

*the peacock no longer dances...*



**Shankar Guha Niyogi**  
14th February, 1943 to 28th Sept., 1991

## **His Work & Thinking**

**Including his last article  
"Our Environment"**

**NIYOGI WEEK - Sept 22-28, 1992**

On September 28, 1992, it will be a year since Shankar Guha Niyogi was shot dead in his sleep. The assailants of the unarmed, Niyogi are still at large. But the people of the Chattisgarh Mukti Morcha, whom Niyogi led are still tenaciously continuing the struggle and frustrating the expectations of the industrialists who hoped that the murder of the leader would also kill the movement.

On July 1, 1992, the police opened fire on a gathering of CMM protestors at Bhilai, killing 15 people and injuring scores of others. This tragedy has spurred further intensification of the struggle. The sustained police repression in Chattisgarh has also heightened the need for nation-wide solidarity with the CMM.

The Jan Vikas Andolan has called for the 22nd to 28th September to be marked as 'Niyogi Week', both to commemorate his martyrdom and to reiterate the resolve to carry forward the ideas and work he lived for. The Week will be marked by various activities of groups all over the country and many will send representatives to join the CMM's rally in Bhilai on September 28th. This Week will also highlight other incidents and issues which typify repression, by the establishment, against those who fight for justice.

While many people have heard about the Chattisgarh movement and Niyogi's legendary role, there is a paucity of information among those who have not come in direct contact with the CMM, about the wide range of issues it has taken up over the years. In the last year several booklets have described the genesis, objectives and present challenges before the Chattisgarh Movement. We have given a brief outline of these in this booklet and emphasised the Movement's thinking on environment and development -which is not widely known. Thus the last article written by Niyogi, titled "Our Environment", has been translated and is re-printed here as part of preparations for the "Niyogi Week".

Jan Vikas Andolan (JVA) is a forum of diverse social and political action groups and NGOs working for more humane, just and equitable development.

**PUBLISHED BY :  
JAN VIKAS ANDOLAN**

Copies Available At:

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Saptapur, Dharwad,  
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## Shankar Guha Niyogi His Work & Thinking

"Niyogi was first and foremost a great social thinker of the alternative development movement, but worked as a trade union leader in order to be able implement his ideas in practical ways. Responding to another need of the times when various secessionist and disruptive forces have been raising their heads in the country, Niyogi's movement provided a model of how poor people from an exploited backward region could be organised for real socio-economic change without any encouragement of separatist or divisive ideas or forces. There has never been any contradiction in this movement between the people's love of and pride in their region (Chattisgarh) and their feelings for their country.

"At a time when it was being increasingly said by pessimists that in the prevailing atmosphere mass movements for genuine change would not be free of contamination from various ugly distortions, Shankar Guha Niyogi succeeded in sustaining such a movement for 14 years from 1977 till his death in 1991. It is now for all of us to ensure that his dreams are not destroyed and the lamp of ideas is carried further to dispel darkness."

- A Tribute to Shankar Guha Niyogi by Bharat Dogra.

In the early hours of September 28th, 1991, an assassin reached in through an open window of the CMSS office in Bhilai and fired six bullets into Shankar Guha Niyogi, who was lying peacefully asleep there. Within hours, thousands of workers gathered at the hospital where Niyogi now lay awaiting final rites. Draping his body in the red-green flag of the Chattisgarh Mukti Morcha, his comrades and followers marched in a resolute procession to the cremation site.

Across the Chattisgarh region, over two lakh workers struck work that day bringing 150 industrial units to a standstill. About one and a half lakh men, women and children followed the funeral procession and then stood in homage as crematory flames consumed the earthly body of a legend.

Niyogi was 48 years old at the time. Three decades earlier he had come to Bhilai from his native Bengal, and like hundreds of

educated young men sought employment in the Bhilai Steel Plant (BSP). He studied for and obtained a B.Sc Degree while working as a skilled worker in the BSR. By 1964-65 he had become a union organiser and was Secretary of the Blast Furnace Action Committee. In the next few years Niyogi was associated with the Co-ordination Committee of the Communist Revolutionaries, the precursor of the Communist Party Of India (Marxist-Leninist). The growing intensity of his political activity eventually caused him to lose his job. He then left Bhilai and roamed the far-flung areas of Chattisgarh - that vast cultural entity which includes the districts of Bastar, Bilaspur, Durg, Raigarh, Raipur, Rajnandgaon and Sarguja.

After a brief period of working underground with the CPI(ML), Niyogi left the organisation and was on his own. The legend of Niyogi began to take shape in the following period, from the late 1960s to the early 1970s.

