

# The anthropologist's assistant (or the assistant's anthropologist?) The story of a disturbing episode

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*Abstract:* This piece tells the story of a disturbing episode in the author's relationship with the field. Though the details are unique, the kind of ethical dilemmas it documents must be in some form or other part of the experience of a great many anthropologists – though such stories are seldom set down in print. These dilemmas include the balance we strike between participation and observation, and between the moral commitments we have as private individuals and our (no less moral) commitment as anthropologists to report on our ethnography in as impartial and objective a way as is possible. Central to this particular story is the anthropologist's relationship with his research assistant over more than two decades, and it tells of the latter's involvement in various human rights campaigns, his arrest, imprisonment and on-going trial on vaguely specified charges. I reflect on the way in which these events have affected my subsequent fieldwork and on the way I have written up. It is the story of a friendship and of a genuine intellectual collaboration between the anthropologist and anthropologist's research assistant that is probably not so uncommon but is seldom fully reflected in the ethnographies we read.

*Keywords:* the ethics of anthropology, the Indian state, participant observation, the research assistant

## **Preamble**

The personalized narrative that follows is not an “academic” article in any conventional sense, and it comes without the usual scholarly apparatus of that genre. Preferring to let my story speak for itself, I refrain from explicit “moral” conclusions, though I offer it here as a concrete illustration of the kinds of “ethical” dilemmas that many anthropologists must in some form confront in the course of their research. It was

written for a meeting of the Cambridge University Student Anthropology Society in October 2008, and as a small contribution toward promoting awareness of the current human rights situation in the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh; and it very much reflects the mood and preoccupations of that moment in my own relationship to “the field”—which is why I have left my original text just as I put it down at the time. I have, however, added a few parenthetical comments<sup>1</sup> and footnotes that refer to subsequent



events, and at the end a 2014 postscript updates the story as I told it then.

### The story (2008)

It is just a story. As true as I can make it, though much is uncertain. In it I have a walk-on part. Over much of 2008 its twists and turns consumed me, even while dreaming. Were I to stand back from them, I'd invite you to think about anthropological practice, or the "everyday" state. I'd reflect on the crucial contribution that the anthropologist's assistant often makes to the ethnographies we read, and on the balance between participation and observation in anthropological fieldwork. Not seeing it as a moral imperative to protect the identities of oppressive policemen, I'd worry about the "ethical guidelines" to which we now sign up, and over the relationship between anthropology and activism. I see some attraction in the Marxist position that stresses action, not contemplation, as key to understanding the world (which is perhaps what the "participant" bit of participant observation obliquely recognizes). I'm a reluctant activist, however. Activism makes partisan demands incompatible with the holy grail of objectivity—a chimera perhaps, though one we can't do without. As to a worm's-eye view of the state in "the world's largest democracy", there would be much to say in more general terms, and even perhaps lessons for our own civil liberties. It was but yesterday that a British government was proposing to lock terrorist suspects up for 90 days without charge and was complicit in the export of torture victims to less squeamish territories. But of these broader concerns I shall not speak. I'll just tell my story.

It requires some background. Since 1993 I have done intermittent fieldwork in the central Indian steel town of Bhilai. The public sector Bhilai Steel Plant (BSP) was constructed with Soviet aid and expertise on a green field site in the late 1950s and 1960s and is located in the Chhattisgarh region of what was then Madhya Pradesh. Chhattisgarh is now a separate state, and BSP

has become one of the largest steel plants in Asia. By the late 1980s it had around 65,000 workers on its direct payroll, and had provided a magnet for a large number of smaller-scale private sector factories in its immediate vicinity. Abutting onto the plant is its company township, and surrounding that an ocean of urban sprawl. To build this gargantuan complex workers flooded in from all corners of the country, and many put down roots in Bhilai.

Its industrial "working class" is deeply segmented by the labor market. BSP workers with permanent public sector posts are an unquestioned aristocracy of labor, enjoying pay, perks, and conditions that are munificent in comparison with those of all others. Regular workers in the big private sector factories are also *relatively* privileged. In both public and private sector industry, however, a large proportion of the workforce are contract laborers who have no security at all, and who do the most arduous tasks for much lower pay. At the bottom of the heap is the vast army of informal sector labor with jobs related to industry. With one significant exception, the local labor unions are in the pockets of management, and are anyway concerned only with the interests of regular company employees. The exception is the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha (Chhattisgarh Liberation Front, or CMM), which started among manual miners in BSP's captive iron ore mines at Dalli-Rajhara but was soon championing the cause of contract workers more widely. Between the mid-1970s and mid-1990s there were violent conflicts between the CMM and the more established unions. In the late 1980s, the CMM began a highly effective campaign on the private sector industrial estate in Bhilai. In 1991, its charismatic leader—Shankar Guha Niyogi—was assassinated by a gunman allegedly hired by local industrialists.

The Naxalite movement is a guerrilla movement of Maoist inspiration. The present [now former] Prime Minister has described it as the biggest threat to India's internal security. Today, Chhattisgarh is its epicenter. Naxalites operate in several of its districts, but it is in Dantewada and other forested parts of the south that they

have their stronghold. That's an Adivasi area—inhabited mainly by supposedly autochthonous “tribes”—where the population has long resented the state on account of the cynical rapacity of its representatives, mainly police and forest officials. Unlike India's mainstream communist parties, the Maoist movement had long given up on the industrial working class to focus on marginalized segments of the peasantry. So when I first started work in Bhilai, the Naxalites seemed far away and of little relevance to what went on there. Over the past five years, however, they have been developing their urban networks, and the intensity of the conflict in the south—where Naxalites have operated since the early 1980s—has also dramatically escalated. Following State Assembly elections in 2003, the right-wing Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party are in power. [New elections were held in November 2008 and the BJP government was returned, as it was again in 2013.]

Nothing has done more to fan the flames than the formation in 2005 of Salwa Judum (“Pacification Hunt”), a vigilante organization sponsored and armed by the state government (who disingenuously claims it's spontaneous). In concert with battalions of paramilitary police, Salwa Judum has emptied vast tracts in which Naxalites supposedly operate, herding many of their inhabitants into “secure” camps in which conditions are inhuman. Many others fled into the forests or into neighboring states. Those who tried to stay behind were treated as the enemy, beaten, raped, and murdered. Nobody knows how many were displaced, but it's probably somewhere between 100,000 and 300,000.

