

JADUGODA
D I A R Y





SHYAMALI KHASTGIR

JADUGODA D I A R Y

with the survey report on
JADUGODA TRAGEDY
from ANUMUKTI

I console and render my heartiest sympathy for them who have been gravely affected by the effects of radiation at not only Hiroshima-Nagasaki or Chernobyl but from nuclear experiments, uranium mines and nuclear power plants. I pray the posterity doesn't face this suffering—

'The sky, water, air and light
When shall I love thou all.'

Shyamali Khastgir
JADUGODA DIARY

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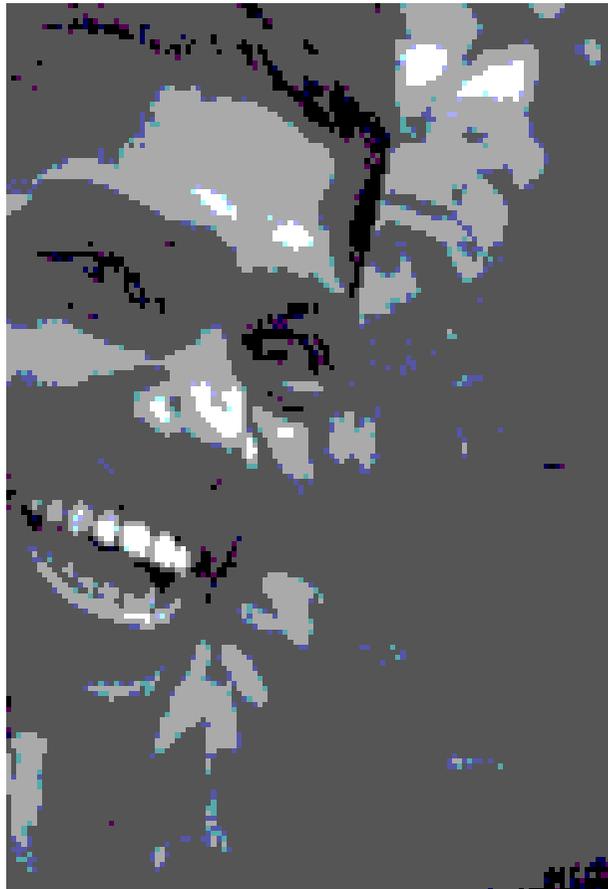
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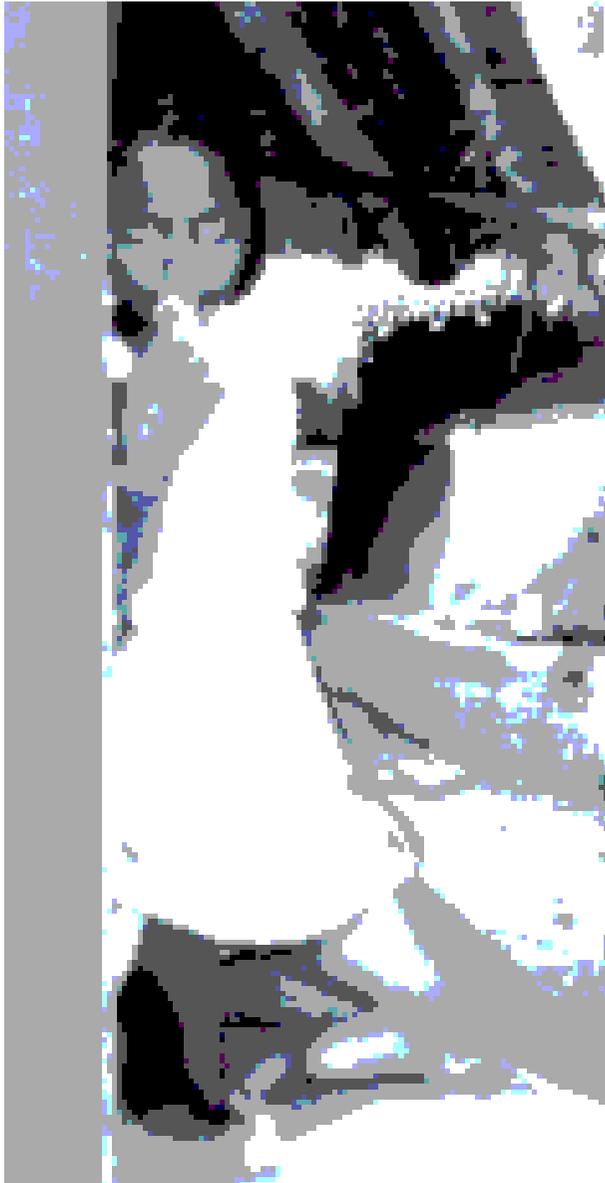
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INTRODUCTION

