

Days in CMM

With Shankar Guha Niyogi

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I first came to know of Shankar Guha Niyogi and the Chhalthishgarh movement in 1979, when I was a first-year student of Medical College. As far as I can recollect, my source of information was a journal named *Curtain*. In 1982, when I was studying in the third year, an organizational senior told me of the 'safai' (cleansing) movement of the Chhalthisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh, the Shaheed Dispensary and the dream of building the Shaheed Hospital. He was Dr Pabitra Guha, who had worked for a few months with the CMSS in 1981. (After the martyrdom of Niyogi, he resigned his job in 1992 and went back to the Shaheed Hospital, and remained there till 1994. He lives in Dalli-Rajhara as yet.) That tale made Dalli-Rajhara a dreamland of mine, and I began to dream of working with the CMSS.

I first met one of the architects of my dreamland in the first week of July 1985. The gas victims of Bhopal laid the foundation stone of a people's hospital in the premises of the Union Carbide factory. The work for the people's health centre began with the help of the junior doctors from Kolkata and Bombay. There the gas-affected people were administered the sodium thiosulphate injection, an antidote to poisonous gas, and the improvement in their symptoms was registered. Improvement in the symptoms of the gas-affected people with thiosulphate implied the existence of cyanide in poisonous gas, which enhanced the criminal culpability of the Union Carbide. Hence, the state launched its terrorizing operation on the night of 24 June. The doctors, health workers and organizers were arrested. I went, along with my junior friend Dr Jyotirmoy Samajdar, from Kolkata in order to resume the functioning of the closed health centre. The day when the prisoners were to be released on bail—the sun was setting over a hillock behind the Bhopal jail—the assembled people were responding to a slogan raised by a tall man dressed in shabby payjama and punjabi “*Jail ka tala tutega, hamara sathis chhutega*”. (Locks of the prison will be smashed and our comrades will come out). That person was Shankar Guha Niyogi, leader of *Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha* (CMM) approached him and informed him of my dream of working in his movement. He told in Bangla with a Hindi accent, "Come on, we are thinking of setting up another hospital in Rajnandgaon..."

I went to Rajhara in October 1986, accompanied by a classmate, in order to have a direct familiarity with the movement. A bus from Durg stoppd at the new bus-stand, and we alighted. We walked along, not knowing how distant the Shaheed Hospital was. Trucks unfurling red–green flags were plying. We made a signal to a jeep with red–green flag, and it took us to the hospital, situated above a hillock. Red–green flag was flying on the high flag-stand in front of the hospital. The large union office was at a short distance and Guha Niyogi, who was busy with his work, could spare only half an hour for us. He told us of those dreams that were being materialized in Chhalthisgarh. As soon as I came out of the union office, I decided to make Dalli-Rajhara my future field of activity. I felt shy to ask how much monthly allowance I was to get (I learnt about it three months later, when I got three months' allowance at a time after the end of a long strike by the workers). I only wanted to know whether there were electricity and sanitary

toilet, because I, having been brought up in Kolkata ever since my birth, could not dispense with these two necessities of middle class city-life.

In December 1986, I left Kolkata for Dalli-Rajhara. While at the college, I was involved in pro-change students' politics and dreamt of getting integrated with workers and peasants. But my theoretical knowledge of the politics of social transformation was almost zero. When I met Niyogi, who was always busy, I looked at him, listened to his words and tried to comprehend them. It is Niyogiji who was the principal teacher of politics in my life.

It was 1 or 2 January 1987. Workers of Dalli mines were on a strike. The management of the Bhilai Steel Plant took this opportunity to violate the agreement of not pushing mechanization and to run dumpers. While trying to resist it, 21 workers or worker leaders were injured by the CISF's lathi-charge. Some received wounds on their heads and some had their hands fractured. They were writhing with pain when they were brought to the Shaheed hospital. Pain-killing injections did not produce the desired result. Hearing the news, Niyogi came rushing to the spot, gnashing his teeth in anger. He caressed the wounded with affectionate hands. I saw with wonder that the touch of Niyogi's hands did what the pain-killing injections had failed to do; the wounded persons as if forgot their pain and quietened. (The spectacle seemed to be like that of a child, taken in his mother's laps, forgetting the stomach-ache.) Then he, with swift steps, came out of the hospital and drove his jeep towards the mines. Later we heard that Niyogi, bursting with anger, seized the commandant of the CISF by his collar and the CISF jawans pointed their guns at him. Perhaps Niyogi would have been shot at but for the intervention of a high-level police officer who came in between. That day, I could fathom the depth of his fellow feeling towards his comrades, his extraordinary courage and class-hatred. I also realized the intensity of love of the people for a real leader.