That Salwa Judum held its first public meeting on the day that the Tata Company (now owners of Jaguar Land Rover) signed a memorandum of understanding with the state government for a new steel plant in the area is suggestive. So are reports that Essar, a big mining and steel company, helped fund the camps. Suggestive because these now deserted villages are located in an area expected to yield vast mineral wealth and in which several dozen enterprises have been granted licenses. It looks like

the Highland Clearances, though the stakes are higher than sheep and the methods more brutal. Essar already operates iron ore mines at nearby Bailadila, one of the richest deposits in the world. It's a remote location, and the only way to transport the ore is to mix it into slurry and pump it down a giant pipeline to the coast. “Why don't the Naxalites blow that up, as they easily might?” Essar pays them not to, senior police sources say. And nor are they the only big industrial house whose protection money supposedly bankrolls both sides. Needless to say, counter-insurgency operations also provide lucrative opportunities for many state functionaries and contractors.

Meanwhile, human rights organizations have tried to call the Chhattisgarh government to account, and there is currently public interest litigation before the Supreme Court, taken out by the historian and prominent public intellectual Ramachandra Guha and by his kinswoman Nandini Sundar, a professor at the Delhi School of Economics who has done anthropological fieldwork in that part of Chhattisgarh, and whose husband is a prominent journalist with a senior position on one of the most influential English-language dailies. Their plea is that the state has no constitutional right to outsource security to a bunch of out-of-control *goondas* (gangsters), which is basically what Salwa Judum are.<sup>2</sup> The police and state government have reacted by claiming that civil society organizations critical of them—like the People's Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL)—have been infiltrated by Naxalites, or are their dupes, and by passing the Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act of 2005. This allows them to arrest anybody suspected of contact with Naxalites, or in any way aiding or abetting their cause. Under it, bail is almost impossible to obtain; suspects can be held for 90 days without charge, and then for many months before their case is brought to a trial that is unlikely to last less than a couple of years.

It's a muzzle on the local press, even if that hardly seems necessary, since the press in Chhattisgarh is entirely reliant on state government patronage. For Mr. Vishwaranjan, Chhattisgarh's

Director General of Police (DGP), the ideological struggle is as vital as the counter-insurgency war. Previously a senior intelligence officer in Delhi, he's the grandson of a famous Urdu poet (Firaq Gorakhpuri) and has literary aspirations himself. He has nurtured relations with the local press, regularly authoring articles for it and providing off-the-record briefings. While the Anglophone national press is highly critical of the human rights situation in Chhattisgarh, the local vernacular newspapers reproduce police propaganda verbatim and are overtly hostile to civil society organizations like the PUCL.

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In Chhattisgarh, the PUCL has not always helped itself, and at present the noise about human rights violations in the state is made by activists based outside it. Locally, its two most prominent office bearers are intellectuals who formerly played a significant part in the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha. That's one reason why the PUCL is deeply disliked by the regional elite, who felt genuinely threatened by Niyogi's movement. After his assassination, however, the CMM fell on hard times, its influence declined, and its leadership split. The more radical faction is led by a couple who were both educated in one of India's elite universities, who were drawn to Chhattisgarh by Niyogi's movement and are the only local union leaders of substance who live like ordinary workers and speak Chhattisgarhi. In these factional splits, the two senior PUCL office bearers have been on opposite sides. One, Binayak Sen, was the driving force behind the investigation and exposure of police atrocities and encounter killings. But since May 2007, he's been in jail.

Binayak, a metropolitan middle-class Bengali by origin, was trained in one of the most prestigious medical colleges in the country and taught medicine in one of its most prestigious universities before joining a community rural health center in Madhya Pradesh. While there, he went in 1981 with a PUCL team to investigate one of Niyogi's repeated arrests. That brought the two of them into contact, and Binayak had

anyway already concluded that politics matter more than pills to the health of the poor. Along with a couple of other young idealistic Bengali doctors, Binayak set up a clinic in a small room in the union office in Rajhara. It grew into an impressive hundred-bed hospital built by the voluntarily labor of union members. Subsequently, he distanced himself from the CMM, shifted to Raipur (now the state capital), started a health center in an impoverished rural area, and devoted much of his time to the PUCL. In May 2007, that led to his arrest. On World Human Rights Day in December 2007, the Supreme Court rejected his bail appeal. In May 2008, his trial began [and more than six years later, it is still going on].

The charge is sedition, though the evidence for it is hard to ascertain. That so far specified is either extremely vague (he is rumored to have received money from abroad) or is seemingly innocuous (some leftist publications were found in his flat along with a postcard from a jailed Naxalite addressing him as "comrade"). Over recent months he had paid 33 visits to an ailing septuagenarian Naxalite leader in Raipur's jail—all sanctioned by the prison authorities, and on the face of it consistent with his medical and human rights roles. Most damaging is that he allegedly smuggled a letter out of the jail on behalf of this leader and handed it on to a Naxalite courier who was apprehended with it. Its contents were reportedly bland. The police claim to have a statement from the courier admitting that it came from Binayak Sen; the courier claims that he was tortured and forced to sign a blank sheet of paper, and the defense lawyers point out that for just such reasons no statement made in police custody is admissible in court. As soon as the trial opened, several prosecution witnesses turned "hostile" (retracted statements they'd supposedly given to the police). The police have announced that they intend to present a supplementary charge sheet and brief the press that they have a lot more on Binayak than they have so far revealed. Both nationally and internationally, the case has become a cause célèbre. Early on, Noam Chomsky sent an open letter of pro-

test to the Chief Minister—who, on discovering Chomsky’s credentials, concluded that there are not many votes in structural linguistics. A year later, a petition signed by 22 Nobel laureates fell on equally deaf ears.

But, though Binayak is also a friend, it’s my research assistant, Ajay T. G., who is the main protagonist of my story. As I’ll suggest, however, the state government’s on-the-hoof responses to the exigencies of Binayak’s case, and their absolute determination to keep him locked up, explain much about Ajay’s ordeal.