I had the opportunity to attend a convention at Jadugoda for the first time on 6 August, 2000 in commemoration of Hiroshima Day. I could manage to see the documentary film made by Sri Prakash the previous year during a rally from Pokhran to Sarnath. Subsequently I came to know Ghanashyam Biruli. I went to Jadugoda at the invitation of Dr Sanghamitra Gadekar which helped me to witness and understand the tribal lives, the UCIL oligarchy and the dangerous consequences of the nuclear radiation. It was in September 2000 when the survey was going on in full swing and I stayed there for one month. The members of 'Anumukti' were doing the survey under the stewardship of Sanghamitra and Suren Gadekar on the effects of radiation of uranium mine. As the accommodation of so many people was not possible in Jadugoda due to heavy monsoon, we had to stay at a Catholic organization near Tatanagar and make our daily trips by jeep. The serene beauty of nature and the humble lifestyle of the tribals in Singbhum moved me tremendously. The modern technology and the greed of the urban people have reduced these heavenly places to hell. When I think about the alienation of human being from nature or the antagonism between religion and science, my mind fills with deep sense of grief. But sometimes I can't express my anguish in words. I went there for a number of times later on as Ghanashyam and Naandi kept their doors ajar for me. So getting a shelter there was not a problem for me. I learnt

also so many things about the lives of the tribals and their history from Bastar Soren of Ghatsihla.

Incidentally, when I was in Jadugoda I met Bela Bhatia after a long interval. She went there in regard to write an article about the special environment issue for *The Hindu*. She often used to come to Santiniketan with husband Jean Dreze 20 years ago and stay at Ruppur village. I had no contact with her for such a long period, though I got some letters from her protesting the Iraq war. Then they were staying at England. There they had been involved in lot of activities against the Gulf war. Many peace loving people and anti-war organizations from all over the world had congregated and camped in places between Iraq and Israel. But they had to wind up the camps as the war started. I handed over the invitation letter to Mother Teresa by myself which Bela had sent to me by Ashok Rudra. I conversed with Mother Teresa for hours. But she couldn't keep Bela's request as she was unwell. I also couldn't go there. Later, when I decided to go I found the Indian delegates had departed. A few days later I went to New Delhi hoping to join the delegates. But then the war had started. Bela and I talked with each other almost the whole night at the Xavier's office in Tatanagar. Our conversation seemed to be endless. During September 2000 when the survey was in full swing I had written something about it. It may be regarded as a diary. I selected a few from them at the earnest request of Paban Dubey which was published in 'Kalantar' newspaper in a number of subsequent issues.

Sri Arabinda Nandi, a close aide and brother of me and dear Nilanjan love to see everything as printed books. But they are indifferent towards my concern about wastage of paper which is closely related to deforestation. Sri Arabinda Nandi and his

close associates helped to publish this book in Bengali with relentless efforts in a very short span of time. I convey my heartiest greetings to all of them. I shall consider my efforts worthwhile if the forests of Jharkhand are saved from destruction and the consciences of people are developed at any high.

