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# Refugee Resettlement in Forest Reserves: West Bengal Policy Reversal and the Marichjhapi Massacre

ROSS MALLICK

WHILE BOATING DOWN THE GANGES DELTA on a visit to the Reserve Forest Tiger Sanctuary, I noticed on the bank some idols overlooking the river. When I asked about their significance, it was explained that a tiger had killed and carried off a girl; these idols were meant to ward off future attacks. Since I was on tour with a West Bengal government Secretary who had police bodyguards to protect him against pirates and tigers, we had none of the apprehensions locals experienced. As the launch continued downstream, the conversation among the government officials took an unexpected turn. They talked of a massacre in the area of Untouchable refugees who had illegally settled in the protected forest reserve: the killings were said to number in the thousands of families.

Seeing the area of the massacre and realizing it was also a tourist attraction brought home the conflict between environmental preservation and development. In these natural surroundings tourists would never guess what it had cost to preserve the environment for their pleasure. Whether the sacrifice is worth making is something environmentalists will increasingly have to confront as human settlement encroaches on diminishing nature preserves. Learning that no investigation had been undertaken, I sought to find out who was responsible. As the investigation led in a political direction, the Marichjhapi massacre raised questions of secular institutional failures and how Untouchables and other marginalized peoples were being presented in Indian studies by those claiming to represent them.

## The Untouchable Refugees

The events leading up to the refugee massacre revealed a trail of communal and class conflict that had its roots many centuries earlier. The Muslims were largely Untouchables and lower castes who had converted to the more emancipatory beliefs of Islam while retaining their Bengali culture. The gap between the Muslim and

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Untouchable tenants was therefore arguably not as great as that between the Untouchables and upper-caste landlords, and in the colonial period Untouchables and Muslims were political allies in opposition to the Hindu-landlord-dominated Bengal Congress Party. In the colonial period the East Bengal Namasudra movement had been one of the most powerful and politically mobilized Untouchable movements in India and in alliance with the more numerous Muslims had kept the Bengal Congress Party in opposition from the 1920s. The exclusion of high-caste Hindus from power led to the Hindu elite and eventually the Congress Party pressing for partition of the province at independence, so that at least the western half would return to their control (Bandyopadhyay 1997; Chatterji 1994). Partition, however, meant that the Untouchables lost their bargaining power as a swing-vote bloc between high-caste Hindus and Muslims, and then became politically marginalized minorities in both countries. With the partition of India it was the upper-caste landed elite who were the most threatened by their tenants and who had the wherewithal in education and assets to migrate to India. Even those not as well off had the connections to make a fairly rapid adjustment in India. The first wave of refugees were traditional upper-caste elite. Of the 1.1 million who had arrived by June 1948, 350,000 were urban middle class, 550,000 were rural middle class, a little over 100,000 were agriculturalists, and under 100,000 were artisans (Chakrabarti 1990, 1). Those who lacked town houses and property in India squatted on public and private land in Calcutta and other areas, and resisted all attempts to evict them. The failure of the Congress government to grant them squatters' ownership and its attempts at eviction provided the Communist opposition with a ready following among the refugees, who gradually came to be organized by Communist-front organizations. Faced with this resistance and the public sympathy they generated among their relatives and caste members, the Congress government acquiesced in the illegal occupations.

Back in East Pakistan the near-total departure of the Hindu upper-caste landed elite and urban middle classes meant that communal agitation had to be directed against the Hindu Untouchables who remained. Later refugees therefore came from the lower classes, who lacked the means to survive on their own and became dependent on government relief. Lacking the family and caste connections of the previous middle-class refugees, they had to accept the government policy of dispersing them to other states, on the claim that there was insufficient vacant land available in West Bengal. By doing so the Congress government effectively broke up the Namasudra movement and scattered the caste in refugee colonies outside Bengal, thereby enhancing the dominance of the traditional Bengali tricaste elite. However, the land the Untouchable refugees were settled on in other states were forests in the traditional territory of tribal peoples, who resented this occupation. The crops and agricultural works of the refugees were periodically destroyed or harvested by tribal peoples. "The soil is poor and there is no irrigation. Our crops are looted by the local Adivasis [tribals], whom we cannot fight because they shoot with bows and arrows, but even more so because they get protection from the police, which is anti-refugee" (Khanna 1978). Little integration took place, and the Untouchable refugees were often given inadequate relief supplies, when these were not misappropriated by corrupt government officials. Prior to their resettlement, refugees often spent many years in prison camp conditions under capricious and corrupt camp administrators. Protests were often met with killings by police or with imprisonment. "Very few among the intelligentsia are aware that out of the 42,000 families who had been dragged and deported there, already nearly 27,030 families have perished; and only now 15,000 families somehow linger on below sub-human level!" (Biswas 1982, 18). There is virtually unanimous

agreement that the conditions in many resettlement camps were deplorable, as numerous inquiries and official documents attest.

In this period the left-dominated opposition took up the case of the refugees and demanded the government settle them within their native Bengal rather than scatter them across India on the lands of other peoples. The Communist Party leader, Jyoti Basu, in prophetic words stated that it would not be “an easy, administrative affair to get rid of the refugees from their colonies” in West Bengal, and a “united movement would make it impossible for the government to carry out the bill’s [eviction] provisions” (Chatterjee 1992, 279). The sites mentioned in West Bengal for resettlement were either the Sundarbans area of the Ganges delta or vacant land scattered in various places throughout the state. In 1976 there were 578,000 acres of vacant land in West Bengal, of which 247,000 could be readily reclaimed for agriculture. With 136,000 agriculturalist refugee families up to that time, the reclaimable land could have provided more than the 0.321 acres per capita land:person ratio then used by agriculturalists (Chatterjee 1992, 185). However, as it was dispersed it would have required a greater administrative effort to relocate the refugees on surveyed vacant plots than to put them together in large encampments. While the creation of refugee colonies provided jobs for the rehabilitation department (which would have quickly disappeared had refugees been settled on vacant local land), the creation of colonies enabled the resettlement to go on for decades without resolution. In other states, for over twenty years the cost of the Dandakaranya Project alone has been 100 crores (U.S. \$30 million), of which 23 crores has gone to administrative costs (Biswas 1982, 18). Thus, while the creation of new colonies was good for government contractors and administrative personnel, providing them with a vested interest in nonrehabilitation, real solutions would have soon eliminated their careers and contracts.

While the upper-caste squatters were getting their colonies legalized and services provided, the Untouchables became exiled to other states where they faced often hostile local populations. Even the affirmative action programs for which, as Untouchables, they would have been eligible in West Bengal, were not recognized in the states in which they were settled, as their castes were not native to those states. The Leftist opposition could play on these grievances to obtain a political base among both the exiled refugees and caste members resident within West Bengal.