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I first met Ajay by serendipity at the beginning of my Bhilai fieldwork in the crowded reception room where passes are issued to enter the steel plant. Then about 28, he was working part-time as a representative for a small Kolkata company that supplied gears for BSP rolling equipment—a job he detested, though it demanded but a few hours a week. We got talking; he was curious about my project and promised to drop in on me. He did and was soon devoting days on end to taking me all over to meet potential informants—all without any remuneration. In fact, he was spending a significant fraction of his meager Deton Engineering earnings on petrol for the battered old scooter on which we went about. And it wasn’t even as if he wanted to practice his English, which with me he is reluctant to speak. It couldn’t go on, and after a few weeks I persuaded him to formally become my research assistant—notionally part-time, though actually he worked extremely long hours. On that occasion I was based in Bhilai for almost a year. Nearly every year since, when I’ve been back on shorter trips, he’s continued to help in my research; in the interim—when he’s had time and the spirit has moved him—he’s done censuses for me, taken photos, kept his ears open for things that would interest me, and phoned me with news. During my field trips I have mostly stayed in his house; and on a couple of occasions he’s visited London. [Though I’ve referred to him here as my “assistant”, that in truth does him down. “Collaborator” is far closer. He

understands what I want to argue, has sometimes inconveniently objected (“not enough evidence”), and has frequently suggested new questions (“in that case we need to know X and Y”).

Ajay’s family come from Kerala and are Iravas by caste, traditionally toddy tappers but upwardly mobile over the past century and now free from the stigma of untouchability. His father was one of eight brothers—the sons of a polyandrous marriage—who all went as migrant workers to Sri Lanka in the 1950s. In the 1960s, things got tough for Indians there, and one of the brothers set up a bridgehead in Bhilai, where the plant was still under construction and where he patrolled the site selling tea from a kettle. With the profits he started a fast food *dosa-idli* “hotel” near the main bus stand, and the other brothers joined him, Ajay’s father setting up a poultry farm in the untouchable quarter of what was once a small rural village but is now an industrial “slum”. That finally went bust in 1991, but it is where his parents continue to live, Ajay with them until recently.

But like all twenty-two children born to the eight brothers, he was actually raised by the womenfolk in the ancestral *taravad* (joint household) in Kerala, the boys being shipped off to Bhilai when they were old enough to work. Some are still there and some now have jobs in the Gulf; apart from Ajay’s father, the senior generation have retired back home, some involving themselves in a new lineage temple. Knowing little Hindi, and having just completed his tenth class exams, Ajay arrived in Bhilai at the age of sixteen to work with a father he scarcely knew. It’s been a conflictual relationship, and until his arrest they literally had not spoken for the last fifteen years, though for most of that time they were living together. It might have gone smoother if they weren’t both so strong-willed and unflinchingly forthright. Apart from that, they also have leftist politics and a conviction that religion is the root of all evil in common. For years Ajay devoted his energies to the Communist Party-affiliated Youth Federation of India, but before I arrived in Bhilai he’d broken

with the party—because its local leadership had broken with party principles.

For Ajay our association opened up other foreign connections, and he went on to work with Murli (Balmurli Natrajan), at that time a PhD student in anthropology at Iowa. Later, my wife, Margaret Dickinson—an independent filmmaker—set up Jandarshan, a European Union-funded access training program in documentary film designed for students from backgrounds unrepresented in the visual media in India. It was located in Bhilai and Ajay became its local coordinator and one of its twelve trainees. Another was Shobha, a railway worker's daughter from a Telugu-speaking Catholic family of untouchable caste from Andhra Pradesh. Ajay, who had resolutely resisted his family's attempts to marry him off to a suitable Irava girl, proposed. Shobha accepted. With varying degrees of reluctance, both families acquiesced. But since Ajay refused to convert, the Bishop did not. Shobha was excommunicated—which she took very hard. And when shortly after the wedding her father died, the thought of divine retribution weighed heavily. Now they are the besotted parents of a tearaway two-year-old son whose religious education is already a bone of contention.

In 2003, Margaret was commissioned to make a film for the International Labour Organization (ILO) about women construction workers, and Ajay and I were roped in as research assistants in Bhilai. Among those we got to know best and have since kept up with is a woman called Chanda. Her husband had recently been badly injured in a truck accident and was unable to work; and one of her daughters, Lachmi, had just had an entirely redundant operation for peritonitis in a dubious private hospital, to pay for which they had sold their village land. After Margaret and I had returned to London, Lachmi got sicker and sicker and the doctors continued to bullshit—until Ajay took unilateral action to get a proper diagnosis. Lachmi had a curable form of childhood leukaemia, but now it was so advanced that she was unlikely to live. Determined that she would,

Ajay spent the next two months taking her from hospital to hospital and raising money for her treatment. She died. In her memory, he founded a small school for unschooled girls in Chanda's courtyard—originally run by voluntary labor with no budget at all, though Murli, Margaret, and I were later able to provide a small subvention and Murli secured a minimal grant from an educational foundation that paid principally for a midday meal, a priority since several of the small ones had illnesses associated with malnutrition. By the time of Ajay's arrest, all of them were literate (and Chanda, who had never been to school, has also learned to read and write). The older girls had scripted, shot, and directed a short film.

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Ajay was also making films of his own—several for the PUCL recording testimony about police excesses and one about Binayak as part of the campaign for his release. On an earlier PUCL assignment, during the 2004 general elections on which the Naxalites declared a boycott, he'd accompanied Binayak and Nandini Sundar to Dantewada to document the poll. They'd been waylaid by an intimidating group of Sangam members (Naxalite activists) and Ajay's camera was seized. Weeks later, an emissary from the Naxalite spokesman for the area arrived at his house with an apology and the promise to restore the camera or pay compensation for it. Ajay was asked to acknowledge the offer in writing. A couple of years later, Nandini published a newspaper article in which she described this incident, contrasting it with another in which her own camera had been purloined by Salwa Judum militiamen without any redress.

Early one morning in January 2008, 200 armed police surrounded the small house that Ajay and Shobha now rent in a new housing colony, and positioned marksmen on its roof. Ajay knew they were coming, since they had first raided the poultry farm and his sister had phoned to warn him. Without a lawyer on hand, it was wise to disappear. So Shobha and the toddler were left to receive the visitors, who—

though they didn't have a search warrant—ransacked the house. Around 3 pm Ajay returned, accompanied—to police fury—by two CMM advocates. For the next few hours they interrogated him, first at home and then at the local *thana* (police station); and they took away his computer, film equipment, all copies of his films, and large bundles of papers including field notes and articles of mine. Late that night they let him go, but an hour or so later two policemen returned to the house to demand that he sign a statement saying that he had willingly agreed to the search. Why he was searched nobody would say, and it seemed that the officers in charge had themselves no idea. The order had come from police headquarters in Raipur, and was one of a number of swoops on suspected Naxalite safe houses. An earlier raid, coincidentally in the very next street, had been on a safe house occupied by the wife and children of the Naxalite spokesman to whom Ajay had addressed his letter, which it seems the police now had.

