why the shining example of the practical naturalist Ambedkar should act like a beacon for all those committed to freeing the human race from the destructive myth of modern industrial development. This "Mook Nayak", or heroic leader of the dumb, right up to the day of his death, single-mindedly pursued the goal of recovering the lost tongue for the dalits regardless of the support he may be getting. Like for him our battle cry should be "The battle to me is a matter of joy, for ours is not a battle for wealth or power, it is a battle for freedom"(Ambedkar, 2006). Freedom from the age-old tyranny of animistic myths.

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