These grievances led to the organization of refugees within the resettlement colonies. The movement began in the Mana group of camps, where the refugees had been held for twelve years as virtual “prisoners of war” and “serfs” under military officers. The top officials were embroiled in a labor conflict with the lower administrative staff, who were more sympathetic to the refugees. In 1970 the top official encouraged the refugees to form their own organization, the Udbastu Unnayanshil Samiti (UUS), as a way of undermining the demands of the lower administrative staff. The organization instead supported the staff against the official, but the person who replaced him proved to be even worse. The UUS, however, continued to press the refugee demands for increased rations, the right to work outside the camp to supplement rations, and the right to be consulted before being dumped in new sites. They led a thirteen-day hunger strike that resulted in increased dole but no say in resettlement, which continued to place refugees in dry and unviable locations. A second boycott in 1974 against refugee dispersal led to deaths from police firings. The following year the organization decided to launch a national movement for resettlement in the Sundarbans area of West Bengal. According to a handbill the organizers put out,

In May, representatives of the Mana Udbastu Unnayanshil Samiti went by launch from Hasnabad to Marichjhapi in Gosaba police station. Opposite this 125 square mile sand bank rising out of the sea is a 100 year-old village. The people of the village told them that the tide did not rise above 5 feet. If we could have erected dykes 5 feet high to hold out the salt water and lived here for 100 years, why can't you? There is great potential for fishing. It would be possible for 16,000 families from Mana to settle just on the island, and nearby at Dutta Pasur another 30,000.

(Chatterjee 1992, 376)

However, when the refugees started walking along the railway tracks to West Bengal they were arrested by the Congress government. When the leaders were released from jail after a year they found the Dandakaranya dispersal had been accelerated, but now the Left Front had taken power in West Bengal.

### The Left Front Policy

In these new circumstances of accelerated dispersal and West Bengal Communist governance, it was decided to step up the campaign for resettlement in West Bengal. Contact was made with the Left Front and the Communist Party Marxist (CPM) front organization for refugees, the United Central Refugee Council. "The exploitative Congress government has fallen and a new popular government has come to power" (Chatterjee 1992, 377). The West Bengal Left Front Minister, Ram Chatterjee, visited the refugee camps and is widely reported to have encouraged them to settle in the Sundarbans, which had been a long-held Left opposition demand. However, what the refugees could not have known was that Ram Chatterjee, who belonged to a smaller party in the Left Front coalition, was speaking for current Left Front policies rather than the forthcoming policy reversal that the Left Front was about to implement now that it was in power. The Left Front was a coalition of smaller parties that included consistent supporters of refugee resettlement in the Sundarbans, and the dominant CPM which effectively decided all government policies. This made for some initially contradictory policy pronouncements on the refugee issue as the parties moved from opposition to governance.

Having sold their belongings to pay for the trip, 15,000 refugee families left Dandakaranya only to discover that Left Front policy had changed now that the coalition was in power, and many refugees were arrested and returned to the resettlement camps. The remaining refugees managed to slip through police cordons, reaching their objective of Marichjhapi island, where settlement began. By their own efforts they established a viable fishing industry, salt pans, a health center, and schools over the following year (Mehta, Pandey, Visharat 1979).<sup>1</sup>

The state government was not disposed to tolerate such settlement, stating that the refugees were "in unauthorised occupation of Marichjhapi which is a part of the Sundarbans Government Reserve Forest violating thereby the Forest Acts" (Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Department 1979). It is debatable whether the CPM placed primacy on ecology or merely feared this might be a precedent for an unmanageable refugee influx with consequent loss of political support. When persuasion failed to

<sup>1</sup>Mehta, Pandey, and Visharat were Members of Parliament appointed by Prime Minister Desai, despite the objections of the West Bengal government, to visit and investigate Marichjhapi prior to the eviction.

make the refugees abandon their settlement, the West Bengal government started on January 26, 1979, an economic blockade of the settlement with thirty police launches. The community was tear-gassed, huts were razed, and fisheries and tube wells were destroyed, in an attempt to deprive refugees of food and water.

Journalists were creating a problem for the government by reporting positively on the efforts of the refugees to rehabilitate themselves. The government therefore declared Marichjhapi out of bounds for journalists, a move which only served to alienate the press. An editorial in the Bengali daily *Jugantar* stated:

Again today, the leaders of the state made caustic remarks about journalists—the Marichjhapi problem is apparently the creation of a few reporters. But journalists are society's eyes and ears, we are merely witnesses. A journalist has no ability to cause something to occur; s/he can only describe it. But sometimes events are such that an immaculately unbiased description sounds like strong censure. . . . The mouths of journalists can be stopped but not the flow of history.

(Chatterjee 1992, 312)

However, the Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu, convinced that the media was indulging in sensationalism and contributing to the refugees' militancy and self-importance by reporting on their activities, suggested instead that the press should come out in support of their eviction in the national interest. This was accompanied by attempts at censorship and accusations against the "bourgeois" press for colluding with the refugees and opposition. There was no doubt the issue served to divide the Left Front coalition parties and could potentially alienate them from the 23 percent of the electorate who were Untouchables. However, these Untouchables were largely illiterate and since the radio and TV were government-owned, the resident Untouchable voters of other castes were less of a problem than might be supposed. In this respect the Untouchables refugees were very different from the upper-caste, middle-class urban refugees of the immediate postindependence period, who were educated, well-connected, and politically influential.

The Chief Minister correctly pointed out that political opponents would find the issue useful for attacking the government, which is precisely what he had done when he was in opposition. The refugee leaders became divided on the extent to which they should rely on the opposition to fight their cause and whether an attempt to solicit support within the Left Front should be continued. The squatters became split into two factions, with one group under Raiharan Barui opposing negotiations with the government in order to force it into recognizing the settlement, and the other group under Rangalal Goldar favoring talks with the Left to reach a compromise agreement. According to Goldar, "Raiharan antagonized the government by making inflammatory statements in the press, by getting mixed up in Opposition politics. When we invited people from the city to visit, he refused to let representatives of the Left set foot on the island. It was a terrible miscalculation. You cannot live in the water and make an enemy of the crocodile" (Chatterjee 1992, 378). Though we do not have Raiharan's version of events, the polarization seems understandable given the circumstances the refugees faced.

It was unlikely that a centralized party like the CPM could have been dissuaded by argument even if a more conciliatory approach had been taken. To have allowed one settlement would have been an invitation for other refugees to attempt the same thing, or for more migrants to come over from Bangladesh, as the CPM leadership

feared. The press generally agreed with this position, but objected to what it considered the excessive use of force. That the CPM and other left parties while in opposition had argued for settlement only to change policies once they were in power was not unusual for politicians, however disappointing it may have been for their refugee supporters. While previous refugees had been allowed to remain and even had gotten their squatter colonies legalized, this precedent was applied to influential upper castes of middle-class origin with plenty of relations and influence in the Bengali establishment. The Untouchable refugees had no such influence, despite the support of a few officials and intellectuals. Thus, while the traditional elites were accommodated in West Bengal, the much larger number of lower classes and castes which the government knew it could more easily evict would have been a greater imposition on the state.

The refugees were well aware of their inherent disadvantage as Untouchables, so they emphasized the common ethnic origins and refugee experiences that they shared with many elite families.