Next morning, *Dainik Bhaskar* carried the front-page headline, “Naxalite urban network broken: Ajay T.G. also in custody.” For the next fortnight he sat in the police station while a senior officer read through his emails. Asked about the letter, he told them the story. After that they appeared to lose interest, though they refused to return his equipment. Though it wasn't scheduled, Ajay pressed me to visit; and I left for Bhillai when teaching ended in March. We worked together unmolested, though one evening I was summoned to dinner by a newspaper editor friend in Raipur who wanted me to meet the Director General of Police, who wanted—I assumed—to check me out.

As soon as I'd left, Ajay began legal proceedings for the return of his equipment. He also attended the opening days of the Binayak trial. On one of them he carelessly forgot to remove from his backpack the pocket-sized tool-kit I'd given him for running repairs to his motorbike. He was searched; and B. B. S. Rajput—Raipur's City Superintendent of Police—presented it to the rolling of drums before the judge, who

coolly observed that it was a tool-kit. That evening, however, Rajput held a press conference at which he announced that a Naxalite had been apprehended entering court with a lethal weapon. It may not be a coincidence that when the police had searched Binayak's apartment the previous year, and Ajay was one of the PUCL observers delegated to ensure that they did not plant evidence, it was he who conducted a body search on the officer -in -charge—B. B. S. Rajput.<sup>3</sup> The next morning the papers were full of his “multi-purpose weapon.”

Early morning a few days later—5 May—Ajay went for milk and was stopped on the corner by two plainclothes policemen who snatched his mobile (there would no interfering lawyers this time) and bundled him off to the *thana*, where he was locked up under guard. In the late afternoon the Town Inspector (TI) arrived, put him in a jeep flanked by eight policemen with rifles, took him to court, where he was told to sign a paper, and delivered him to Durg jail. The TI himself was not unsympathetic, and was the only policeman who ever gave him a hint as to why he'd been arrested. “It's because of some letter that you're stuck.”

But why did they pick him up now, when they'd had that since January and could have read the whole story on the Internet in Nandini's article at any time over the past two years? Conspiracy, not cock-up, I reckon. The senior police who pulled the strings never seriously supposed he was a Naxalite. Not once was he questioned. His attempt to recover his equipment through the courts was perhaps a last straw. Or perhaps I was an unnecessary complication and they were waiting until I left; or perhaps B. B. S. Rajput—having softened up the local press—saw the toolkit incident as an opportunity to teach Ajay a lesson. But the main compulsion, I suspect, was that at just this time the case against Binayak had opened in utter disarray as witnesses called by the prosecution repudiated their previous testimony. It was a public relations fiasco, and the unmasking of new Naxalite networks involving Binayak's associates was a bid to recover lost ground and bury bad news.

The local press played along. On the morning after Ajay's arrest, *Dainik Bhaskar* reported that he was a Naxalite public relations officer and intimate with their spokesman's wife. Next day, under the headline "Naxalites had a foreign connection," they carried the "astonishing news" that he'd brought a professor from the London School of Economics (LSE) to help in recruitment to the movement; and a few days later ran a phantasmagorical story about the fabulous funds he'd received and funnelled to the Naxalites.

Presuming on our dinner party acquaintance, I emailed the DGP, pointing out that the letter mentioned in the press reports must relate to the incident that Nandini had written about. Since that took place well before the Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act became law, it could hardly be in breach of it. And since *Bhaskar* attributed its story to "police sources," it seemed unaccountable that they had not interviewed me while I was there. They must now have questions for me, and I'd wait by the phone for the next few days. It didn't ring; so I called our mutual newspaper editor friend to say that I was proposing to return to Chhattisgarh to clear up any misapprehensions in police minds. Within hours the DGP rang. Of course, I was always welcome, though now was perhaps not the moment. And I should know that the letter they had was about a completely different camera from that mentioned in Nandini's article. There was another he'd supplied to the Naxalites. Anyway, they had a lot of other evidence against him. That I'd never suspected Ajay's involvement in Naxalism just went to show how clever these terrorists are. Meanwhile, intelligence from my press friends was that the case against Ajay was more serious than that against Binayak.

The other immediate step was to persuade the LSE to threaten *Bhaskar* (whose owners have property in London) with a fabulously expensive libel suit in the British courts unless they printed a retraction; after much foot-dragging, the School's solicitors were instructed to warn the paper of their clients' resolve to pursue a

case "in India or any other jurisdiction."<sup>4</sup> In very small type, *Bhaskar* carried a "clarification" and the journalist responsible for the piece sent me an emollient email to explain that he'd just written what the police told him.

At that time, Margaret, Murli, and I spent our days trying to find out what was going on; give Shobha long-distance moral support (difficult because our calls were bugged), liaise with the PUCL and their lawyers, get the story noticed by putting out information on Chhattisgarh.net, and answer the inquiries of journalists. It helped that the anniversary of Binayak's arrest was just coming up, and this was accompanied by a renewed press campaign on his behalf and by demonstrations both inside and outside India with which Ajay's name could be linked. Early on, the magazine *Tehelka*—famous for sting operations exposing official corruption—carried a big spread, followed by a number of supportive pieces in the national press. Murli set up an Ajay T. G. website where the coverage could be found. But none of this would have had much effect if Ajay's cause had not been adopted by Amar Kanwar, a prominent Delhi-based documentary filmmaker, who had made an early film about Niyogi's murder and is married to a Supreme Court lawyer who represents the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha. Amar constituted a committee for Ajay's release made up of high-profile names on the liberal left of the Indian film industry and in the performing arts, and saturated the OSIAN documentary film festival—one of the biggest in the world—with publicity about the case. He also organized well-advertised showings of Ajay's films in cities all over the country, and arranged that the DGP would receive a continuous bombardment of phone calls from broadcast media and newspapers, and that every two or three days some item on it would appear.

In Chhattisgarh there was little stir, though the national PUCL did organize a hunger strike in Raipur, and—to my astonishment—the most influential figure in the state Communist Party, of whom Ajay had been bitterly critical, owned him as a prodigal son and lobbied the Chief



Minister. All his other former comrades, however, completely shunned the family, as did nearly all of their friends. One initially acted as junior counsel to the PUCL lawyer, but turned double agent for the police and tried to extract their property deeds and bank pass from Shobha. Most people, however, were just frightened. Since the raid in January, their bank account was frozen, and Shobha was destitute. We tried to send a float, but none of the local friends we asked was willing to act as a conduit.