When I came to Chhattisgarh, I was almost ignorant of Hindi, and whenever I came across a Bengali, I felt much relieved by speaking with him in Bangla. I could not get along well with Niyogiji by speaking with him in Bangla. He continued his conversation in Hindi and asked me to speak in Hindi, even if it was faulty. He explained to me how he had learnt Hindi and told that while living in hiding, he, for about ten years, never uttered a Bangla or English word consciously. He told me, "Please think and dream in Hindi; and you will find that you have acquired a command over that language." I could not, however, go as far as to dream in Hindi, but definitely his advice bore fruit. I learnt to speak and write in Hindi. Even after twenty years since I left Chhattisgarh, I feel more comfortable in speaking Hindi than in speaking English.

Niyogi did not write any autobiography, and it does not seem probable that he would have written anything like that even if he had found time for it. He never told anybody about his past life in a way that would enable the listener to write his authorized biography. But I heard many times, as did others, tales of various phases of his life, fragments of various episodes from 1969 to the end of the Emergency.

Shankar (his original name is not Shankar, but Dhires) was born in a middle class family. His father's name was Heramba Kumar and mother's name Kalyani. He received his primary education at the village of Jamunamukh of the Naogaon district of Assam, and the beautiful natural scenario of Assam made him a lover of nature. He received his high-school education

when he was living with his uncle in the Sanktoria coalfield area near Asansol. Looking closely at the lives of the coal-miners, he began to understand how the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. While studying the Intermediate Science Course in Jalpaiguri, he got involved in student movement and became a devoted worker of Students' Federation. The wave of the food movement all over Bengal in 1959 swept him away. He got the membership of the undivided Communist Party of India as a skilful student organizer. As he was intensely involved in student politics, his results in the examination were not good. Yet he was allotted a seat for studying engineering in Jalpaiguri on the strength of family recommendation. But he considered it an undue privilege and deserted his home.

It was the year 1961, when it was not difficult to find an employment in the BSP. I heard from Niyogi that the recruiting officer of the plant used to sit before a table at the Durg railway station, the purpose being to recruit for the plant those who had come from outside to seek employment. Dhires's age was then a few months less than eighteen, which was the minimum age for employment. So he had to wait for some time. Then he underwent a training course, after which he was employed as a skilled worker at the coke-oven department of the plant. He had nursed a desire for higher education, and hence began to study the BSc and AMIH courses at Durg's science college as a private student. Dhires gave leadership to the student movement of that college. Sweepers of the Durg municipality, informed of this skilful leader, came to him, and realized their demands after a successful strike under his leadership. The recognized union of the steel plant was affiliated to the INTUC. The next largest union was that of the AITUC. Niyogi, while remaining with the AITUC, went on organizing the workers independently for the solution of their various problems.

In 1964, the CPI split into two, and Dhires joined the CPI (M). At that time, he studied classical Marxism-Leninism under the guidance of Dr B S Yadu, a veteran communist physician. The Naxalbari uprising of 1967 created a stir in Madhya Pradesh too, and almost all the CPI (M) activists of this province were influenced by it. Dhires came in contact with the All-India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries. After the formation of the CPI (ML) on 22 April 1969, he was associated with it for some time. But failure to adapt his own activities to the party line of boycott of mass organizations and mass lines led to his expulsion from the party. (It may be mentioned that the decision to expel Niyogi was taken in the presence of an elderly central leader and subsequently, that leader too opposed the party line on the same question.)