" For the next five or six years his nomadic existence took him to many occupations and struggles, all within the Chattisgarh region. Forest work in north Bastar, catching and selling fish in Durg district, agricultural labour in Keri Jungata, shepherding goats in interior Rajnandgaon, were some of the occupations he was involved in. Everywhere he was involved in local struggles. The struggle of adivasis in Bastar, agitation against Mongra reservoir in Rajnandgaon, and the Daihand people's struggle for water were some of the struggles from which he learnt his early lessons in mass organisation. Eventually he settled in Dhani Tola working in the quartzite mines, where his long interaction with mining and miners began."

-- Niyogi & the Chattisgarh People's Movement, by PUDR.

It was in Dahni Tola that he met and married Asha, herself a miner. By 1975 his activities as an organiser of the miners were sufficiently irksome to the establishment to lead to his arrest during the Emergency. He spent thirteen months in jail under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA). On returning from jail he shifted to Dalli Rajhara and soon founded the Chattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh (CMSS).

The CMSS began by organising successful struggles for more wages and working conditions. The wages increased from Rs. 3 a day to over Rs. 20 a day and are even higher now. But soon the union was initiating processes for creating, in an overall sense, a

better life for the miners and their families. It spearheaded a successful anti-alcohol campaign which closely involved women and led to their growing participation in the functioning of the CMSS. The union began running a dispensary in a small garage and by 1983 had built a 15 bed hospital with modern facilities. The hospital was built with the savings and labour of the union members. Later it built school buildings, where the government now runs schools.

The local authorities had never seen fit to provide basic facilities like garbage collection from the miners 'bastis'. When the union's demands were repeatedly ignored, its activists began loading the garbage in trucks and dropping it in the residential area of the officers. They threatened to keep doing this till arrangements were made to keep the workers' 'bastis' clean.

The Chattisgarh Mukti Morcha (CMM), was formed to take up the wider problems of the region, especially those of the adivasis. A subsequent struggle to free bonded labourers in the region led to the formation of the Chattisgarh Gramin Shramik Sangh (CGSS). Over the years the CMSS, CMM and CGSS have worked in tandem.

The tortuous course of the struggle is marked by numerous cases of state repression and the harassment of its leaders. Over the two decades in which he emerged as a prominent leader Niyogi went to jail some 25 times — usually without facing any formal charges, let alone trial. Even in those petty cases that were foisted on him, he was never convicted by any court of the land for any offence.

Since 1991, Niyogi's focus of new activities had shifted to organising workers in the industries of Bhilai. The earlier struggles had been primarily in 'interior' areas. Now the movement came into direct, sharp and sustained conflict with the wealthiest and most powerful industrialists of the area. As tensions mounted and physical attacks on union workers increased, Niyogi anticipated his own murder. In a message which he recorded a few weeks before his death, he spoke of how the industrialists of the Bhilai area would make their final assault on the movement in the form of a conspiracy to kill him. "This world is beautiful," Niyogi had said in the message, "and I certainly love this beautiful world, but my work and my duty are important to me. I've to fulfill the responsibility that I've taken up. These people will kill me, but I know that by killing me none can finish our movement."

The significance and meaning of Niyogi's life and death must be understood in the context of the post-colonial 'development' that he was struggling against.

A report by the People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) has noted that:

"The post-colonial development in backward regions like Chattisgarh essentially results in the self-sustaining nature of underdevelopment, notwithstanding any development programme. This process continuously throws people out of their traditional occupations. And then they become, as casual and contract labour, the cannon fodder for industrialisation, whether under the aegis of the public sector or private, under planning or (under) market (economy). And when people begin to assert their rights, the economic and political parasites bred by this kind of development attempt to crush it with the help of the state.

"This all too familiar process faced resistance in Chattisgarh. During its course the workers struggle transcended the much narrower traditional boundaries of the trade union movement. Wage and working conditions, skills and semi-mechanisation, education, health and environment have all become part of their agenda. The innovative features of this militant mass movement are informed by alternative visions of developmental processes. Yet it is confined to the constitutional boundaries imposed by a ruling elite against whom it is fighting. The Directive Principles of the Constitution articulated with more clarity and forthrightness are its hallmark. Enforcement of labour legislation is the arena in which the battles are being fought. The movement pursued peaceful methods with remarkable patience in a political environment where violence has become the only language which the rulers can understand. Realisation and appropriation of democratic space within the threshold of the constitution is the essence of the Chattisgarh movement. It is this process, spread over almost three decades, that changed the life and living of the people of the region."