Every day countless non-Bengalis come to this state in search of work. The Left Front government does not put them on trains and return them to their own states. Thousands of people live unlawfully on the footpaths of Calcutta and the stations of West Bengal contributing to an unhealthy atmosphere. But the government does nothing about them. Is it because we are Bengalis that there is no place in this state for the refugees of Marichjhapi? . . . Marichjhapi is not the only squatter colony in the state. The Marichjhapi refugees did not ask for money from the government, nor did they squat on other people's property, they had only wanted the government's scrub and marshy waste lands. So I ask, what harm did the Marichjhapi refugees do to the Left Front government? Caste Hindus live in the other squatter colonies, and there were only Scheduled Castes [Untouchables] at Marichjhapi. Is that why there is no space for the people of Marichjhapi in this state?

(Chatterjee 1992, 356)

The refugees also appealed to the national untouchable federation BAMCEF led by Kanshi Ram, but in those days it was not the powerful organization its offshoot the Bahujan Samaj Party subsequently became (Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998). In commenting on the plight of the Namasudra refugees, Kanshi Ram observed the uniquely desperate situation this untouchable caste had been subjected to in the aftermath of partition.

Immediately after the exit of the British in 1947, there was a sharp and steep slump in the Namasudra Movement. The partition of India ruined many a people, but those harmed maximum were the Namasudra. Not only the people and the community were ruined, but also their movement was completely destroyed. Today the Namasudra are the rootless people. Divided in two countries, their roots are in Bangladesh and branches in India. Bangladesh government is always eager to uproot them, whereas the government of India and West Bengal are ever angry and hostile.

The massacre of Marichjhapi and the sad plight of those in Dandakaranya, Andaman, Nicobar and elsewhere tell its own tale. After all this if they are expecting some help or sympathy from the High Caste Hindus, they are hoping against hope. . . .

Unfortunately the CPI(M) Government was unable to see ability in them. They say, they do not believe in caste considerations, they include people in the cabinet on the basis of their ability. And on this consideration, they had not included any

Scheduled Caste in the Cabinet of West Bengal. But the Scheduled Caste people still cling to CPI(M), perhaps they are helpless and [have] nowhere to go.

(Ram 1982, 4)<sup>2</sup>

With no national party prepared to take up their cause, the Untouchables were indeed without powerful allies. Institutions of the central government such as the Scheduled Castes and Tribes Commission that had an obligation to defend the Untouchables' human rights did not publicly intervene (Sikdar 1982, 22). The attempt to interest the media and some intellectuals proved partly successful. They were invited to a feast on the island at which refugees who barely managed one meal a day scraped together lavish meals for their influential guests to get their message across. Supporters raised funds and supplies, and some officials colluded in efforts to get these to the refugees. In order to ensure press coverage after the blockade, a refugee, Saphalananda Haldar, evaded police patrols and swam to the mainland where he informed the Calcutta press of police firing in Kumirmari. They published the story along with his name, which resulted in his arrest. Police shooting and killings of the refugees in various places were causing adverse comment in the press. The refugees were not without sympathizers in the outside intelligentsia and even in the government administration and Left Front cabinet itself. Within the ruling CPM there were members who felt the government should have been trying to rehabilitate the refugees in order to develop a party base, rather than resorting to force.

The press reported police tear-gassing of refugees, the sinking of their boats which they needed to obtain rice and drinking water, and arrests of people attempting to work on the mainland or sell firewood from the reserve forest. With starvation deaths occurring among the squatters the situation was taking a desperate turn. On January 27, 1979, the government prohibited all movement into and out of Marichjhapi under the Forest Preservation Act and also promulgated Section 144 of the Criminal Penal Code, making it illegal for five or more persons to come together at any given time. However, the refugee supporters appealed to the Calcutta High Court, which ruled against interference in the refugees' movements and in their access to food and water. The government then denied the refugees were subject to any blockade and continued the blockade in defiance of the High Court. Since the police union was under CPM control, the court system had been effectively bypassed in this instance. Though some of their number died of starvation and disease, the refugees would not give up. When police actions failed to persuade the refugees to leave, the State Government ordered the forcible evacuation of the refugees, which took place from May 14 to May 16, 1979. Muslim gangs were hired to assist the police, as it was thought Muslims would be less sympathetic to refugees from Muslim-ruled Bangladesh.<sup>3</sup> The men were first separated from the women. "Most of the young men were arrested and sent to the jails and the police began to rape the helpless young women at random" (Sikdar 1982,

<sup>2</sup>Atul Kohli (1996) notes that the tiny tricast Bengal elite increased its Cabinet composition from 78 percent under the Congress (1952–62) to 90 percent under the Communists (1977–82), indicating the weakness of caste as a salient political category. However, Attwood and Baviskar (1995, 84) utilize the same information to state that though Kohli "sees this 'weakness of caste' in a positive light, we are less sanguine about it. The major political parties in West Bengal are led by members of a tiny, high-caste minority. The bhadrakok cannot hope to benefit from caste-based appeals to the rural electorate. In other words, caste is "weak" in Bengal politics because the dominant minority requires other bases of electoral support and because the majority so far lacks the ability to challenge the minority."

<sup>3</sup>Interview, Indian Administrative Service (IAS) Secretary of the West Bengal Government.

23). At least several hundred men, women, and children were said to have been killed in the operation and their bodies dumped in the river. Photographs were published in the *Ananda Bazaar Patrika*, and the Opposition members in the State Assembly staged a walkout in protest.<sup>4</sup> However, no criminal charges were laid against any of those involved nor was any investigation undertaken. Prime Minister Desai, wishing to maintain the support of the Communists for his government, decided not to pursue the matter.<sup>5</sup> The central government's Scheduled Castes and Tribes Commission, which was aware of the massacre, said in its annual report that there were no atrocities against Untouchables in West Bengal, even though their Marichjhapi file contained newspaper clippings, petitions, and a list with the names and ages of 236 men, women, and children killed by police at Marichjhapi *prior* to the massacre, including some who drowned when their boats were sunk by police.<sup>6</sup> The refugees themselves complained to visiting Members of Parliament that 1,000 had died of disease and starvation during the occupation and blockade (Sikdar 1982, 23). "Out of the 14,388 families who deserted [for West Bengal], 10,260 families returned to their previous places . . . and the remaining 4,128 families perished in transit, died of starvation, exhaustion, and many were killed in Kashipur, Kumirmari, and Marichjhapi by police firings" (Biswas 1982, 19).