Meanwhile, some events had taken place. Dhires lost his job after leading the first successful strike in the BSP. On the other hand, the police, having branded him a Naxalite, was looking for him. At that time, he went underground and began to take his thoughts to the ordinary workers by means of a Hindi weekly. Inspired by Lenin's *Iskra*, he named the weekly *Sphulinga* (Spark). Side by side, he began preparations for going to the villages. During this period, he came to the realization that for the victory of the working class movement, it was essential to form a bond between this class and the exploited Chhattisgarhi nationality. He wrote a booklet on the nationality problem of Chhattisgarh, which was proscribed by the police when it was coming to Chhattisgarh after getting printed in Maharashtra.

In order to know Chhattisgarh and its people, in order to be integrated with them, he, from 1968, went on passing his day's incognito in the villages. Sometimes he assumed the identity of a seller

of goats, buying goats in the villages and selling them in Durg and Bhilai. He could in this way maintain his contacts with his comrades there. Sometimes he was a peddler, sometimes a fisherman or a PWD labourer. Alongside, he continued the work of organizing the people through movements, e.g. movement for the construction of the Daihan dam, movement of the peasants of Balod for irrigation water, movement of the adivasis against the construction of the Mongra dam.

In 1971, he got employment as a contract labourer in Danitola Quartzite mine of the BSP; the skilled worker of coke-oven was now grinding stones, wearing shorts. This is the period when he assumed the name Shankar by which he became famous. Here he made his acquaintance with his future wife Asha, daughter of his co-labourer Siyaram. The first miners' union organized by him was also located in Danitola, although under the banner of the AITUC. Before his arrest under the MISA during the Emergency in 1975, Niyogi's organizational activities were in Danitola.

The largest iron ore mines of the BSP were situated in Dalli-Rajhara. When Niyogi was imprisoned in Raipur Jail, contract miners of Dalli-Rajhara were vigorously engaged in a spontaneous movement. The leadership of the INTUC and the AITUC entered into an unjust agreement with the BSP management, according to which, permanent workers and contract labourers were to receive Rs 308 and Rs 70 per head respectively, although both categories of workers did the same type of work. Workers came out of the two unions in protest against this unjust agreement. It was the last phase of the Emergency. On 3 March, workers stopped work and started an indefinite *dharna* in the Lal Maidan. They were looking for an able commander who could lead them. Seeing the militant attitude of the workers, no union leader belonging to the CITU, HMS or BMS—dared to face them. A few days later, as the Emergency came to an end, Shankar was released from prison. The distance between Dalli-Rajhara and Danitola is only 22 kilometers. Some workers, who had come out of the AITUC, knew Niyogi as an honest, lighting leader. Hence a team of representatives of Dalli-Rajhara workers went to Danitola in order to request him to give leadership to their movement. Niyogi, at their invitation, came to Dalli-Rajhara, and the independent organization of contract miners, *Chhattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh (CMSS)* was formed. The flag of the new union was red-green, red standing for workers' self-sacrifice and green for the peasantry.

The first struggle of miners under Shankar Guha Niyogi's leadership was a struggle for dignity; they would not obey the agreement signed by the leaders who were lackeys of the management. They accepted financial losses and took Rs 50 each, instead of Rs 70, as bonus from the management and contractors of the steel plant.

In May 1977, began the movement for idle wage (the wage that a worker is entitled to, when the employer cannot provide him with work) and for Rs 100 as house repairing allowance. The pressure of the movement compelled the management and contractors to yield to these two demands in presence of the officers of the labour department. But on 1 June, when the workers went to take payment of the repairing allowance, the contractors refused to pay it. The workers again went on strike.

At the night of 2 June, the next day, two jeeploads of policemen came to arrest Niyogi. They arrested Niyogi from the hovel of the union, and a jeep sped away with Niyogi. Before the other

jeep started, workers, awakened from their sleep, surrounded the remaining policemen, demanding the release of their leader. In order to break the encirclement, the police opened fire, killing seven persons, including Anasuya Bai, a woman worker, and Sudama, a boy. But this did not prove enough for them to get out of the encirclement. Finally, on 3 June, a large police contingent arrived from Durg, killed four more workers and rescued the encircled policemen.

But police atrocity failed to put down the workers' movement. After a continuous strike of as many as 18 days, the mine management and the contractors again agreed to the demands of the workers. Niyogi was released from prison.

The enthusiasm generated by this victory led to the formation of branches of the CMSS in other captive mines of the BSP—Danitola, Nandini, Hirri. All the branches together launched another wave of movement with further victories.