Last year a Citizen's Committee conducted a detailed inquiry into the circumstances surrounding Niyogi's murder. The Committee consisted of D.S.Tewatia, ex-Chief Justice of Punjab and Haryana High Court and later of Calcutta High Court; Kuldip Nayar, senior journalist and ex-High Commissioner of India to the United

Kingdom; Vijay Tendulkar, well-known playwright and theatre personality; Anil Sadgopal, noted educationist and social activist; and Rakesh Shukla, advocate, Supreme Court. The Committee's report entitled 'Behind the Industrial Smokescreen' stated that:

"He (Niyogi) was killed because he was an odd man out in an area where none had dared to challenge the network that some industrialists operated to deny their workers even basic amenities and living wages..... Shankar Guha Niyogi's murder assumes sinister proportions when seen in the context of the rapidly changing industrial scenario in the country, under pressure from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. It is reflective of the drastic erosion in the democratic space open to the workers to agitate for rights assured by various industrial and labour laws, in asking for minimum security of employment and a wage which stretches the notion of dignified survival to its limit....The establishment would go along with all this in order to ensure that the outside banking institutions and multinationals stayed and prospered. A person like Niyogi, with a vision of self-reliance and alternative development of Indian society, will then be missed more than ever before".

"Niyogi's politics and the politics of the CMSS is the politics of struggle, and creativity. Struggle for creation and creation for struggle - this is our *nara* (motto, slogan)," says the introduction of a booklet titled 'Our Environment: The Perspective of the CMSS'. Niyogi wrote this booklet in the last two weeks of July 1991. It was his last piece of writing. In October the union published the booklet, as originally scheduled. The introduction to the booklet adds that: " Comrade Niyogi wrote about the CMSS's thinking on the environmental movement in the hope that it would reach and become part of the wide-spread debate among the various *sangathans* involved in these struggles."

The following is a translation of Niyogi's article.

# Our Environment

Perspective of Chattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh  
*by Shankar Guha Niyogi*

The Chattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh (CMSS), a registered trade union of the mine workers, has from its earliest days attempted to expand the scope of trade union work. Unlike most other trade unions in India, it has not limited itself to struggling for higher wages. Members of CMSS have, in diverse ways, been actively involved in social and cultural issues.

Over the last eight to ten years, CMSS workers have joined hands with unorganised workers, adivasis and peasants to run a 'Let's Struggle for Good Health' campaign, through the use of magic shows, street plays, booklets, lectures and various other programmes. The CMSS workers also set up a hospital as part of the campaign. This 50 bed hospital has a modern operation theatre and a maternity ward.

The CMSS also worked on the history of the area and initiated the practice of observing the martyrdom days of important historical persons of the region -- thus inspiring a greater sense of self-esteem among the people. Veer Narayan Singh is among the most notable of such leaders.

To counter alcoholism among the workers, the union led a vigorous anti-liquor campaign. The union has today become synonymous with this campaign.

The CMSS has also done substantial work in sports, education and other such fields. It has built at least 6 school buildings and handed them over to the government. The union itself runs one primary school. Thousands of women have got organised and are actively involved in the leadership of the CMSS to ensure that women's special concerns and issues form an integral part of the Union's agenda. Likewise the union has also been actively working on environmental issues. Instead of shedding crocodile tears over the environment, the CMSS has evolved and acted upon its understanding of the environmental problem through concrete actions.



## **HOW THE CMSS CAME TO TAKE AN INTEREST IN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES**

For some time now, workers in the CMSS have been gathering information about and discussing the disturbing news about holes in the ozone layer, the growing disproportion of harmful poisonous gases in the atmosphere and the declining oxygen content in the air.

Closer home, they have watched as the Shankhini River and a little stream emerging from the Dalli mines turn blood red in colour from the high iron ore content in the water. Effluents from the distillery, the steel factory and fertiliser plant have poisoned the water of the Kharoon and Shivnath rivers. There are frequent heated discussions, within the union on the problems arising out of this destruction in the name of industrial development.

When those working on gas boosters, accelerators, the compressor or blast furnace, complained that they could no longer hear the sweet music of the cuckoo bird (koyal), we would think that it is their bad luck and leave it at that. Though these self-evident problems are part of everyday life we were not able to relate these observations to the wider issue of environmental protection.

The Chattisgarh mines are an example of the worst havoc wreaked by destruction on the environment. The workers of CMSS firmly believe that:

- 1) Wherever there is injustice and oppression, there is bound to be resistance.
- 2) The process of destruction can be countered by the creativity of construction.

The union's involvement in environmental issues began with a small incident. One day an adivasi came weeping to the union office. He said that he and some other people from his village were bringing headloads of firewood out of the forest to sell in the local market when they were stopped by an official of the forest department. The official beat the adivasi and forcibly took the firewood from him. Then, even as the adivasi watched, the official sold the firewood to someone else. The next day was the 'hariyali' (greenery) festival. The adivasi spoke of this and said despondently that now he and his children would have to go hungry during the festival.