The CPM congratulated its participant members on their successful operation at Marichjhapi and made their refugee policy reversal explicit stating that "there was no possibility of giving shelter to these large number of refugees under any circumstances in the State" (CPM West Bengal State Committee 1982, 14). Within the CPM there was some dissatisfaction with the way the party leadership had handled the question. Many CPM cadre felt the leadership had dealt with the problem in a "bureaucratic way" when it could have used the issue to develop a mass movement on behalf of the refugees. The Communists had large refugee organizations which could have organized the refugees and brought them to West Bengal. Instead of utilizing the situation to rehabilitate the refugees and in the process develop a solid Communist base among them, the CPM resorted only to force. The CPM cadre who were unhappy with the policy, however, could do nothing; no one on the CPM State Committee opposed the State Secretary, Promode Das Gupta, on this issue. However, not all Parties and Ministers in the Left Front coalition Cabinet favored the eviction, preferring to support the refugees instead. The Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), which had a political base in the Sundarbans and was in the Left Front government, opposed the decision, as did other Left Front supporters. The RSP Minister, Debabrata Bandyopadhyay, was not given a new portfolio after the subsequent election which "did not show the CPI(M) in a commendable light" (Bhattacharyya 1993, 134). His exclusion from the cabinet was attributed to his efforts to eradicate corruption in CPM-controlled village councils, though his opposition in cabinet to the eviction may have been a contributing factor. His successor, the number two CPM Minister, Benoy Chowdhury, years later was not renominated for a party seat after he complained about how corrupt his party had become (Nagchoudhury and Sengupta 1996, 89). After the CPM had come out in opposition to resettlement, the refugees were unlikely party

<sup>4</sup>Interviews with Indian Administrative Service and West Bengal Civil Service officers.

<sup>5</sup>Interviews with Indian Civil Service (ICS) officers.

<sup>6</sup>Letter from All India Scheduled Castes/Tribes and Backward Classes Employees Coordination Council to Bhola Paswan Shastri M.P., Chairman of the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Subject: "Genocide Committed on the Scheduled Caste Refugees of Marichjhapi Island."

supporters and the CPM leaders may have felt other leftist parties might take the opportunity to develop a base among the refugees in opposition to them.

Even if it is admitted that the refugees should not have left Dandakaranya in so sudden a manner after selling out everything they had, the Left Front Government should have shown some consideration for those whose total participation in the Left's struggle against the Establishment and whose kith and kin in West Bengal voting concertedly for the Left Front enabled it to hit the Writers' Buildings [take state power].

(Chakrabarti 1990, 434)

In a final twist to the episode, the CPM settled its own supporters in Marichjhapi, occupying and utilizing the facilities left by the evicted refugees.<sup>7</sup> The issues of the environment and the Forest Act were forgotten. A Professor of Medicine from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, who visited the refugees in Dandakaranya shortly after their return, told me that those who came back were now dispossessed, having sold their land and belongings to make the trip to West Bengal, while those who had remained behind were better off. An air of gloom hung over the refugee colonies and the people went about their lives in a mechanical way without enthusiasm. Though Indian Administrative Service Secretaries of the West Bengal government, who worked on a daily basis with the Left Front Ministers, revealed to me the killing and raping, the hiring of Muslim gangsters, the resettlement by CPM supporters, and divisions in the Cabinet over the eviction, they did not have the names of the gangsters and policemen who actually committed the atrocities. The failure of the government to investigate what happened meant that this information was never compiled. Had the Left Front government felt it was being unfairly maligned by the atrocity reports, it could have ordered an independent inquiry to exonerate itself. The accuracy of the allegations and the involvement through acts of commission and omission by the Chief Minister and Prime Minister Desai, among others, make such an investigation unlikely. A journalist of the Bengali daily *Jugantar* noted:

the refugees of Dandakaranya are . . . mainly cultivators, fishermen, day-labourers, artisans, the exploited mass of the society. I am sorry to mention that they have no relation with the elite of society. If it is a matter of any body of the family of a Zamindar, doctor, lawyer or engineer, the stir is felt from Calcutta to Delhi, but in this classified and exploited society, we do not feel anything for the landless poor cultivators and fishermen. So long as the state machinery will remain in the hands of the upper class elite, the poor, the helpless, the beggar, the prostitutes and the refugees will continue [to be victimized].

(Sikdar 1982, 23)

The subsequent silence in the Bengali academic community about what so many knew happened at Marichjhapi is indicative of the intellectual dominance of certain perspectives and the acquiescence of this intellectual elite in the abuses. For the next thirteen years the only reference to the massacre in the academic literature was in a summary of the West Bengal human rights record by Sajal Basu (1982, 168).

Both the CPI(M) led left parties and Congress (I) prefer to continue in violence-prone activities, causing casualties and eviction of cadres from localities. As a ruling party, CPI(M) has forcefully evicted middle peasants belonging to non-CPI(M) groups.

<sup>7</sup>Interview with IAS Secretary of the West Bengal Government.

Police torture on CPI(M-L) [Communist Party of India Marxist-Leninist] and SUC [Socialist Unity Center] cadres, violent eviction of Marichjhapi refugees, incidents at Panshila symbolise CPI(M)'s violent orientation. The Congress (I) too has its inner troubles being expressed in street fights, its affiliated mastans are again active in violent activities.

At the time of the killings the opposition made unfavorable comparisons with the British massacre at Jallianwallabagh. Their argument was that the Marichjhapi massacre may have exceeded in numbers the Jallianwallabagh massacre and the massacre of eighty Communists in West Bengal in 1958, but the refugees had no influential backers to publicize their cause in movies and history books. Jallianwallabagh was investigated by the Hunter Commission, but Marichjhapi was soon forgotten, except by the Untouchables themselves. The "crime was white-washed and most culprits went not only unpunished, but remained in service and . . . in some cases were even rewarded" (Guha 1989, 279). Though M. K. Gandhi refers here to Jallianwallabagh, it could just as easily apply to CPM and Congress massacres. While the massacre of nationalists or communists elicits the reaction of powerful constituencies with an intellectual community to publicize their cause, in this case the refugees had virtually nothing. After the massacre of Communists by the Congress government, Jyoti Basu stated in the Assembly that there was nothing but dead bodies between him and the government benches. This incident has been commemorated ever since on "Martyr's Day." The Communists' own massacre created a much more muted reaction and was soon forgotten. When Congress faced a similar situation with refugees they cut off aid, but unlike the Left Front they did not resort to blockade, eviction, and police firing. In this comparable respect the CPM was more repressive. Whether this reflected a party ideological difference between self-avowed Gandhianism and Stalinism or simply the different personalities of the responsible leaders is difficult to determine. The CPM supported the Tiananmen Square massacre, which has some parallels with its own practice, but given the marginality and isolation of the refugees there was limited domestic and no international publicity.

In 1961 when Dr. Roy [West Bengal Congress Chief Minister] ordered the despatch of the camp refugees to Dandakaranya and when 10,000 of them refused to move he did not use force to transport them there although he suspended the payment of cash and dry doles and withdrew the amenities enjoyed by the camp refugees. He did not also force them out of the camps. The refugees continued to live at the ex-camp sites and to fend for themselves without any government help and finally got themselves integrated into the economy of the region. But the Marxist Government had no compunction in driving out precisely those refugees who, according to their own statistical evaluation of the amount of surplus land available in West Bengal, could have been absorbed in West Bengal.

(Chakrabarti 1990, 434)

The CPM succeeded where the Congress Party failed because it was prepared to kill men, women, and children. Neither the Congress nor the CPM was a good practitioner of their respective idols' philosophy and practice, but ideology even in the context of Indian politics may make some difference. However, as the record indicates, police killings under Congress regimes were not uncommon, and the numbers who did die through the neglect of Congress regimes may well exceed those killed in the Marichjhapi eviction.