Dalli-Rajhara falls within the district of Durg, and a neighbouring district was Bastar. The authorities took the initiative of full mechanization of the Bailadila iron-ore mines of Bastar, the inevitable consequence of which would be retrenchment of workers. On 5 April, 1978 the police of the Janata Government opened fire on the workers struggling under the leadership of the AITUC to resist mechanization. Workers of Dalli-Rajhara stood by these struggling fellows. Side by side, Niyogi made Dalli-Rajhara workers aware of the impending danger of mechanization. The workers started the movement against mechanization, and compelled the management to accept the proposal of semi-mechanization, which would raise the quantity and quality of output without retrenching workers. They resisted mechanization till 1994. (In 1994, one section of the leadership behaved treacherously with the workers and handed over the Dalli mines to the management for full mechanization.)

Successive victories of the union in economic movements led to large increases in the daily wages of the workers of Dalli-Rajhara. But that scarcely had any impact on their standards of living. Rather the adivasi workers increased their expenditure on alcohol. Niyogi asked, "Should the blood of martyrs then go down the drain of the wine shop?" The union initiated a novel *sharab bandi* (anti-liquor) movement, which freed about one hundred thousands of persons from this intoxicating habit. However, while continuing this movement, he had to be imprisoned under the National Security Act.

Niyogi gave the trade union movement a new dimension. So long, no established trade union did anything except demanding higher pay or bonus or replying to charge-sheets. In other words, trade union activities covered only those subjects that were related with the work places of the workers. Niyogi held that a trade union's activity should not be confined to eight hours' (work time's) issues; it has to deal with twenty four hours' issues. With this idea, the new union launched many new experiments in Dalli-Rajhara.

Mohalla Committes were set up in order to improve the housing conditions of the workers. In the schools run by the BSP, there was no provision for education of the children of contract labourers. Six primary schools were set up for these children under the leadership of the union, and an adult education programme for illiterate workers was undertaken. The pressure of the movement for education compelled the management to set up a number of primary, secondary

and higher secondary schools. The health movement started in the form of cleansing (*safai*) movement. On 26 January 1982, the Shaheed Dispensary started functioning. On the *Shaheed Divas* (martyr's day) of 1983, the Shaheed Hospital was inaugurated. For the pastime of the workers and for the expansion of a healthy culture, *naya anjor* (morning sunshine) cultural troupe was set up. The Shaheed Sudama Football Club and the Red-Green Athletic Club were formed for the cultivation of health. The Mahila Mukti Morcha was formed for women's liberation movement. The CMM was built up with the aim of freeing Chhattisgarh from exploitation and for setting up the worker-peasant raj in Chhattisgarh. A model afforestation programme was implemented behind the union premises as a challenge to the anti-people forest policy of the government.

Departments of the Chhattisgarh Mines Sramik Sangha, formed in 1978:

- I. Trade Union Department
2. Department for work on arrear and fallback wages
3. Peasants' department (transformed into CMM in 1979)
4. Education Department
5. Savings Department
6. Department of Health
7. Sports Department
8. Department for Protection from Alcohol
9. Department of Culture
10. Department for Development of Workers' Slums
- II. Department for Women—named Mahila Mukti Morcha in 1980
12. The Department of Mess (The Kitchen of the Union)
13. Department of Construction
14. Legal Department
15. Library Department
16. Propaganda Department
17. Department of Volunteers
18. Department of Environment was formed in 1984

Women played an important role in the movement of the CMM. In the *Mukhia* meetings of the workers' organization, they participated in significant numbers, although they were somewhat less than 50%. The reason is that contract labourers in the mines used to do two types of work, raising (grinding stones) and transporting (loading trucks). The former type of work was done by both men and women, while the latter only by men. From every raising area, men and women were elected in equal numbers, and from a transporting area, only men. From a *mohalla*, women and men were elected in equal numbers. Consequently, the number of female participants in *Mukhia* meetings was taken as a whole, somewhat less than that of males. Women workers played important roles in the workers' organization, and in the Mahila Mukti Morcha. Women workers organized other women [Vide : Chandana Mitra, *Sangharsh O Nirman* (Struggle and Creation), Anustup Prakashan, Kolkata]