But not everyone was cowed. Most of the neighbors, including the Malayalis, cold-shouldered Shobha, but the Muslims remained friendly—perhaps because Muslims are conditioned to mistrust the police. *Sarkari naukri*—secure public sector employment—is a meal ticket for life and the guarantee of a decent living. But it comes at the price of steering well clear of radical left-wing politics. Not one of their numerous friends with *naukri* has dared visit the house since Ajay’s arrest. Of the handful who did keep in contact, one was my five-star informant Somvaru, an ex-bullock drover turned forklift truck driver, now long retired from the plant. He, his daughter and his son-in-law (who both have BSP jobs), put together some money and Somvaru was delegated to deliver it to Shobha. The son-in-law did not dare go himself and cautioned Somvaru not to take his moped because the house would be under surveillance and the police would trace him through its plates. Somvaru is around 75, it was baking June, and he made the 12-mile journey three fruitless times by bicycle because the place was locked up. The fourth time he went a very long way around via Shobha’s brother’s house, where he learned that she had barricaded herself in lest the police plant evidence. And there was Chanda, and two young slum women who helped in Ajay’s (now closed) school. They were repeatedly interrogated and threatened by the police, who tried to get the children to say that they’d been taught to meow like cats and bark like dogs (call signs they imagined Naxalites use in the jungle) and warned their parents that Ajay had intended to sell them to the Naxalites.

In practical ways, both sides of the family were supportive—though Shobha’s brother, Babu, a railway clerk, judged it imprudent to visit either the house or the jail or speak to me on his mobile. But to Ajay’s amazement, his father came to the prison, where they spoke for the first time since 1993. His only brother also returned from the Gulf to see him; he had just left for Kerala when he was killed in a traffic accident. Ajay could have applied for compassionate leave to attend his obsequies, but he would have had to travel in shackles and handcuffs, accompanied by eight armed guards—little solace for his grief-stricken parents. But though their families stuck by them, Shobha complained that some of the wives in Ajay’s extended kin group would mutter that he had brought their family into disrepute and that now he and his father were reaping the fruits of their karma—of Ajay’s intercaste marriage and of their godlessness. When I returned to Bhilai in early September, Babu hectoring me about Ajay’s irresponsibility. He had no right to put them all at such risk. “Who is this Binayak Sen? Let him look after his own house and you look after yours.” And when I asked where India would be had Mahatma Gandhi followed that line, Babu coldly suggested I be sensible, for—as everybody knows—“those days are gone.” That’s how most think. What makes Ajay a maverick, and his arrest for subverting the Indian state so ironic, is that he believes it redeemable; that it *could* serve the commonweal and that it’s not therefore futile to protest at its shortcomings.

As a “dangerous terrorist”, Ajay’s prison regime was supposed to be stringent. Only close family visitors were allowed, for just 10 to 15 minutes once a week. Visitors and prisoners would stand ten feet apart in a bawling crowd, divided from each other by a mesh and grill. While others would pay the guards Rs.30–40 for some special relaxation of the rules, for Shobha’s routine visits they demanded ten times as much; initially they’d claim that her application was wrongly written and must be done again, and poke in the pickles and squeeze out the toothpaste she’d brought.

Once a fortnight they were supposed to present Ajay in court, where she could sometimes get a glimpse of him, though at first they never came as scheduled and claimed insufficient manpower to escort such a high-security prisoner. He would travel handcuffed in a truck with eight police riflemen. On one occasion, Somvaru's grandson was among them and subsequently volunteered for that duty. We have known Pankaj since he was small and Ajay was instrumental in helping the family recover the Rs.80,000 they had paid a middleman to get him a job that never materialized. At court, Ajay was put in a small police lockup where he would stand by the door to get some air and avoid the vomit and excrement that covered the floor. After five or six hours, he'd go before a clerk, sign his name, and be returned to jail. He never set eyes on a magistrate.

But prison, he says, wasn't too bad, apart from the latrines and the shortage of water for washing, and apart from being forbidden books and writing materials. Boredom was a problem, but he made it his project to exercise, lose weight, and learn Telugu (Shobha's mother tongue). He was deeply disturbed by the vicious beatings he witnessed and by the routine violence of the jail, but was never a victim himself. He was a "Naxalite" prisoner, and Naxalites you don't mess with inside, since outside their comrades take sure retribution. At first he was put in Barrack 8, designed to sleep 40 but with a floating population of around 100. Though his fellow prisoners were deferential, they thought it risky to talk to him, and after a couple of weeks got him transferred to another barrack. Ajay was a *nigrani*, under special surveillance, so they were more closely monitored too.

In one phone call, I jokingly told Shobha to tell Ajay to treat it as fieldwork. She didn't need to. He was doing that anyway, and when I went to Bhilai shortly after his release he had many new details from a fellow prisoner about the one communal riot in Bhilai's history, about a case of father-daughter incest in one of the neighborhoods we have studied, and about a long-running dispute between two Andhra Pradesh villages

that has been perpetuated in Bhilai over three generations. In this last he touchingly assumed I'd be especially interested, since it contradicts various generalizations I've published about life there. By the time I visited he had already made for me a detailed map of the prison—an authentic Benthamite Panopticon commanded by a watchtower in the middle—so that he could begin to explain its sociology: how the number of warders is tiny (around one per shift for 250 prisoners); how the place is supposedly run by convict-warders (*quaidis*) who are serving sentences, though it's actually controlled by remand prisoner "bosses" or "gangster-brothers" (*dada bhaiyya*) from two warring gangs in Bhilai; how this elite and their henchmen domineer prisoners without social and cultural capital in the criminal world, and without visitors to supply them with money and goods from outside; and how these unfortunates cook their food, launder their clothes, make their beds, and hover about the latrines to hand them water to wash their anuses. Of Brijesh, the king of convict-warders, the "*chakkar-in charge*" who has responsibility for the central courtyard and watchtower, I learned how his post provides him with an income of at least Rs.50,000 per month after paying off the officers—an income derived from his "rights" over ten sleeping platforms in the cushiest barrack that he rents to rich prisoners, and from his responsibility for allocating jobs of varying degrees of desirability to other *quaidis* or even no job at all. I learned how some of this money has been invested outside, and much else besides.