The lack of an investigation means that various estimates of the killings continue to circulate years after the event. While Atharobaki Biswas is very specific in stating

that 4,128 families died in transit from starvation, exhaustion, and police firings, Nilanjana Chatterjee indirectly corroborates this figure. Dr. Chatterjee states that by the time the eviction was completed on May 17, 1979,

at least 3,000 refugees had secretly left Marichjhapi and scattered across West Bengal. . . . At the end of July 1979, a spokesman for the Dandakaranya Development Authority announced that of the nearly 15,000 families who had “deserted,” around 5,000 families (approximately 20,000 refugees) had failed to return. The final deadline for them to re-register with the project was extended yet again to 31 August 1979 and the matter was considered officially closed.

(Chatterjee 1992, 300)

From these figures (20,000–3,000) it can be estimated that as many as 17,000 people died, and if based on her calculation of four per family, this represents 4,250 families, which is almost exactly the figure given by Atharobaki Biswas. Though these people are missing and presumed dead, no breakdown of how or where they died was ever undertaken. An IAS Secretary of the West Bengal Government who worked with the Ministers involved in the eviction decision said the bodies of the victims at Marichjhapi were dumped in the river to be washed out by the tide. This will make the exhumation of bodies as was undertaken in Bosnia and Cambodia impossible, and in this macabre sense the refugees’ selection of the Sundarbans was to prove not only unfortunate in their lives but in uncovering their deaths as well, since there were no human settlements downstream to observe the bodies.

The Marichjhapi massacre raises a number of disturbing ethical and legal questions. As a democratically elected government, the Left Front undoubtedly had the obligation to implement laws and enforce forest protection. As the refugees were not residents of their state, though Indian citizens, the state government was arguably less obligated to the refugees than to their own voters, who had prior demands on the state’s limited resources. However, in ignoring the Calcutta High Court ruling their right to evict might be questioned. It is unlikely anyone would put on paper an order to rape and kill the refugees; however, under the circumstances of West Bengal it was entirely predictable that this could result from an attempted eviction. Certainly the hiring of Muslim gangsters indicated a willingness to use extra-legal methods. As it is common knowledge that the police rape and torture people to death with de facto immunity from prosecution, and over 6,000 political murders have been calculated to have taken place under the Left Front, the likelihood of significant abuses was foreseeable (*India Today*, 31 August 1995, 31; Amnesty International, March 1992, 2).<sup>8</sup> The killings were already occurring and being reported in the press well before

<sup>8</sup>The use of torture was indicated when a Communist Party–Marxist informant warned me that attempts to obtain publications of Maoist insurgents could lead to my torture by police and being a scholar would not save me. He had used his ruling party influence to keep Maoist friends out of jail because even though they were killing each other, there might come a time when they would be on the same side, as they would once have been in the old undivided Communist Party. I never did find out if I was in the tortureable or untortureable category of society. The Communist relationship with the police is interesting. They reinstated police mutineers who had been dismissed by the Congress government after their mutiny was put down by the army. When the second United Front government took power and Jyoti Basu was appointed Minister-in-Charge of Police, one officer to advance his career handed over the names of police informers in the Communist Parties, resulting in the deaths of about a hundred of them. Though an investigation was conducted no action was taken and the officer subsequently became Calcutta Police Commissioner and Inspector General of Police (Roy Choudhury

the main massacre; there was ample opportunity for the state leaders to stop further abuses had they so desired. As this was an eviction ordered by the CPM state committee and the Left Front cabinet, their failure to ensure proper supervision of the operation so that excess force would not be used makes them morally and perhaps legally culpable for rape and mass murder.<sup>9</sup> Their failure to investigate the abuses after the fact means that not only do the actual rapists and killers remain unpunished, but the cover-up that followed implicates those who ordered the eviction in the first place.

## Environmental Priorities

The Chief Minister declared that the occupation of Marichjhapi was illegal encroachment on Reserve Forest land and on the state- and World Wildlife Fund-sponsored tiger protection project. Jyoti Basu stated that if the refugees did not stop cutting trees the government would take "strong action." "Enough is enough. They have gone too far" (Chatterjee 1992, 298–99). The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and other conservationist groups appear not to have taken any official positions on the subject, which was expedient given the controversy that might have arisen from foreign interference. The brutality of the illegal blockade as well as the self-avowed Stalinism of the ruling CPM (Stalin's rather than Gorbachev's portrait was displayed at their 1989 Congress) made any public declaration of support for the action unlikely.

There appears to be nothing on record indicating any pressure on the government for eviction from any environmental nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or other nonstate groups. No lobbying seems to have been necessary to make the government undertake the eviction on behalf of interests that included the environmental movement. While not involved in the eviction, the environmental movement nevertheless achieved a victory from the result, though the massacre was not something the environmentalists publicized. It was widely known that indigenous peoples were being evicted by conservation projects, but as this population was estimated at 600,000 (of whom two-thirds were uncompensated), it was unrealistic to expect environmental NGOs to provide relief on this scale (Fernandes, Das, and Rao 1989, 78). The West Bengal government had asked the central government for funding to rehabilitate the refugees; the central government refused. Had funding been forthcoming alternate arrangements for the Marichjhapi refugees might have been undertaken. Since persuasion was unlikely to make the refugees leave, vacant land in the state would have been required to induce them, but such innovative solutions appear never to have been seriously considered, perhaps because of the administrative burden this dispersal would have entailed.

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1977, 225). When the Communists came to power in 1977 they retained the services of police torturers who continued the practice, even though the Left Front government had evidence they had tortured other leftists. I was offered an interview with one well-known police torturer who reputedly took special pleasure in torturing women, but when an intermediary mentioned that the officer had proved useful to the Chief Minister, who retained the Police portfolio till May 1996, I declined the invitation since my research might not have been appreciated and he apparently had more powerful connections than I had.

<sup>9</sup>I talked to one civil servant who told me he had taken leave rather than follow orders to take part in the eviction. While this may have been the ethical thing to do, if some people could avoid participating it may have led to those more ruthless and prejudiced taking part in the eviction.