Some of the union activists went to the City Superintendent of Police (C.S.P) in Rajhara and demanded that he take action against

the forest official. After some initial resistance, the C.S.P relented, investigated the matter and had the forest official brought to the police station. When he was produced before the C.S.R, the official said: "This man (the adivasi) is destroying the jungle and we have to protect the environment. I can even start a case against him." When the union activists asked whether taking a Rs. 5 bribe for the headload of firewood made it 'legal' he denied this charge. But all the jungles have disappeared, the trade union activist pointed out, because of the saw mills. The contractors and leaders of political parties have all joined hands to wipe off the jungles. "Wasn't that damaging to the environment?" the activist asked. "Wasn't that a violation of the law? Why is it that all your laws seem to apply only to the adivasis and poor. If the protectors of the law instill insecurity and fear among the residents of the jungle, then we will have to work for the security of the adivasis through people's movements....."

From that day, our union accepted a challenge and soon it began a campaign with the slogan "apne jungle ko pehchano" (know your jungle).

#### EVOLVING A PERSPECTIVE AND STRATEGY

Soon there were weekly meetings in the union office on how to give this campaign a constructive direction. After several discussions, the following issues were identified:

- 1), The causes of environmental destruction will have to be analysed.
- 2) Consciousness on environmental issues must be developed at the national level in a comprehensive manner.
- 3) The rights of forest dwelling people over the forest produce and the forest must be secured, so that they will continue to feel that 'the jungle is our own'.
- 4) Steps will have to be taken to rectify the faulty aspects of existing forest policies and laws. By initiating alternative methods and processes at the village level, we will have to build a strong popular base for this campaign.
- 5) The distortions and corruptions of the administration will be challenged and opposed with full force. Suggestions will be made for better forms and means of administration.
- 6) Under the 'Know Your Jungle' campaign, we will have to build programmes which strengthen our relationship (*rishta*) with the forest.

- 7) Tough action will be taken against water pollution and we will demand that the administration provide clean drinking water to all by digging a sufficient number of tube-wells.
- 8) To curtail noise pollution, we will try to raise public consciousness against the excessive use of loud-speakers.
- 9) The more conscious activists of the union will try to build an understanding of the environmental movement in India and the world. They will also work to build fraternal links with the movement and prepare activists and general members to represent the union in events and activities of the movement.
- 10) In those industrial units where the union has some strength it will demand stricter air pollution control measures by the management. It will also fight against the problems of noise pollution and evolve a programme for workers who are suffering due to noise pollution.
- 11) The wastage of human and financial resources by government officials in the name of environment protection, will be vigorously opposed. Anti-labour measures in the name of environmental protection will also be opposed. The abstract approach to the environment, which fosters an anti-industrialisation climate, must also be countered with tough opposition.

### **IN THE BEGINNING**

The CMSS's area of work lies north of Bastar and includes the southern part of Durg District. The entire area is rich in iron ore and now has one of the most productive mines in Asia. But just 35 years ago when people went from Kusumkasa to Dondi or Bastar, they had to cross dense forests. On the way they would encounter small villages of Gond adivasis. Under the lush green canopy of trees, lived numerous species of birds and their songs filled the air. Little streams and rivulets roamed and rippled across the miles creating yet another kind of music. Children played freely. Young men and women frequently gathered to dance in the forest through the night.

Then one day some officers of the Geological Survey of India arrived in the forest. They were soon followed by a team of Russian and Indian engineers. Then there was a sudden, unexpected, thundering blast. People, birds, animals and trees alike trembled from the shock. That first blast was followed by many, many more. After this the jarring noise of the bull-dozer came to dominate over

all that was before. Who knows where the koyal and peacock fled to? The drums fell silent and young people no longer danced in the forest, for there was no forests left. One by one lakhs of trees were cut and carted away. In their place sprang up scores of saw-mills. The once crystal clear, bubbling streams all turned blood red from the iron ore particles which now flowed in them.

Finally the day came when no trace of the green canopy was left. Instead, from Rajnandgaon to Durg and Raipur, grand palaces of the saw-mill owners and traders came up. The iron ore from Rajhara was smelted to make steel at the plant in Bhilai and the swirling smoke from its chimneys heralded 'development'. Upon foundations tainted by destruction, came to stand the edifice of 'new development'.