By the end of July, time was running short for the police. Ajay had to be charged within 90 days, but they had no evidence. There were also all those newspapers—even *Al Jazeera* and the *Guardian*—taking an interest in the case and phoning the DGP, who took the unprecedented step of visiting Ajay in jail. Ajay knew little of the campaign for his release, but reckoned that they must want a deal. The DGP explained that though personally sympathetic, Ajay was "technically stuck" and they would have to find some way of "turning the case." On his laptop he had

a number of emails between people involved in the campaign for his release, a couple of whom had fallen out over its conduct and one of whom had written things that could be construed as readiness to dump Ajay. That the DGP showed him. He again asked about the camera incident and about his earlier police statement. When Ajay pointed out that he had never made one, the DGP said that must be remedied and he would draft something for Ajay to sign. A couple of days later the District Superintendent of Police (DSP) arrived at the jail with a document that recounted the camera story but added that Ajay had sometimes suspected Binayak of Naxalite links. He refused to sign, and the DSP said he'd amend it. The next version was no improvement, and Ajay remained recalcitrant, though the police enlisted the aid of a well-known Malayali gangster, a former comrade in the Youth Federation, who sent one of his sidekicks (accompanied by two policemen) to warn Shobha that it would be best if Ajay abandoned his scruples. By the time they got to a third, more anodyne draft they were on the eighty-ninth day of Ajay's incarceration, and, though the Town Inspector waited outside the court lock-up for five hours almost begging him, and his superior was threatening that if he didn't sign they'd press charges and he would be kept, like Binayak, for years, Ajay was now unwilling to make a statement at all. The court duly ordered that he should be freed on statutory bail, though the formalities of his release took another three days.

Shortly after that, the DGP summoned Ajay to Raipur to remind him that bail did not mean that charges were dropped, and that he would do well to keep quiet. That afternoon, he, Shobha, and their son flew to Delhi, where Amar had organized a party for the Release Ajay T. G. Committee, to which—as Shobha excitedly reported—the women came alone in their own cars and smoked cigarettes, drank some cocktail that Amar mixed from a drinks cupboard as well stocked as a wine shop, talked nonstop in hi-fi English, and didn't go home until past mid-

night. Next day they held a big press conference at which Ajay, the working-class hero, shared a platform with mega-stars of the cultural world, like the novelist Arundhati Roy, and with political heavies like the General Secretary of the Communist Party. Since then he's been all over India speaking at meetings and showing his films—films in which Murli and I had for several years been unsuccessfully trying to interest our big-city intelligentsia friends.

And shortly after his release I went to visit. On arrival at Raipur's airport—by sheer coincidence, I was told—I was introduced to the head of police intelligence by the journalist friend who had come to meet me, and was later able to renew my acquaintance with the DGP. I also visited Ajay's school that had now reopened, though only the day before the police had again harassed Chanda, and though only half of the pupils had reappeared.<sup>5</sup> Some hadn't come back because in the interim they had been sent as child laborers, some because their parents had been pressurized by neighbors. It was an orchestrated campaign supported by the charlatan Registered Medical Practitioners in the neighborhood, against whose quackery Ajay had railed, but instigated by the mistress of a powerful Congress politician who heads a phoney NGO in the area, had been trying to build up a vote bank in it, and hadn't appreciated that Ajay had publicly rubbished a fantasy survey commissioned by UNESCO and conducted by her outreach workers that reported that 80 percent of women in the slum live by prostitution. Groups of women would arrive in Chanda's courtyard to harangue her for allowing a school run by a terrorist to operate there. On 6 September, many of these women cooked chicken. What justified that extravagance was that, though none could read, they'd heard that the local papers were saying that the next day the world would end—a story apparently provoked by the start of the CERN accelerator. But is it true, some wondered? “Of course it is,” said Chanda with mock conviction. “If it must be true that Ajay is a terrorist because it is written

in the papers, it must be true that tomorrow you die!”

When Ajay walked out of jail, Shobha insisted that their first call was church. But it's a huge disappointment to her and her family, and the source of some tension between them, that Ajay's ordeal has not resulted in his conversion and that he does not see that he owes his liberty to the power of prayer. It's as plausible an explanation as others. An alternative would be Amar's campaign. But why couldn't Chomsky and the 22 Nobel laureates do as much for Binayak? In Raipur, my newspaper friends insist that nobody in the state government even noticed what Amar's committee was up to. Though neither publicly came out in Ajay's defense, according to one, what really counted was the discreet word he had with the Chief Minister; according to another, it was his close relationship with the DGP. So what's my version? Amar's campaign *was* very effective, but what was decisive was that the police were inhibited from following standard procedure: no evidence requires them to fabricate it. Once more their problem was the Binayak trial. Just before Ajay was released, the property seized from Binayak's apartment was presented in court, and the sealed bag was found to contain an extra item that was not on the manifest or initialled by witnesses. It was an unsigned, typed letter thanking Binayak for his services and purporting to come from the Maoist high command. A crude fabrication, of course, the defense not implausibly claimed. To preserve some shred of credibility, it was clearly bad strategy to follow this with evidence against Ajay that looked equally dodgy. Just as Ajay's arrest was a response to the exigencies of the Binayak case, so I believe was his release.

So why are they so obsessed with Binayak? One possibility is that they genuinely believe he's a threat—though I think that's unlikely. Or at least, the threat that he really represents is any kind of critical dissent from government policy on the “Naxalite problem”. What is certain is that his case has become a major prestige issue for the BJP state government. With Assembly

elections coming up in November 2008, they cannot afford to back down [and once they were back in power, they had little reason to do so]. But there is another aspect that's important. In one of a series of articles for the *Pioneer*, the organ of the ideological vanguard of the Hindu nationalist right, the DGP rounded on Ram Guha, whom he likened to Ezra Pound, duped by Goebbels into supporting the Nazis. Casting himself as a humble Shudra (he's actually a Bihari Kayastha by caste), what Guha and other vocal critics of the Chhattisgarh government really represent, the DGP asserted, is the arrogance of the metropolitan Anglophone elite, the new Brahmins of our age. It's a theme he has returned to repeatedly in regular diatribes against these “pseudo-intellectuals.” The grandson of a famous Urdu poet, he himself belongs to a regional vernacular elite, and it is to the prejudices of that elite in Raipur that the vendetta against Binayak speaks. That's why my two newspaper editor friends are prepared to listen, and the willingness to do so among industrialists and the political establishment is reinforced by the memories of the real threat posed to them by Niyogi's movement—with which many of these (metropolitan) elite “class traitors” had unaccountably identified. It's not just that Binayak himself is an urbane Bengali intellectual, but that many who champion his cause make *them* feel like small-town hicks. Chhattisgarh is a new state in search of an identity; it has a BJP government that needs to define itself in relation to a Congress-led coalition at the center, and though its political elite is in fact mainly of outsider ancestry, it deeply resents being told how to run its “own” state by metropolitan toffs. The amour propre of a regional ruling class is at stake, and it's not only the Naxalites they want to best.