That schoolchildren in Britain, Belgium, Holland, and Germany were raising money for Project Tiger was already a matter of some Indian concern. A former Chief Conservator of Forests defended this practice of taking foreign aid for Project Tiger by downplaying its contribution in financial terms while arguing for its political importance. "The WWF's money utilised in India so far is a mere 35 lakhs [U.S.\$100,000]; five per cent of the Project's budget. Even this pittance of 35 lakhs was accepted to enable the world community to have a sense of involvement in the campaign to protect a 'World Heritage'" (Shahi 1978, 14). However, the Chief Conservator noted that the greatest sacrifices were being made by the forest dwellers themselves. "It was therefore laudable for European children to raise funds for saving tigers in another continent but equally praiseworthy, if not more, has been the silent and untrumpeted sacrifice of those who have shifted their century-old villages lock-stock-and-barrel and of the thousands of tribals who forsook their sources of livelihood" (Shahi 1978, 9). Dr. Karan Singh, Chairman of the Project Tiger steering committee, was criticized for putting the interests of tigers ahead of people, as were other supporters of indigenous peoples' displacement. The prosecution of a villager who killed a tiger with an oar when it attacked his companions raised questions of the relative value of human life versus endangered species. That European children were raising money to preserve animals that ate poor Third World children probably escaped the notice of animal rights campaigners. "WWF literature started to blame the poor for being the 'most direct threat to wildlife and wildlands'" (Chatterjee and Finger 1994, 70). "WWF founders originally chose the rhino because they did not want people to think of WWF as just a 'save a cute animal' organization. What they apparently quickly learned was that, although the principle may have been ecologically and ethically correct, it was not politically expedient. The panda—and, subsequently, the Bengal tiger, the gorilla, the elephant and many others—were necessary to rally attention, call for action, and, not least, support the organization" (Princen and Finger 1994, 150). Inevitably, such organizational imperatives necessitated downplaying and ignoring the human costs paid by poor people for environmental preservation. A typical example was the *National Geographic Explorer* television program, which did not allow the villagers to speak for themselves on this issue. Instead, a narrator states that the man-eating "tiger doesn't just mean death, the tiger means life, because the tiger protects the forests which gives them food for their families. They know the tiger is necessary for the world to be whole, and the tiger is a price to be paid." The fact of the matter is that the villagers would be better off if the tigers were nonexistent so that the villagers would be able to exploit the forests in safety. Tigers can only provide forest protection against defenceless people who have to go into the forest for their livelihood, regardless of the dangers. Tigers are no match against poachers or the forest contractors. For poor people there is no advantage to having tigers for it is they who pay the price with their lives, while the tourist operators and the politicians they finance reap the benefits. This is not something *National Geographic* is likely to say on television, so a folklore is invented to pretend there is a mutual dependency that makes the lives lost seem a necessary and accepted price to pay for conservation. It is the poor that pay the price and the rich who benefit, but this is not something that is palatable with western audiences, who like to think only about how much benefit they can provide by saving the tigers in a win-win situation.

Though Marichjhapi was covered in the Indian press, it apparently received no international coverage, and the only academic study came over a decade later in an unpublished doctoral thesis by Nilanjana Chatterjee. The World Wildlife Fund

escaped association with the eviction, but the contradictions inherent in its policies subsequently came to international attention when it was found to be aiding Zimbabwean and Kenyan authorities to purchase helicopter gunships and assault weapons to enforce shoot-to-kill policies against poachers. "This case demonstrates that very different standards are proposed in the Third World to those that would be accepted in the NGOs' northern homes. Again, when technical considerations are allowed to displace moral ones, some very contentious policies arise. WWF's actions, once publicized, generated an outcry in Britain" (Yearley 1996, 217).

The practices of environmental organizations do not appear to have been changed by this experience. While "the Burmese army is razing entire Karen villages, killing, raping, enslaving, to make way for the biggest nature reserve of its kind in the world . . . to attract millions of tourists," the deaths of thousands of villagers has not prevented environmental organizations from cooperating with the military dictatorship (Levy, Scott-Clark, and Harrison 1997, 5). In defending their work with the Burmese government, the New York-based Wildlife Conservation Society science director stated, "We do not sanction forced relocation, torture or killings. But we have no control over the government." The Smithsonian Institution spokesman has said about their presence in Burma: "We are there to do important conservation work. We may disagree with a regime but it is not our place to challenge it." A WWF director stated "Sometimes we have to deal with repulsive regimes. . . . We have to weigh up whether the conservation benefit is worth the risk of being seen, directly or indirectly, to be supporting those regimes" (Levy, Scott-Clark, and Harrison 1997, 5). Since all aid supports a regime by providing foreign exchange or substituting for it in goods and services, these programs need to be very carefully considered to determine that the donor interests are not superseding the interests of the poor people most affected by it.

If conservation groups are currently willing to associate with a military dictatorship undertaking massacres and forced labor to create wildlife sanctuaries, it can be assumed that their attitude to the democratically elected government of West Bengal would not have been any different, though in Marichjhapi they managed to avoid international media coverage. As a Bengali newspaper observed, "The lives of the trees in Sundarban are certainly of value but surely the lives of these shelter-seekers are not without value" (Chatterjee 1992, 338–39). The settlers and their supporters questioned the bona fides of the government as a protector of the environment. Any attempt to develop the Sundarbans as a nature preserve and tourist attraction would lead to the usual bureaucratic corruption and inefficiency with "armies of experts, the squandering of World Bank funds and little to show for the effort except mountains of reports" (Chatterjee 1992, 340). Responding to complaints that the refugees were destroying the experimental coconut plantations on Marichjhapi, they called attention to the Forest Department's "misuse of government funds." In a few months, by contrast, they had by their own efforts created twelve settlements, laid out roads and drainage channels to prevent water logging, as well as built a school, dispensary, smithies, a pottery, cigarette workshops, a bakery, seven fisheries, boat building yards, 170 boats, four market places with 300 stalls, and the beginning of a major dike system to hold back the tide (Chatterjee 1992, 340–41). While this might appeal to those more inclined to development, there was no doubt that the state position was closer to an environmentalist agenda, even if in practice their system was inefficient and corrupted. This conflict between environmental preservation and peoples' rights goes to the heart of the trade-offs between human rights and ecological preservation. There are costs from environmental preservation

to people who are displaced as a result or who lose opportunities for life improvements through denial of land access. In the case of Marichjhapi it was the poorest people who paid with their lives, while the benefits went to the animals, tourists, and tourist operators. Tourism, in requiring pristine environments, creates an incentive for big business and the state to set aside areas that might otherwise be used by poor people for subsistence. While this may generate economic benefits they rarely are realized by the people being displaced and certainly not by the Marichjhapi inhabitants. Even this benefit may be debatable since the facilities left by the refugees were later inhabited by followers of the ruling CPM, which means the environmental improvement was not realized, even if a potentially more environmentally detrimental influx of refugees may have been prevented.

The environmentalists have not taken a position on the massacre and were not implicated in it, but on the other hand none are known to have opposed it or taken up the issue. The West Bengal government, which did the unpleasant work on behalf of environmental preservation, were alone in being blamed. That Congress had failed to use force to evict their predecessors may have encouraged the refugees to think the Left Front would be at least as tolerant. Without attractive alternate settlement arrangements as an inducement, only force could have succeeded in achieving the eviction. It is difficult to remove thousands of families who are prepared to risk death, even when they are unarmed. Such determination, which at one time would have been considered heroic and pioneering, had become antistate, subversive, and environmentally unfriendly. As resources diminish there are likely to be more struggles by poor peoples that will place them in conflict with environmentalists. Unless environmentalists are prepared to spread the costs of preservation so that the poorest people are not the only ones to pay the price, there will continue to be resistance to the imposition of alien values on these marginalized people. All too often the environmental movement uses its influence with Third World elites to obtain preservationist policies detrimental to the poorest people dependent on these natural resources. Unless prior arrangements for alternate livelihoods are made and compensation paid, the pursuit of a preservationist agenda will result in human tragedies.