Then the cement plant was installed and the powder dust shower of cement which spread over the fields destroyed the agriculture of lakhs of farmers. Meanwhile the putrefying molasses at the newly opened distillery created an all pervasive odour. Eventually all the rivers were polluted. A vile itching spread among the people who live beside these rivers. The mortality rate of cattle became unnaturally high. More and more people began flocking to the townships and cities. There amid the ceaseless noise of machines, the stink of chemical pollutants and filth, hutment colonies proliferated where people were compelled to live like insects.

The protection of the environment is now the central issue. It is the new challenge-to which we must rise.

#### **UNEQUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IRRELEVANT LAWS**

Now when the skies darken in anticipation of rain, the peacock no longer dances spreading the full glory of his feathers. His dancing ground, the jungle has been destroyed beyond repair. And, still the felling of trees continues unabated.

Meanwhile, the concrete jungles spread their tentacles ever wider. People are learning to live in a new world of iron and brick cages. Through television, they watch the varied sights of the world within minutes. Offices of big companies hang oil paintings of jungles and beautiful adivasi women - and this is meant to project their appreciation of adivasi culture. When they feel bored, the people of this world go to Darjeeling or to Goa -- to watch the sunset over the Arabian sea.

Back in the villages, the night is still dark and sometimes the young people dance and sing. "When you city people sleep," they say, "we sing and dance as companions of the moon".

What a difference. When truck loads are, continuously carting the jungle away to the cities and the bamboo is vanishing into the paper mills, it becomes difficult to workout how national awareness on the environment can be created.

People all over this fast shrinking world are worried about the environment. The damage to the global environment is so severe that we can well ask how the five trees in my home or a few dozen bushes in the 'basti' are going to help save the environment. It is true that the public consciousness is not moved by statistics alone. Yet the need for creative action demands that we combine logic and statistics with our emotive response to the environmental crisis. It is only from such a combination that a national consciousness about the environment will emerge.

The union has thus substituted the word 'environment' with the word 'nature' — that which has been there from even before our ancestors. We have no right to destroy the air which our ancestors breathed and the crystal clear waters with which they quenched their thirst. This river, this air, this mountain, this jungle, these chirping birds -- this is our land (*desh*). We will take the help of science to move our world forward, but we will also ensure that the rivers remain clean and flow freely and that there is pure invigorating air. We will always need to hear the melodies of birds which kept our ancestors one with nature.

In the society we want to build, love for people of the country will be seen as an act of love for the nation and love for nature would be considered patriotic. This is the kind of national consciousness we need, to save the environment.

It is common knowledge that people who lived hundreds of miles away from the forests, came here as traders and merchants to loot the trees and became millionaires. They are in league with the forest officials. Most of them have some close relative who is a powerful politician. They own several trucks and often saw mills as well. Some of them are themselves forest contractors. Their every moment is consumed by the pursuit of narrow self-interest. The forest dwellers in India are primarily adivasis who have never used the forest and its products for narrow self-interest or out of greed. But today, even to use forest produce for their minimal daily needs, they have to bribe forest officials and workers.

## **INDIVIDUAL INTEREST, COLLECTIVE INTEREST, NATIONAL INTEREST**

Public or collective interest and national interest are all complementary to each other. But, at the time of formulating legislation on the forests, the collective interests of the adivasi communities are not taken into account. The first Forest Act was enacted by the British in 1817. This marked the beginning of the long drawn-out calamity which continues to unfold even today. These laws, which made indigenous residents aliens in their own natural habitat, were a direct attack on the adivasis.

The adivasis could no longer say with pride 'this is our jungle'. So it came to pass that the forest was orphaned, without a mother or a father. In the hands of the bureaucracy, the forest laws have become instruments for establishing freedoms of forest officers. Reform of the Forest Laws is a dire necessity.

Clearly there is a need to identify the real robbers of the forest. A list should be made of all the millions of plants and leaves in the forests. Then the laws must be framed in a manner that requires full participation of forest dwelling villagers in their implementation. The local people must be prime beneficiaries of all the forest produce -- like the Tendu leaves, Bel, Char, Salpi, Mahua and numerous medicinal plants. The fuel-wood needs of farmers dwelling near the forests must also be taken into account. The right of the adivasis to cut trees for building their homes must also be protected by law, even if they are required to pay for it.

To some extent these needs have been provided for in the current Forest Act. But the procedures for its implementation are complicated. The inefficiency, irresponsibility and unrestrained corruption of the forest officials and other workers makes things still worse. An effective forest policy that protects the interests of adivasis must take this into account.

When the people are able to feel and know that the jungle is truly theirs, from that day every one of them - even the little children -- will keep a watchful eye and protect the forests. Then the forest thieves will be stopped and the ills created by useless and irresponsible officials will be undone. When the forest becomes a means of preserving collective well-being then all its dwellers will act against every stroke of any axe used to cut trees illegally. Such protection of community interest will in turn secure the national interest. This will not only protect the environment but also guarantee the future of humanity.