Ajay is out of jail. Over Binayak the hullaballoo is sure to continue, and he at least has the dubious privilege of an endlessly protracted trial. It's not Burma, nor even Guantanamo, admittedly. At least not for the anthropologist's assistant or the high-profile doctor. For representatives of the truly disadvantaged third of

India's vast population who wind up in jail, the difference is not always obvious.

### Postscript (2014)

So that is the story as I told it shortly after Ajay's release. Matters have moved on since. I did not subsequently return to Chhattisgarh until January 2010 and was back again at the beginning of 2011, though there was then a gap until January 2014.

In the run-up to the second anniversary of Binayak's detention, the campaign for his release intensified—both in India and abroad. The alumni of the elite medical college in which he was trained proved tireless. In Britain, the Save Binayak campaign under the chairmanship of a Cambridge doctor orchestrated—among other things—motions in the Lords and the Commons, a wave of press coverage, a large and well-publicized demonstration outside the Indian High Commission, and a letter of protest to the *Guardian* signed by 141 academics with South Asian interests. In the United States and elsewhere there was a similar fuss. It all coincided with an Indian general election, at which a Congress-led coalition government was returned. The result was declared on 16 May 2009. Ten days later Binayak was granted bail by the Supreme Court. A connection seems likely. Impervious as the Chhattisgarh state government may have been, New Delhi was more sensitive to India's credibility as "the world's largest democracy".

A few months later, Ajay, Margaret, and I called on Binayak and his wife in their Raipur apartment. A police jeep was parked by the entrance, and our names were taken at the gate. Binayak was on bail but his trial in the High Court continued, and on Christmas Eve 2010 he was convicted of sedition and sentenced to life imprisonment. Pending appeal, he was once more granted bail in March 2011 by the Supreme Court in a judgment undisguisedly critical of the case against him. Following that, he was in even greater demand for TV and press

interviews, was made an official advisor to the Planning Commission's Committee on Health, and was granted leave to travel to South Korea and to London, where he jointly received the Gandhi Peace Prize in a pompous and jarringly ironic ceremony in the House of Lords. He was allegedly a Naxalite, and the Chhattisgarh government was now threatening to add a charge of "waging war against the state." That carries the death penalty. More recently, the state government was able to block a proposed visit to Nepal at the invitation of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health to address a seminar on health care. As the Additional Superintendent of Police, Raipur, told the court: "Such foreign visits of Dr. Sen consolidate Naxal and Maoist networks. India's internal security is also compromised." Not a shred of evidence for that when the Sens were in London. Meanwhile, the case against him grinds remorselessly on and is likely to do so into the foreseeable future.

As to Ajay, his seized equipment and other possessions remain in police custody, and many of their erstwhile friends are still frightened to visit. He is still on bail and was for many months required to report to his local police station between set hours on every other Monday. Early on during my 2010 visit, we both traveled with the engagement party of Shobha's younger brother to a small town about a day and a half's journey away. On the way back the train was twelve hours late, and Ajay was unable to clock in on time with the police. We were both (I more than he) in a panic that, provoked by my presence, they might make that a pretext to rearrest him—though in the event they seemed hardly to notice. A bit later on in my stay, he was involuntarily reporting to his local *thana* as part of his bail conditions, while I was voluntarily spending whole days there reading through police records of suicide cases to which I had got access through the good offices of one of my newspaper editor friends, who was thick with the DGP. Senior police were certainly aware that I was staying with Ajay, though if the local police knew they did not appear to care, and though I kept my eyes anxiously open, I

saw no sign that when Ajay and I went about together we were tailed. But what was obvious was that all Ajay's phone calls were bugged (so that when a couple of Amnesty International workers from London came to Raipur and wanted to meet him, the police were demanding to know who they were as soon as he had ended the call). It all seemed very haphazard—which is perhaps both the saving grace and the Achilles' heel of the Indian state.

On my next visit, we unexpectedly found ourselves celebrating the birthday of a mutual friend in a large double bedroom—converted into a temporary drinking den—in a plush new hotel. It emerged that it was owned by B. B. S. Rajput—the police superintendent who had orchestrated Ajay's arrest. Among the rather shady (and of course exclusively male) party of befuddled guests was the hotel's manager, the superintendent's son. At the same friend's birthday party three years later (held in a different venue), I overheard one guest ask another who Ajay was. "He's that Naxalite," he was told. It's like that, Ajay complains, wherever he goes.

During my 2011 visit, I judged he could do with a break from Bhilai and pressed him to come to London for a short stay. Permission to travel was, however, refused by the Lower Court, and that refusal was upheld on appeal to the Chhattisgarh High Court. The legal advice was that the Supreme Court would almost certainly grant him leave, and Amar's wife—the CMM lawyer—generously agreed to make the application on a pro bono basis. When the Supreme Court called for the papers in the case, however, the Chhattisgarh authorities decided that it was time to bring Ajay to trial. That meant they were not obliged to disclose the evidence against him to the higher court. His trial opened on 2 December 2011 and for more than a year was heard by a magistrate who did not have judicial authority in such cases. Not that Ajay ever set eyes on him. The prosecution's case was never ready. He would simply sign in at the court and be given a new date. He did see the judge to whom the case was then assigned, but that judge was transferred, and seven months later a

new one has still to be appointed. Defense counsel has yet to be supplied with transcripts of the data on Ajay's hard disk, and the precise charges against him have yet to be formulated. It's pure Kafka. In the meantime, Ajay's UK visa application, which he was now in a position to make, was rejected on stated grounds that were demonstrably spurious, and my attempts to lodge a formal complaint suggest that the British state is not far behind in Kafkaesque opacity.