Attracted by the novel leadership of Niyogi, people inhabiting the vast stretches of Chhattisgarh began to take up the red–green flag. In those days Chhattisgarh was comprised of seven districts

of Madhya Pradesh. In five among them, namely Durg, Bastar, Rajnandgaon, Raipur and Bilaspur, the organization and movement of the Mukti Morcha spread rapidly. Among those who fought under the banner of the Morcha were the workers of Bengal-Nagpur Cotton Mill of Rajnandgaon, the oldest factory of Chhattisgarh. On 12 September 1984, the police fired on them to put down their movement. Four workers courted martyrdom, but the movement was victorious.

The last struggle fought under Niyogi's leadership was the Bhilai workers' struggle. Bhilai was the centre of exploitation of workers in Chhattisgarh. The struggle started from there, and it drove the factory owners into panic. Yet the demands were apparently very ordinary—living wages (salaries for minimum livelihood), permanent jobs in permanent industries, right to be organized in unions. Chhattisgarh, which is rich in mineral, forest and water resources, was also the supplier of cheap labour. The upshot of acceptance of such demands was hence far-reaching and dreadful to the owners. So, the police, the administration and almost all the political parties joined hands to crush the movement.

The police and ruffians were employed to attack. Niyogi was kept in prison from 4 February 1991 to 3 April 1991 on the strength of various old warrants. Attempts were made to extern him from the five districts. But nothing could crush the movement. In order to mobilize public opinion in support of the movement, a large band of workers, led by Niyogi, went to Delhi and gave a deputation to the President and the Prime Minister. A fortnight later, on 28 September, secret assassins hired by the owners murdered Niyogi.

Niyogi had come to know of the conspiracy to murder him much earlier. He noted it in his diary and told of it in a cassette. Yet he was resolute in the race of approaching an inevitable death. The reason was: "Everybody must die, so will I, today or tomorrow.... I wish to set up a system in this earth where there will be no exploitation.... I love this beautiful earth, and love my duty even more. I must fulfill the responsibility I have shouldered.... Our movement cannot be crushed by killing me."

The democratic organization I had grown up within during my student days was led by Marxist-Leninists. Sometimes Niyogi seemed to be a misfit with them, and sometimes I used to suspect that he might be a revisionist. In May 1987, Niyogi slipped on the ground and had his leg fractured (fracture neck femur), and an operation was performed on 3 June. This was the only time that he was not in Dalli-Rajhara on 3 June, the martyr's day. For post-operative recovery, he remained in the Shaheed Hospital for quite a few days. This incident was as if a godsend to me. From this time onwards, I slowly developed an intimacy with him.

Thereafter, I went to him time and again with various questions, and discussed them for hours on end. We debated and occasionally quarreled also. Be it in a morning or at dead of night, I never found him tired as far as political organizational discussions were concerned. During those discussions and debates, he never made me feel that I was eighteen years younger to him, and lacking in theoretical knowledge or experience. In our discussions, only argumentation was given importance, not any egotism. (On my return from Chhattisgarh, I, in the early nineties of the last century, became attached to a working class movement that created a sensation in Bengal, taking the responsibility of its health programme. Then I had to come in close contact

with a few well-known workers' leaders with middle-class background. I found that there was a gulf of difference between Niyogi and those fellows.)

Ever since the beginning of my involvement in students' politics, I, in different phases of my life, was associated with various democratic organizations. Nowhere else did I find the like of the practice of democracy that I saw in the CMM. In an article titled 'Problems of Trade Union Movement in India', Niyogi made a brief but valuable discussion on democratic centralism. I witnessed attempts to run organizational affairs on a democratic basis in the organizations of the CMM. Decisions regarding the movement and various organizational matters were taken in a democratic way and they were implemented in a centralized manner.