The union has taken up these issues in discussions with officials. Where necessary agitations have also been launched to protect the interests of adivasis and curb forest thieves. Some ten years ago there was a problem in Salhetola village, where a near-by saw mill was cutting all the Sagwan trees in the area. The villagers complained to the police, to the forest department and politicians, but none responded to their pleas. Then the union suggested a big function at which some trees would be planted amid much fanfare. This had both symbolic and practical value, plus the large gathering of people served as a show of strength. After this function the Sagwan robbers of never came back.

### **A BALANCED POLICY: THE ONLY PROTECTION FOR ENVIRONMENT**

The need for protecting the environment has been recognised from the early stages of industrial development. The smoke and foul gases spewed by factories can partly be off-set if a balance is maintained by preserving the forests. But if the forests are treated only as raw material for the industries and wiped out then how will this balance be maintained? Under the current forest policy, eucalyptus, nilgiri, and pine trees are being planted in large numbers because of their commercial uses in industry. Such trees and the large-scale monoculture plantations, which current policies foster, cannot save our forests.

- 1) The union has discussed, at length, the effects of such monoculture plantation and fought against them. Even the monoculture planting of Sagwan is not healthy, for no grass grows where the large leaves of this tree fall and cover the ground. The union has repeatedly shared these observations with the Forest Department and made suggestions for corrective action.
- 2) While the monoculture plantations are favoured by government policy with funds coming even from the World Bank, the cutting of natural forests with all their natural diversity continues unabated. Piled high in timber depots these trees are proudly displayed as 'production'. There is competition among officials to show annual increases in such production. So long as 'production' is defined in these terms, the forests will keep vanishing.
- 3) There must be strict prohibition against the cutting of Mahua, Char, Tendu and other such trees. This ban will help the

natural reproduction of these trees to increase. Since the livelihood needs of the local people depend largely on these trees, their protection will ensure the overall economic balance of forest dwelling communities. This alone can guarantee the survival of the forest.

- 4) There should be research into the medicinal and other chemical properties of various trees and herbs in each forest area. This will help in giving special attention to the preservation of such plants.
- 5) Often there is news about a tiger, lion or other wild animal in a sanctuary attacking and killing local dwellers. Then hunters are called in to kill the man-eater and under this pretext many other lions and tigers are killed. The problem of man-eating wildlife is further evidence of how the natural balance has been upset. The animals attack people because their natural prey --wild boars, deers, rabbits etc. -- have become scarce. Thus all efforts must be made to restore the natural balance and the Union has undertaken programmes for this purpose.
- 6) Large dams are submerging vast areas of forest and destroying many precious trees which grow under special conditions. Any project that leads to the destruction of trees like the Lac and the Sal must be opposed. For this reason our union is opposed to the Bodhghat Dam. The union also opposed the construction of the Mongra Dam in Rajnandgaon District because it involved large scale deforestation. A song, written by a labourer who is a member of the union, "*Mongra ke bandh banan devo nahin bhaiya*", urging people not to allow the dam to be built became vastly popular because of this struggle.

#### SOME SUCCESSES

Issues that are easily understood by ordinary people are often beyond the comprehension of bureaucrats and officials. For example, when people propose a small check dam on a stream or river, even if the Revenue Department has no objections the Forest Department actively opposes the scheme. Such small dams can enhance efforts to add to the forest growth and are also a watering source for animals. But unlike the big dam projects, the small schemes do not bring any profit to the forest officials. When a big dam is built there is usually large scale 'production' of timber from the area about to be submerged. Nevertheless, in some places, like



Tuygodi and Jugera, the union has been successful in having small dams built.

Rain water flowing out of the iron ore mines carries a fine silt of the ore into the surrounding area where it spreads in a thin layer over the top soil, destroying the productivity of the land. The union led a struggle and got compensation for the affected farmers. It also made efforts to redirect the flow of water out of the mine, in order to prevent it from destroying cultivable lands.

Coordination between the various government departments is usually poor. This is a major deterrent to the search for innovative solutions to problems. For example, certain lands in a village, particularly grazing lands, are often under dispute. The powerful people of the village tend to grab control of such lands. Often 'camps' are formed in the village around such disputes and these conflicts can even lead to bloodshed. Government policies have called for coordinated efforts by the Revenue Department and the Forest Department, for planting useful trees on these disputed lands. Schemes of this kind can also generate such good grazing lands for cattle that there could be an 'Operation Flood' here.