As with Marichjhapi, human rights abuses can result from tourism and environmentalism without direct pressure by these interests on governments for eviction. By developing a business interest in preservation, ecotourism creates a lobby for government policies that place new value on these areas, which would otherwise be seen as wastelands suitable for settlement and more conventional forms of development. Once the West Bengal government recognized their value as a tourist attraction, this potential was certainly more attractive than another refugee influx. The state ultimately failed to realize the tourist potential through poor infrastructure development (Montgomery 1995, 27–28), but even without a significant tourist industry, as an idea for future development it could influence government policy without being implemented. The successful preservation could be seen as an unambiguous victory for environmentalism as long as the massacre was not exposed.

Much of the environmentalist literature portrays indigenous peoples in harmony with nature and resistant to encroachment by big business and government over their livelihoods. This portrayal offers poor people as potential allies for environmentalists against megaprojects. This indigenous eco-consciousness, however, is often more a technological constraint necessitated by poverty. Poor people who degrade the environment do not conform to the way environmentalists need to portray them, and therefore tend to be ignored in the literature. The Marichjhapi refugees were

environmentally unfriendly and so offered no campaign opportunity for national or international conservation groups. The government, by adhering to an environmental agenda, did not have to face the opposition that came from movements such as that against the Narmada dam, which operated within dominant environmental paradigms and could make international environmental linkages (Baviskar 1995). In fact, the tribals to be displaced by the Narmada dam were just as environmentally destructive as the refugees, but the outsiders who organized them against the dam were able to falsely portray them to the outside world as environmentally conscious and therefore suitable allies and victims in the struggle against megaprojects. They were able to tap into an international environmental lobby that ended World Bank funding and whatever influence the Bank might have brought to bear on the Indian government to provide the tribals with adequate compensation. The refugees, despite a resistance that surpassed anything the environmentalist movements mustered, died unknown deaths because they did not conform to external perceptions and interests in Indian society or lobbies in the western world. What they were successfully undertaking in development was insufficient to overcome the stigma in the dominant society over environmental destruction. They were following the traditional path to development, which was no longer considered fashionable in frontier areas. Governments had drawn a border line around the forests and nothing more was to be converted to farmland. In these circumstances it is difficult to see how the refugees could have “packaged” their cause in terms that could have appealed to dominant domestic and international opinion.

### Untouchable Representation

After visiting the Dandakaranya refugees in central India and seeing that they were in no position to make an international protest about the Marichjhapi massacre, I sought to put it on record. However, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva told me they were flooded with thousands of complaints, indicating nothing would be done. Amnesty International did not respond to my letters, and Human Rights Watch responded with form letters that gave no indication the material had been read. A visit to the Amnesty International headquarters in London resulted in advice to emulate the strategy of gay rights’ activists of enrolling members in the organization to boost its priority, an approach Untouchables and other marginalized Third World peoples are unable to follow. In Washington with the help of a contact I was able to receive a personalized response letter from Human Rights Watch, but still no indication the material was read or action taken. Submitting the case to academic journals did not result in any evaluations or attempts at refutation. The editor of one leading academic journal wrote me “that after all this time . . . we have yet to obtain one solid outside referee report on your manuscript. We have solicited several referees and some have even accepted the task, only to have the ms [manuscript] returned to us in a few weeks with a terse statement that they felt unable to provide the promised report.” After several years the direct approach of exposing the human rights abuse was deferred to placing it within a framework that might appeal to academics through three versions aimed at a range of academic journals. Without a receptive outlet for such material, I had suggested to a Harvard professor, who had researched Untouchable movements, that since Untouchables numbered 140 million people, representing nearly 3 percent of humanity, a journal on them might

be started, but he rightly pointed out that even if funding could be obtained not enough people would write for it to be sustainable. Books offered the alternate venue but when I sent an Untouchable memoir to eight specialists in the field none were willing to facilitate publication. Since 68.6 percent of university press books are subsidized by subventions from outside sources, and the publication rate for un-introduced manuscripts is, according to two surveys, 0.38 and 0.57 percent, “to get a book published, recommendation through an informal circle or network is close to being an absolute necessity” (Powell 1985, 230, 169, 171–72). The obstacles to Untouchable human rights publication are considerable, while what is published by scholars on untouchability is often of little interest or use to Untouchables, raising questions of whether collaboration is worthwhile.

These failed attempts at representation are significant because it indicates the problems in presenting human rights abuses from the point of view of victims rather than of intellectuals. At the same time academic outlets are particularly important in the absence of other forums for redress. It is known that international agencies have been largely ineffective in preventing or punishing human rights abuses, but at least many abuses get put on the record and receive some degree of international publicity. For really marginalized groups such as the Untouchable refugees, without a significant western middle-class diaspora to take up their case, such attention is not forthcoming, even from groups specifically devoted to uncovering human rights abuses.

Scholars are constrained not to criticize regimes that provide them with research access. One scholar of West Bengal noted that his research in that state required not only an Indian government visa but permission from the ruling Communist Party as well. The Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute even warns academic grant applicants that “the Government of India does not permit research in strategic areas or on sensitive regional, political and social themes” (Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute 1998, 5). There is a history of some intellectuals ignoring the human rights abuses of “progressive” regimes, but in West Bengal press coverage of these abuses makes ignorance or omission less excusable. Rural Untouchable segregation and discrimination is hardly touched on in the Bengal literature. Land redistribution figures are given without mentioning how many beneficiaries subsequently lost their land. A West Bengal government sample survey found more beneficiaries were losing their land than being newly recorded, indicating that the land reform was a fiasco. Though this deficiency is too obvious not to have occurred to scholars, no such survey is undertaken, making their research useless for serious policy implementation purposes, however beneficial it may be for academic careers. If businesses only reported profits and never their losses they would lose credibility, but analogous land reform research using only cumulative redistribution is undertaken, perhaps because it will be inoffensive to the regime granting access. On the other hand, marginalized peoples have no equivalent influence over scholars since they cannot read their work, unlike the dominant intellectual elites. Frank assessments therefore require acceptance that it may not be possible to continue in the field, an approach many scholars having made a considerable investment in the subject will wish to avoid. Not a few say things privately that appear very differently in print, indicating research may have been compromised.

Human rights abuses may be tangential to academic interests, but without an awareness of these abuses, academic analysis can be untenable. For instance, as recently as 1996 a Princeton professor described the Left Front as providing “good governance” (Kohli 1996, 121). The London School of Economics political scientist, T. J. Nossiter, stated “If, and I believe it, Rajiv Gandhi, did say at his first meeting with Jyoti Basu after becoming prime minister that the chief minister was more fit for the role, the

comment was not only a gracious courtesy but a proper tribute to Basu's standing" (Nossiter 1988, 139). As long as abuses such as Marichjhapi cannot get into the academic literature, this may seem plausible. When justice institutions are largely nonfunctional, academic exposure of injustice is that much more important. With 230,000 cases pending in the Calcutta High Court alone, justice is virtually impossible, with the resulting increase in lynch mob killings (Banerjee 1995, 137). In the absence of interest in the human rights abuses, politicians get away with mass murder. The Marichjhapi massacre was not that much different from Bosnian massacres, but at least in Europe the politicians responsible got indicted and had to go into hiding. The West Bengal Chief Minister makes frequent trips to the West without a question being raised about the massacre in public meetings. In the absence of this issue, Jyoti Basu was able to make a bid for the Prime Ministership of India in May 1996, which was only prevented by his CPM central committee voting 35 to 20, in what he called a "historic blunder," to refuse to lead a minority national government (Nagchoudhury 1997, 29). The CPM has since reportedly had second thoughts, and Jyoti Basu could become Prime Minister if another favourable conjuncture arises.