How was it done in reality? One evening of every week was allotted for the meeting of *mukhias*. More than three hundred *mukhias* attended the meeting; every area of the mines and even mohallas were represented. The discussions on the relevant issues were made as broad as possible. In the first phase of the discussions, Niyogi often remained absent deliberately, lest the relatively backward workers' representatives should feel shy of speaking in his presence. The decisions taken at the first meeting were by no means final. On the following day, the *mukhias*, before the start of the day's work, held meetings with ordinary workers in their respective areas and reported the previous day's proceedings. If the general workers agreed to the previous day's decisions, they became the decisions of the organization. Else, the *mukhias* again met with their feed-backs. This process of decision-making made it incumbent for all the workers to implement the decisions. We are accustomed to seeing that when a union leader levies a subscription, one section of workers pays it while another does not. The organization of the CMM was an exception. 100 percent of the workers paid their subscription, be it one rupee per head for whole-timers' allowances or one hundred and fifty rupees at a time for participating in the parliamentary elections. Except the ill ones, all the workers participated in movements or other programmes.

I saw Niyogi continuously for five years. I witnessed how a person was applying Marxism-Leninism in his life, activities, and movements. Unlike the Marxist-Leninists I had seen earlier. I never saw him quoting always from texts. To him Marxism was not a dogma; it was a dialectical, scientific method of 'concrete analysis of concrete conditions'.

I came to Chhattisgarh in order to work as a doctor, and simultaneously to participate in political activities. My understanding of the latter was participation in meetings and processions, and some actions. In 1988, Anup Singh and I came forward to lead a skirmish. As soon as he received the information, Niyogiji rushed to the spot and took us off; he himself tackled the matter. I felt somewhat aggrieved and asked whether I had come to Chhattisgarh only to work as a doctor. After we had cooled down, Niyogiji sat with us, and explained, in a simple but clear manner, the historical responsibility of intellectuals aspiring for social change. "You are not heroes. The real heroes are the struggling masses... your task is that of teacher.... you have studied much. It is your task to take to the workers and peasants the science you have acquired expertise in and the lessons of science of social change....." From then onwards, I have tried not to repeat such mistakes, and have tried till today to fulfill the responsibility of which Niyogi made us aware.

Niyogi seemed to be merciless in his criticism of certain comrades; their slightest faults did not escape his notice. I often found that Niyogiji was criticizing me severely for a small fault of mine, but kept silent when another intellectual made a similar type of mistake, which was more serious. Grievances accumulated in my mind and I became inclined to think that Niyogiji was being partial. One day I asked him about it. He replied, "It is my responsibility to severely criticize and rectify one whom I consider my co-fighter in the communist party of the future.... My behavior towards one who is my co-fighter in the united front must be different." Since then, every criticism by him was desirable to me.

Even petty problems or distresses of his colleagues did not escape his notice. Let me narrate an episode. When I joined the *Shaheed Hospital*, a protracted strike was going on in Dalli-Rajhara and Rajnandgaon, for which the monthly allowances for the doctors could not be paid regularly. Once I decided to visit my home, but I had no money except the amount just enough to cover my train fare. I felt shy of telling anybody of my need. While going to the bus-stand, I saw Niyogi seated in a motorcycle repairing shop. He beckoned me, asked me to be seated and got engaged in a gossip. The time of the arrival of the bus was approaching and I was growing impatient. At that point of time, a comrade came and gave Niyogi two thousand rupees, which he handed over to me. He, having learnt from somebody else that I would go to visit my home, borrowed the money from a source. He kept himself informed not only about the problems of mine, but also about the weal and woe of all his colleagues, of the ordinary members of the organization.

In January 1991, Niyogi and I were to go to Kolkata. We were to attend a convention of the *Paschimanga Rajya Sarkari Karmachari Samiti* in Krishnanagar, Nadia and a seminar organized by the journal *Matprakash* and the *Nagarik Mancha* in the Students' Hall, Kolkata. Only one reserved berth was available in Bombay Mail. Niyogi, almost by force, made me lie beside him in his berth.

I asked Niyogi time and again to put his thoughts in writing. He found little time to write. On several occasions, he told me, "Doctor Sa'ab, go on writing on the discussions I have with you." I wrote on some of them, but did not attach much importance to it, because I did not know that he would leave us forever so soon.

Niyogi repeatedly aspired for the life of a martyr. The eleven fellows who, in 1977, sacrificed their lives in order to free him from the hands of the police and the four worker comrades who courted martyrdom in the class struggle of Rajnandgaon-Niyogi always bore in mind their self-sacrifices. I did not feel sorry at Niyogi's death, because he received the type of death he aspired for; he became a martyr of class struggle.