But who is to take the responsibility for making this a reality. A people's movement alone is not enough. This dream, cannot be realised until a sensitive environmental perspective influences the thinking of the bureaucracy and the political leadership. The union is making sustained efforts to foster debate on the development of such a perspective.

There is a great-deal of noise being made today about the environmental crisis, but there is still little evidence of long term efforts that can make a difference. The protection of the environment necessarily demands sustained long-term programmes. The close involvement of local people is equally essential. For then such efforts can also be instrumental in the progress of adivasi communities. There is need for a new national level government organisation to undertake this work. Just as there are police stations everywhere, there should be 'environment stations' (*thana*). Today there are 15 crore unemployed people in India. Under the new environmental programme it should be possible to give work to at least 50 lakh of these people. This organisation would have to be run by environmentally sensitive people.

## **KNOW YOUR JUNGLE - KNOW YOUR FAMILY**

When a distant relative whom we have never seen dies, we are not as upset as we are when tragedy strikes someone in our neighborhood, whom we have known and seen for many years. Our relationship with and attachment to the jungle is also similar. If I don't know the jungle very well I may inadvertently destroy a fledgling Sagwan tree. Therefore about seven years ago the union launched the 'Know Your Jungle' campaign. This on-going programme includes:

a) Selective planting of trees that have domestic uses, like: Bamboo, Salphi, Mahua, Mango, Jamun, Parhar, Seesham, Ber, Sagwan, Neem, Karra, etc.

b) Such trees that are commercially useful and are grown in plantations, such as -- cashew, sandalwood, and various kinds of eucalyptus.

c) As part of the 'Revive the Jungle' programme, the planting of lime trees, Karanj, Karonda and a certain kind of Arhar which has a bush that lasts about three to four years.

Over the last seven year the union has nurtured a small patch of forest near the union office as an example of what is possible. Here several varieties of trees have been planted, such as -- Khamhar, Kadam, Almond, Raintree, Coconut.

The union members now proudly call it 'Hamara Jungle'. Through this programme we were not only able to make creative use of the free land around the union office but also evoke interest among the union members. Soon they began planting trees around their own homes. Where earlier there was no greenery in sight today many areas where workers live are lush green because of the trees planted by them.

In the process we also gained a closer understanding of the government's tree planting schemes. We concluded that only 40% of the trees planted in such programmes survive, because the local people are not involved in nurturing them.

If a programme of tree plantation is undertaken with the full participation of the people, the break-down of trees planted would be as follows:

Bamboo.....15% -- used by people to build homes.

Local varieties.....35% -- including Char, Mahua, Bael,  
Awala, Kaad.

Commercial Varieties.....20% - Rookh, Arhar, Almond,  
Cashew, Sandalwood, Lime,  
Neem, Jamun, Mango etc.

Varieties promoted in Government schemes.....30% .

The trees grown under the 'Know Your Jungle' programme now have little sign-boards on them giving the local name of the tree, its Hindi name and botanical name. We have also collected information on the botanical families by which different species of trees are related to each other. This has helped to generate a fuller understanding of the trees, especially among school children who are thus able to expand upon what they learn in school. The union is also planning to bring out booklets about the uses of these trees and how much oxygen each produces.

Through the 'Know Your Jungle' programme we were able to build an understanding of our most reliable companions -- trees. Along with this understanding the planting and preserving of trees has been popularised, which alone can guarantee the protection of the environment. The campaign still continues with whatever limited resources the union has.

#### **NATURE GAVE US A SOURCE OF WATER**

In Dalli-Rajhara life has revolved around the Dalli and Jharan streams for centuries. The names of many villages are in some way related to the streams. Even today people in this area depend on these streams for their daily needs. When these streams became polluted the union took up this issue, demanded action from the authorities and got some results. Today instead of being blood red the water in these streams is orange coloured.

The union also succeeded in getting 89 tube-wells dug in the part of Dalli-Rajhara where the workers live. It is now striving to ensure similar safe drinking water facilities in the surrounding rural areas.

The union also plans to launch an agitation against the pollution of the Shivanth River by the Kedia distillery. This agitation will require the involvement and support of workers, farmers, intellectuals and environmentalists in large numbers.

## **WAGE INCREASES AND NOISE POLLUTION**

Fifteen years ago when workers in Dalli-Rajhara earned about Rs.3 a day there was no social problem of noise pollution. Prolonged struggle by the union succeeded in raising the wages. Now the minimum wage of workers is around Rs.70. As wages increased people began making frequent use of loud-speakers - playing film songs at full blast on various festive and ceremonial occasions. Even shopkeepers began to make regular use of loud-speakers. Before long noise pollution had become a major public hazard in Dalli-Rajhara.