Ghanashyam Biruli and others have built a house with help from their Japanese friends to take care of the radiation affected people. REACH had run a care and educational centre for some time. But due to some reasons REACH had to stop working here. I thank Smt. Bani Singha for her effort to make contact with REACH. I hope initiatives taken by JOAR will definitely help the affected and distressed people. Due to my health condition I couldn't go there for long time. But I am well informed about them. I have known that more mines have been opened there. The entrepreneurs also want to start uranium mining in Meghalaya under the guise of the Government. But the Khasis are still trying to resist it. This antagonism between the venture capitalists and the struggling, toiling masses never seems to be diminished.

I, especially remember my eldest uncle Professor Satishranjan Khastgir, who was the first person to help me understand the dangers of nuclear radiation. The lifestyles of Satishranjan and my very close relative Dr Debaprasad Mitra reflected in their thoughts that the scientific visions and religious practices are complimentary to each other. Perhaps I have had passed most of my fledgling days with Leela and Debaprasad Mitra, besides Santiniketan, my grandmother Souranalini and father Sudhirranjan Khastgir. The occupations and personal lives of these people were too woven up which should be evaluated one time. I hope so! These very people have helped me to repose a keen faith in human

being forever. It's not that I don't often get pessimistic in these dark days. But the memories of these people and the teachers of Santiniketan provide the necessary stimulation in my mind. I remember respected Rakhaldia and the experiences of his esteemed and lengthy life. I also remember people like Pannalal Dasgupta, Amlan Dutta, Dipankar Chattopadhyay, Samar Bagchi, Niranjana Halder, Badal Sarkar et al whose works have provided me a lot of inspiration. I am also grateful to my friends of *Manthan* and *1400 Sahitya*. Along with these people I am thankful to the 'Anumukti' team who has lent support to Medha Patkar to save Narmada River; the adivasi friends of Ghoshaldanga; Jamini Mahato of Ghatshila; Sandip Pandey, without whose efforts the rally from Pokhran to Sarnath wouldn't have been possible and et al. Can the song sung along with the members of JOAR, be able to resist the power of the dangerous and poisonous minerals to destroy not only Jadugoda or Jharkhand but also the entire world?

India has opened its floodgates to liberalization, privatization and globalization. Consequentially the harmful technologies of nuclear power plants have arrived at the threshold.

But we shall not be pessimist. The awareness and conscience of human being shall be inspired, their creative pursuits shall lead towards emancipation, so that our Mother Nature sustains in flora and fauna, fresh air and drinking water, the rendition of the birds etc. The tribal lives have still not forgotten the rhythm of nature. Sense of austerity shall be inculcated into us from them.

It's known that almost all the other planets are lifeless due to the radiation from sun. Our planet itself has taken so long years to create the favourable conditions for holding lives. The levels of

radiation are again increasing by leaps and bounds due to deforestation, rapid urbanization, factories, nuclear power plants and extraction of radioactive minerals from underground. As a result almost every household is suffering from multiple dreaded diseases. But the business communities are moving towards destruction like addicted ones defying the prevailing good old senses of religion and science. Everybody is likely to be adopting the same path of devastation. The senses are seemingly getting ineffective and the destiny left unknown. I earnestly appeal to the rural people and my adivasi brothers and sisters not to emulate these urban thugs. These people are addicted. Pardon them, if you can. You are the only ones who can show the Mother Nature, the path of survival.

Already some pictures have been sent to the Hiroshima Information Centre. Care and medical facilities are definitely necessary but mass education shall be among the most important priorities in order to stop the harmful effects of the radiation. The people of Haripur are very much concerned about it. But the pressure of the nuclear demon is no less. It can't be seen or heard. It's tasteless and odourless. But when it arrives in the form of deformity, mental retardness or cancer the human being seems to be lost in bewilderment.

Sri Chitrabhanu Chakraborty has translated the 'Diary' into English. Some related articles from the special issue (January 2004) on Jadugoda of *Anumukti*, a journal devoted to non-nuclear India, have been included here to help the readers have a comprehensive understanding of this grave issue. I appreciate the efforts of my friends of MONFAKIRA to bring out the book on this 6 August as a gesture of solidarity towards a nuclear-free world.

SHYAMALI KHASTGIR