We, the surviving comrades of Niyogi, and the hundreds of thousands of toilers of Chhattisgarh, had the responsibility of disseminating his thoughts, of intensifying the struggle for building up a 'New Chhattisgarh'. How far we have been able to do so may be discussed later. Shankar Guha Niyogi continues to live among those who have been practicing his thoughts in some way or other.

Many intellectuals, e.g. Gazi M Ansar, popular science teacher Arvind Gupta, Avinash Deshpande, lawyer Rakesh Shukla, literateur-journalist Sitaram Shastri, Asish Kundu, Chanchala

Samajdar, Binyak Sen, Ilina Sen etc, worked with the CMM in various phases. Many of them did not remain with the movement till the end. For some, family responsibilities became too pressing, some had to give up the mission for economic reasons and some others left the enterprise owing to the failure to bring the individual under the collective. But their tribute to Niyogi after his murder proves that, barring one or two exceptions, their relations with Niyogi or his organization were not wiped out. [Vide, "Niyogi"—leader of Struggle and Creation. Sitaram Shastri; Niyogi Wanted to Build Up a New Model, Binayak Sen, *Sangharsha O Nirman* (Struggle and Creation), Anustup Prakashan, 1992]

There are many questions and queries regarding the split in the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha and the parts played by different individuals in it. It is not possible to answer all of them within the space of this article. Here I try to explain the matter briefly. Niyogi had got hints of the attempt on his life and recorded his final message in a micro-cassette. He proposed the formation of a provisional central decision-making committee that would take the helm of affairs after his demise. He suggested the names of three intellectuals, five working class leaders and a youth leader as members of the committee. In this committee, an ideological struggle started first on the issue of class struggle versus class collaboration. The next ideological struggle was on whether the organization would function on the basis of democratic centralism or the advanced leadership of the organization would take all decisions. While these two struggles were going on, debates such as the attempt of non-Chhattisgarhis to usurp the leadership of the organization were raised. (Incidentally, of the nine members, three were Bengalis, one was from Haryana—he raised this issue—and five others were Chhattisgarhi by birth.) Finally, in the middle of 1994, two members of the central decision-making committee were expelled from the organization for opposing the agreement on mechanization in the Dalli mines. The militant and advanced section of the Bhilai organization came out in protest, and a split took place in the CMM. The CMM (pro-Niyogi) was formed. The CMM (N) did not survive long, but the issues that its members raised led to two more splits in the CMM. At present three organizations are active in the name of the CMM.

Now we are in a period of lull in mass movement, in workers' and peasants' movements and the common masses are confused. On one hand, the 'vote-all' political parties, leftist or rightist, are always busy in adopting anti-people policies and their application. On the other hand, another group, emphasizing only *sangharsh*, not *nirman*, is engaged in the perilous game of nipping the creative aspirations of the common masses in the bud instead of rousing them. In this period, Shankar Guha Niyogi and his activities once again became relevant in the interests of the common masses.

This is proved in the new discourses on him, in the writings on him and his experiments, in the documentary on him. Guha Niyogi's writings, long out of print, and narratives of his movement have been published in a new shape as *Sangharsha O Nirman* (Anustup). Many of those who were associated with Niyogi's movement have written on Niyogi and the movement of Dalli-Rajhara in their memoirs. One example is Dr Ilina Sen's *Inside Chhattisgarh—A Political Memoir* (Penguin). It is needless to say that the points of view of all these writers are not the same, which is quite natural. Many of them have undertaken hair-splitting analyses of the feasibility of application of Guha Niyogi's experiments to the expanded fields of struggle. Many others, on the other hand, are reluctant to attach much significance to Niyogi's personal

behaviour and activities; they are prone to treat them with slight and scorn from negative angle. But in whatever way Niyogi is appraised (it is obvious that fighters for the people and their enemies will always take conflicting positions in this appraisal), his opponents too cannot deny that he has become more and more relevant in the public life of this country, in the determination of the orientation of struggle. Otherwise, they would not have, after such a long span of time, to write against him.