Through its neighborhood committees the union has been campaigning to raise public awareness about the harmful effects of noise pollution. The health workers of Shaheed Hospital have also been actively involved in this campaign, which aims to reduce the use of loud-speakers.

## **LISTENING AND LEARNING**

For centuries poets and writers have described the glories of nature. In our land too there are many great such works of poetry and other literature. Knowledge of and familiarity with such literature can form a powerful emotional foundation for environmental protection.

Today all over the world scientists quote complicated statistics to describe and explain why they are deeply worried about the environment. Union members discuss these findings and strengthen their own understanding of the problem. We also make an effort to collect detailed information on environmental movements.

In Tehri the enemies of nature have been working hard to destroy the balance and harmony of nature. We value and share Pandit Sunderlal Bahuguna's ideas and work, and are in solidarity with him. The Chipko Movement inspires us and we consider it a revolutionary movement. Since the 'No Dam' movement began in the Narmada Valley our union's people have gone there and wholeheartedly joined the struggle under the leadership of Baba Amte. The success of environmentalists in stopping the construction of the Silent Valley Dam in Kerala fills us with hope. We feel one with the spirit of the American Indians and their love of nature and their motherland.

The workers feel a sense of solidarity with all those in environmental struggles. We feel they are part of our family and we try to raise our voices along with theirs in unison.

### **DIFFICULT BUT NOT IMPOSSIBLE**

Even the management of the Bhilai Steel Plant could not ignore the rising environmental consciousness of the workers. Earlier the management was indifferent and uncaring. There was always a fine dust flying in the air from all the unpaved roads and denuded areas. Medical tests showed that many workers were beginning to suffer from silicosis. The union demanded that the management do something about the problem. In the Rajnandgaon textile mill also the union made special efforts of this kind. Now in the mines and roads of Dalli-Rajhara the management is sprinkling water to cut down on the flying dust. Miners who suffered ear damage due to noise pollution at the work place have also been given E.N.T. treatment, due to the union's efforts.

Once upon a time there was a king. He was very worried about the corrupt ways of one of his ministers. The King transferred this minister to a remote place by the sea shore thinking that there he would not have any opportunities to gain wealth by wrongful means. But when the Minister reached his new post by the sea shore he took upon himself the task of counting the waves. Then from each ship that passed that way he charged a fine because it disturbed his 'task' of wave counting. And so the minister became very wealthy just counting waves. There is no shortage of wave counting officials in our country. This kind of 'counting' is going on even in the name of environmental protection. Large industrial units like the Bhilai Steel Plant now have 'Environment Departments'. Those officials who have no interest in any other department are posted to the environmental wing. They give out contracts in the name of tree plantation, where little effort is made to ensure the survival of the trees. The union is firmly opposing such programmes.

Private companies like Simplex Engineering, V.K.Engineering and others take plots from the government for planting trees and then gradually convert the land to their own private use. The union is actively fighting against this kind of corruption.

When the management of the Bhilai Steel Plant was planning to mechanise its mines at Dalli, some years back they claimed this would be environmentally beneficial. The union was able to show their claims to be false. You cannot expect to grow trees on land where no top-soil is left.

These days, anti-industrialisation ideas also appear in the guise of environmental protection. The union opposes such ideas.

The truth is that we will have to protect our earth and our planet. The trees, plants, clean drinking water, clean air, birds and animals and human beings - together all of us form part of this world. Through sensitive ideas and flexible programmes we will have to maintain a balance in nature and in science and this can be done on the basis of the development of people's consciousness.

- Translated by Rajani Bakshi

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छोटी-छोटी बातें, हजारों दुख गाथाएं  
समझने में सीधी और आसान  
कहीं सिर्फ एक या दो मामूली सी पहचान  
धूल कण, एक पेड़ का गिरना, कहीं से थोड़ा सा रिसाव  
चूल्हे का उष्म धुआं  
हमारी आवाज शर्मिन्दा होकर  
छुप जाती हैं मशीनों के बाजार में  
सिर्फ वेदनाएं, दुख की गाथाएं  
चलती रहेगी अनन्त काल तक ?  
या  
हम, उठ खड़े होंगे  
अन्तिम क्षणों पर, अन्त नहीं होगा,  
जहां अन्त होना था  
वहीं शुरुआत की सुबह खिल उठेगी ।

Printed & Published by The Convenor, Jan Vikas Andolan, C/o. S. P. S.  
Ashadeep, Jayanagar, Saptapur, Dharwad, Karnataka 580 001.  
Printed at: New Age Printing Press, 85, Sayani Road, Prabhadevi,  
Bombay 400 025. Phone : 422 82 22.