It is clear to everybody—and a recurrent nightmare for Shobha—that if Ajay now steps too far out of line his bail might be summarily rescinded. He bridles under the constraints but carries on regardless. When the police picked him up in 2008 they assumed that there would not be a murmur because nobody of significance would notice. Now they know he has "backing". Since his release from jail he has managed to win commissions for several campaigning films that—though not at all lucrative and unlikely to endear him to local industrialists—have put him in touch with an activist network all over India. At the time of writing, his latest—*First Cry*, a celebration of the CMM union hospital at Rajhara—is about to be premiered at the India International Centre in Delhi; it is hard to imagine a more "establishment" venue. But he is nevertheless continually confronted by situations that place him at risk—as when, 20 months back, a gang of toughs (who had allegedly set out from the local *thana* and included several off-duty policemen) threatened to trash a training camp for Video Volunteers<sup>6</sup> that he was running in Raipur, and as more recently when he was roughed up by the security guards of a Swiss multinational cement plant at Baloda Bazaar. Ajay had been accompanying a Swiss woman photojournalist who was touring the area and who wanted to stop on the main road outside the plant to take pictures of the workers streaming off shift. The company was understandably jittery, since only six weeks before five of its employees had been buried alive under the debris of three giant fly-ash containers and only one had survived. Ajay and his companion had been menacingly told to move on but had stopped a

kilometer down the road to get a shot back over the factory. The guards caught up with them, ripped the journalist's clothes, and manhandled Ajay. Though it had taken six hours before the appropriate officer was "available", they had lodged a First Information Report with the local police as soon as they could. In the interim, the leader of the cement plant's "recognized" union—who happened to be there that day and who we both know well of old, since he is also the boss of the "pocket" union of a big Bhilai engineering company in which I have done some research—had informed them that they were dealing with a well-known Naxalite. But by now Ajay had experience. He had already alerted the CMM lawyers and mobilized contacts in the press and on local TV channels. That protected him and also threatened embarrassment for the company, which was shortly to hold its annual shareholders' meeting in Geneva.

Such incidents could easily take a different turn, however, and land Ajay back behind bars. Soon after he came out of jail, his second son was conceived; he and Shobha have a growing family, and Ajay's parents are aging and increasingly infirm. The demands of *grhasthya ashram*—the responsibilities of the "householder"—are not easy to square with the commitments of the activist, and Ajay struggles to keep both balls in the air. It is not hard to see why, in the general case, youthful engagement is so often subsequently tempered by the practical and moral exigencies of family life, why idealism is so often eroded by the developmental cycle of the domestic group.

As said at the outset, I am myself a reluctant activist. That is principally because most of the time I believe that as a professional anthropologist my primary responsibility is to describe how the world "is", rather than to prescribe how it "ought" to be. "Fact" and "value" should be kept as separate as possible (Béteille 2012). But if my narrative has any more general lessons, I'd say that one of the most important is that that distinction may be extremely difficult to maintain in practice. Most ethnographers encounter situations in which they are—often despite themselves—sucked into the world of "praxis";

and I will not attempt to conceal the fact that in my personal judgment no state can claim moral legitimacy when it routinely harasses its citizens in the way that Ajay and Binayak have been harassed (to say nothing of the countless thousands of voiceless poor people who are incarcerated in Indian jails on spurious charges for years at a stretch).

Such homilies notwithstanding, I aspire to be an ethnographer, not a preacher; and it is perhaps worth drawing explicit attention to the way in which involvements of the sort I have described have affected the kind of ethnography I have recently done. Since Ajay's arrest, various doors that were previously at least ajar seem to have swung firmly shut. I doubt that I would now get another gate pass to work inside the steel plant, and my chances of getting back onto the shop floors of the bigger private sector factories in which my presence was previously tolerated are slim. Management is now more guarded and evasive, and sometimes distinctly frosty. At the same time, however, other doors have opened—most notably, perhaps, with the rump of CMM activists who had previously regarded me with suspicion but who have now decided that a friend of Ajay's is a friend of theirs. And then there is his talent and reliability as a "fixer" for very poor people—somebody who can be trusted to get proper medical attention for Bukhau, find a place in a leprosy ashram for the old fellow who lives in a leaky canvas shack on the edge of Dabra Para, do the paperwork required to get Devki a BPL (Below Poverty Line) card that will enable her to buy enough rice to feed her children, or take Amit to the CMM Martyrs' Hospital in Rajhara for the treatment of his painfully swollen testicles. Ajay and I spend increasingly more of our time together standing interminably in line for prescriptions or waiting for X-rays, and I have sometimes resentfully wondered if I am not now more a supernumerary auxiliary social worker than an ethnographer. But then bits of family history that I have not previously heard come pouring out and I am reminded that "social service" can serve "social science" as well.

It is perhaps not only the texture of the data that I am able to collect that has subtly shifted, but also the way that I write about it. Recently, one of my younger colleagues—who has read my academic writings on Bhilai with flattering attention—astutely observed that over the years their tone has become bleaker and more pessimistic. He is right, and one of the reasons for that is that when I began this research I focused most closely on relatively privileged segments of the formal sector labor force. As it has progressed I have moved down the labor hierarchy and spent more of my time with people who must eke out a miserable existence through informal sector employment. But what I also recognize is that the sour taste left by the events I have described here have also in all likelihood given me a more jaundiced view of the world that Bhilai's industrial workers inhabit.

That, then, is my story. I will not presume to tell you what to conclude from it—either in terms of our understanding of the Indian state, or in terms of the practices and ethics of anthropological fieldwork. I believe that it should speak for itself.

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2009), and *Persistence of Poverty in India* (edited with N. Gooptu, Social Science Press, 2014).

## Notes

1. Comments in square brackets are additions to my original text.
2. The court subsequently ruled in their favor and Salwa Judum was officially disbanded, though many of its cadres were then sworn in as “special constables”. Many were people displaced to “safe” government camps who had no alternative means of livelihood.
3. This appears to be the same officer as was initially in charge of the investigation into Niyogi's assassination. After widespread protests that the state constabulary were dragging their feet, that case was subsequently transferred to the Central Bureau of Investigation. The CMM had already made allegations of corruption against this officer (Anonymous 1992: 53), and he was also involved in the 1992 police firing on CMM protestors at the Bhilai Power House railway station in which 16 workers were killed and scores wounded.
4. The School's concern was, of course, to protect its own reputation, and it was made quite clear to me that it could play no role in defending Ajay.
5. As it transpired, the school could not survive for more than a few months after its reopening because of continued harassment and factional tensions within the *basti* (settlement). It is some testimony to its short-lived success, however, that in early 2014 18 of its 28 pupils were now in regular school and nearly all of them come from households in which none of their siblings are educated. Most of the older ones are now working or married (or both).
6. Part of a community news service that reports on otherwise untold stories that are submitted by “barefoot” videographers.

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