Niyogi was extremely careful about the progress of his cadres. Anybody approaching him with some creative plan would receive extreme help from him. He himself was a dreamer, and taught others to dream. He felt gratified if somebody wanted to materialize the dream. Under the inspiration of Niyogi, and largely spurred by the need of the movement, I learned to write. I also learnt the art of photography and painting to some extent. I began to send the news of the movement of Bhilai from the start to the journal *Update from Chhattisgarh*. We also set up the publication department of the CMM, *Lok Sahitya Parishad*. Booklets of 'Lok Swasthya Sikhsamala' began to come out after even two months from the Shaheed hospital for the purpose of health education. Niyogi usually refrained from intervention: yet he helped us smoothly in the supply of money and circulation of the publications.

I am not particularly fond of travelling, but I did not want to miss any opportunity to go outside with him, because the occasion turned into a lively class. It was 8 September 1991. The union office received a phone call from Niyogi, who was then in Bhilai, asking them to send Dr Goon, whom he wanted to accompany him to Delhi, throughout our journey, we—Niyogi, Janak (Janaklal Thakur, president of the CMM and former MLA of Dondi-Lohara) and I—we discussed various plans, e.g. improving the quality of *Update from Chhattisgarh*, setting up the *Chhattisgarhi Bhasha Prasar Samiti* of the *Lok Sahitya Parishad*, making cassettes of the songs of the worker-poet Faguram Yadav, setting up a hospital in Bhilai after the victory of the movement.... We had our tea in the train from small earthen cups with narrow mouths. Niyogiji asked me to take an empty cup. He said that he would have the potters of Chhattisgarh make such cups. ...

On 10 September, Janak returned with other comrades, but Niyogi had me staying there with him for one more day. He introduced me with many comrades who were supporters of our movement. Later, it seemed to me that he was apportioning his tasks among us. Later we came to know that he knew that a plot was underway to murder him. I was surprised and wondered what great devotion to his ideal could keep a man so impassive in the face of impending death.

During his lifetime, I met him last on 24 September. It was Tuesday, and I had no hospital duty in daytime. After spending the day in the office, I came to our quarters in the afternoon in order to cook our supper. Ansar (the organizer from Rajnandgaon) arrived and informed, " Doctor Sa'ab, Niyogiji is calling you."

Although a bit annoyed owing to the interruption, I went to the office. Niyogiji was to go to Bhilai (this was the last occasion of his visit from Dalli- Rajhara to Bhilai), and I had to prepare some files-of telephone numbers, Delhi-dharna, pictures of the Bhilai movement, the Bankheri episode... for him. Then Niyogi went on telling about his trip, to Bankheri on the way from Delhi to Bhilai, his meeting with the Chief Minister Patwa and the labour Minister Bhojwani in

Bhopal.... His book on environment was going to be brought out, and he told in detail about the desired front cover (no, I could not live up to his desire). He promised to bring an electronic typewriter for improving the quality of *Update*. The time for the evening round was approaching, and when I expressed my desire to leave, Niyogiji said, "I have some more talks with you". At that point of time, the manager of a contractor came to discuss some problems. My time was running out and I was determined to leave. Niyogi said, "On my way to Bhilai, I shall see you at the hospital." Whatever the reasons, he could not come, and he could never come thereafter.

On 28 September 1991, I, along with three worker activists, brought down his blood-drenched corpse, from the table of the morgue of Durg. Nine hours after his death had already elapsed; yet fresh red blood was streaming from the bullet wounds on his back. Shankar Guha Niyogi, became a martyr. We covered the corpse of our heroic comrade with the red-green flags of the CMM.

I was with the corpse from 28 to 29 September. Six shots from an indigenous pistol pierced the back and went into the heart, but there was no sign of pain. The visionary, my leader was as if dreaming with a light smile. It seemed that if I called, 'Niyogiji', he would open his eyes and ask, "Doctor Sa'ab, what's the news?"

I first reminisced about him five months after his murder. At that time few persons were reconciled to his absence. In Dalli-Rajhara, it appeared to us that he was in Bhilai, and the comrades of Bhilai were inclined to think that he was in Rajhara. He was intertwined with our existence in this way. Shankar Guha Niyogi showed how a person, even after death, lives in his thoughts and activities.

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