What eventually tarnished the Left Front image was not a massacre at the beginning of the regime but the corruptions that were perhaps inevitable in any long ruling government (Sen Gupta 1997, 905–17). The powerful middle and upper classes did not like to see their taxes misappropriated, and regime image changed more from elite corruption than human rights abuses against the lower classes. A veteran party leader and former Chief Minister of Tripura was expelled for criticizing the Chief Minister's son's business acquisitions in a pattern similar to the business activities of the families of Chinese Communist Party leaders. Press investigations found funds from a Rs 2,500 crore (\$US 757 million) Personal Ledger Account had been appropriated by the Communist Party. Government-subsidized residential plots were illegally sold at a small fraction of market value to Calcutta High Court judges (Plot No. FD429, FD434, GD346, CL16), relatives of the Chief Minister (FD452), Ministers (IA29, FE145, AL210, BH97), and scholars supportive of the regime, including a coeditor of the subaltern series and son-in-law of the Advocate General (Plot. No. FE14), and the husband of Jyoti Basu's authorized biographer (EE block, Sector 2, Plot 5) (Banerjee 1997, 22–23). Though these people cannot be expected to investigate their own illegal land occupation, given their subaltern class perspective they could have used their proven government influence to investigate or at least publicize the massacre of fellow illegal land occupants at Marichjhapi. That this elite gets away with what poor people are killed for discredits secular governments and institutions with the electorate and contributes to the rise of caste, regional, and religious parties which have come to dominate Indian politics. The postindependence years were marked by not only the dominance of the secular Congress Party in government but the secular Communist Party in opposition. This is no longer the case. The governance problem that corruption presents has been attacked by the Supreme Court and elements in the bureaucracy that have attempted to bring politicians to justice, and the fact that I could get information from senior administrators about the Marichjhapi massacre represents a part of this effort. However, any hopes they may have had that my efforts would result in the attention of international human rights organizations or academic publication having any effect are yet to be realized.

Though every politically informed intellectual in the state seemed to have heard about the massacre, it never appeared in the subaltern series or any other academic

publication. Nossiter was informed about the massacre, but most foreign scholars probably never read the Indian press of the period, and local reticence to my questions on the subject indicated most foreigners might not have known. Their praise of the regime is therefore based on ignorance of what went on rather than deliberate deception. This would indicate that when it comes to human rights and governance the Indian press rather than academic literature is the more informative. The absence from the subaltern series of subaltern voices that expose human rights abuses by the regime indicates that despite a theoretical adherence to granting an autonomous subaltern voice free of intellectual substitutions, in practice only voices that conform to certain dominant intellectual norms are tolerated. The fact that a human rights abuse had to be put within the guise of issues that appeal to scholars is perhaps a fair compromise between subaltern victims and the need to reach intellectuals. Nevertheless, it is a significant shift in perspective that has to be noted. Representing marginalized peoples is fraught with the dangers of misrepresentation, but with human rights abuses these representations can be very clear. However, even the most straightforward example of exposing a massacre in the hope of obtaining justice for victims is no easy matter given the inadequate institutional avenues for redress and the inclinations of scholars with other priorities and perspectives. Academic outlets as publications of record can at most be only a first step to obtain redress, but without the inclusion of human rights abuses in them, much of social science and humanities analysis will misrepresent the societies they study. The virtual absence of reports on human rights violations in the academic literature shows gross misrepresentations of what goes on in the society and serves to discredit the academic community as marginalized peoples become aware of how they are being portrayed. As the All-Bengal Namasudra Association put it to the Simon Commission in 1929, "It has been seen in more than one case that British members of the Indian Civil Service, on account of their living in this country for a long time, and by coming into contact with only a section of the people, are mentally captured by the ideas of those few people who are in the position of social aristocrats" (Simon Commission [1929] 1998, 93–94). This distortion continues to influence the academic community, and those enamored of India have often presented a misleading representation of subaltern groups.

The Marichjhapi massacre was soon forgotten by nearly everyone except relatives of the victims. However, it did have an influence on Untouchable activists who developed an antipathy to the Communists resulting from their failure to desegregate rural areas, to implement successful land reform and educational programs, and their refusal to investigate human rights violations such as Marichjhapi (Mallick 1993, 1994, 1998). Despite much of the academic literature praising Left Front programs, a lot of people outside academic circles came to know better, and the absence of the massacre from the literature did not prevent Untouchable activists in other states from hearing about it. At the time of the massacre the CPM could calculate there would be no consequences from the eviction because no one could have predicted that those Untouchable activists who had most vociferously taken up the cause of the refugees would take power in India's most politically important state of Uttar Pradesh in the 1990s. Though the Untouchable governments were short-lived, the movement retained a vote base that in fractured coalition politics was too important to ignore. The rise of Untouchable caste politics was being widely condemned, but without an understanding of how the secular parties had let down the Untouchables through human rights abuses and corruption, it is not possible to realize one of the reasons for the decline of secular politics in India. Just as other massacres before it were used to symbolize the oppression of colonial or Congress rulers, Marichjhapi was used as a

political tool to show the abuses of the Communists and the failures of secular Indian government. A consciousness of the massacre continued among Untouchable activists and in publications which very few in the dominant intellectual elite were aware of, let alone read. That discussion of the massacre did not appear in academically respectable publications did not mean it never happened or was not to become noteworthy in the Untouchable politicization and rejection of secular parties. Untouchables were the most natural allies of secular parties, and the failure of these parties to provide justice contributed to the rise of caste politics. Until secular parties and institutions are willing to come to terms with their past treatment of Untouchables, they are unlikely to be able to make permanent inroads into the increasingly important and autonomous Untouchable electorate. Given the nature of India and Indian studies this sea change will have to await the Dalit occupation of state power, when state largesse will then be appropriated to further Untouchable objectives. As Kanshi Ram observed, "Those who worship dogs, cats, even stones will lose no time in worshipping social reformers like Periyar, once the Dalits come to power" (*India Today*, 15 October 1995, 11). This cynicism is a result of the treatment Untouchables have received at the hands of secular parties and governments, and by inference of the academic community. The democratization process currently underway in India will bring more of these antagonisms out in the open. Until the state and society provide enhanced human rights and life opportunities for these marginalized groups, caste reconciliation cannot be successful. One small step in this process might include investigating the Marichjhapi massacre and sending those responsible for trial to the Supreme Court or International Criminal Court.

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