



*"If we care for the poor, we cannot allow the Gross National Product to destroy the Gross Nature Product any further."*

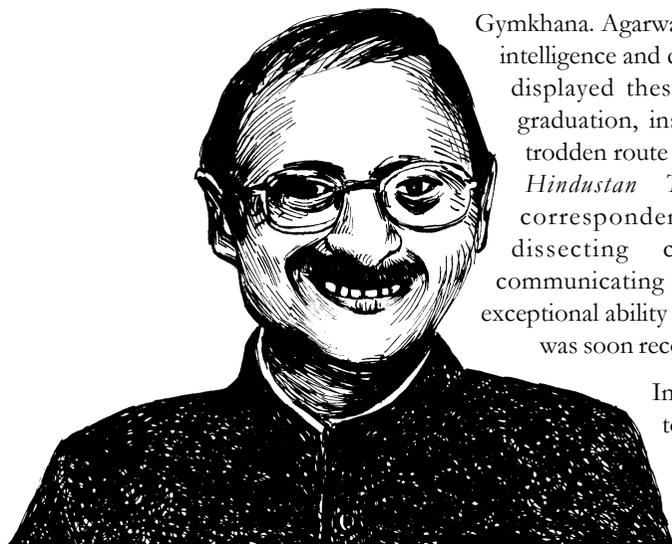
*- Anil Agarwal: WWF, London, October 8, 1985*

Anil Agarwal was a prominent Indian environmentalist – perhaps the first to see the problem through the eyes of the poor. The poor – because of their fast population growth were blamed for degrading the environment and rapid deforestation. Agarwal challenged these notions. He felt that the poor had a great stake in the responsible management of the environment.

Anil Agarwal was born in a business family of Kanpur. In 1970 he got a degree in mechanical engineering from I.I.T. Kanpur. He was a fiery orator and was elected as the President of the Student's

Gymkhana. Agarwal was a man with a sharp intelligence and deep commitment and he displayed these traits early on. After graduation, instead of taking the well trodden route to the USA he joined the *Hindustan Times* as a science correspondent. He had a flair for dissecting complex ideas and communicating them with clarity. This exceptional ability for lucid, brilliant writing was soon recognized.

In the mid 1970's he went to England and came under the influence of Barbara Ward – the high priestess of the environment and



author of *Only One Earth*. After gaining sufficient international exposure Agarwal returned to New Delhi in the early 1980's and founded the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE).

The staggering breadth and depth of Agarwal's concerns were demonstrated first in *The State of India's Environment 1982: A Citizen's Report*. In compiling this report he was helped by numerous grassroots movements and field activists. This landmark book was the first serious overview of the use and abuse of nature in India. The book honestly and attractively documented the reality of India's environmental degradation. It got an overwhelming response and was reviewed in hundreds of journals worldwide!



*A caricature of Anil Agarwal by Rustam Vania*

The *First Citizen's Report* came as an eye opener for insular academicians, blind state and sleepy public. It examined the ecological burden borne by women in dealing with a declining biomass-based rural economy. This helped in understanding the relationship between environment and development. Its contents were discussed and acted upon. It had a far reaching impact. The book was translated in Kannada and Hindi by famous environmentalists Shivaram Karanth and Anupam Mishra.

Subsequent Citizen's Reports followed. In *The Politics of the Environment* Agarwal argued for a holistic management of land and water resources in the country. The third report focused on floods and the fourth appropriately titled *Dying Wisdom* documented India's traditional water harvesting methods. While the first two reports drew on field reports of scores of activists the latter were produced in-house, reflecting the slow fading of CSE's links with mass movements.

In *Towards Green Villages*, Agarwal emphasised decentralised control by village communities as a strategy for environmentally sound and participatory rural development. The CSE documented and brought into prominence initiatives such as *Sukhomajri* in Haryana, *Ralegan Siddhi* in Maharashtra and the *Tarun Bharat Sangh* in Rajasthan as holistic experiments in land-water management.

Agarwal did not trust political parties or trade unions as agents of change, but preferred to pin his hopes on grassroots organizations which he believed could pressure the state into action. When Rajiv Gandhi became the prime

minister, he invited Agarwal to brief the Cabinet and senior bureaucrats on environment and development issues. Rajiv Gandhi felt that sensitising key politicians could positively impact the environment.

At the time when wanton pollution caused by vehicular exhaust was choking Delhi, Agarwal mounted a sustained and hard-hitting campaign through the publication of *Slow Murder*. This report brilliantly pinned responsibility on fuel refineries, auto manufacturers and regulatory authorities. This analysis was followed by a concerted media campaign which finally led the Supreme Court to order the phasing out and conversion of polluting vehicles in Delhi. Agarwal marshalled solid evidence and embarrassed many corporate firms for shamefully polluting the environment. Soon the entire public transport in Delhi switched to compressed natural gas (CNG). If people in Delhi breathe a little easy today it is thanks to Anil Agarwal.



Agarwal founded the fortnightly environmental magazine *Down to Earth* with a wonderful children's section titled *Gobar Times*. The CSE has often taken up high-decibel campaigns against the high-handedness of corporations and forced the government to set-up regulations and enforce them. As a fiercely independent environmental watchdog the CSE founded by Agarwal has done commendable public service to the country.

In 1989 Agarwal co-authored a pamphlet *Global Warming in an Unequal World*. This showed that the *survival emissions* of the poor – the methane released by rice fields was different from the *luxury emissions* of the rich – toxic gases released by their military-automobile-industrial complex. The West sought to blame the victims and reward the polluters. The rich Western countries accused underdeveloped countries like India and China for global warming and exhorted them to clean up their act. Agarwal termed it as *environmental colonialism* and urged the West to own up its historical responsibility for greenhouse gases. It was foolish, he argued to divide the *carbon sink* provided by the oceans and atmosphere in proportion to the magnitude of greenhouse gases currently being emitted by *each country*. A more equitable way would be to allocate each human being an equal share of the carbon sink.



Agarwal received several honours for his work. IIT / Kanpur bestowed the Distinguished Alumnus Award on him. In 1987, the United Nations Environment Programme elected him to its Global 500 Roll of Honour. The Indian Government honoured him with a Padma Bhushan for his work in environment and development.

For more than twenty years Anil Agarwal was India's most articulate and influential environmental campaigner. He possessed an uncanny ability to synthesize the results of specialized scientific studies and to communicate them in simple language. He believed in not just highlighting environmental problems but in finding just solutions.

Agarwal possessed an almost heroic determination. He conducted a long battle against chronic asthma, and then in 1994 was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer which affected the eyes and brain. From his sick bed, while in remission he planned and carried out his last campaign. He died prematurely at the age of just fifty-four in Dehradun on Jan 02, 2002.

