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IN MEMORY OF SANJAY SANGVAI

REMEMBERING A FRIEND, AN INSPIRATION

Sanjay Sangvai
1959-2007



A tribute to a former Narmada Bachao Andolan colleague, friend and inspiration

I am still in shock after learning this morning that Sanjay Sangvai, a colleague of many years, is no more. When the sms came today from Shripad Dharmadhikary, I could not believe it. But then there was the flood of messages that came after.

Having worked with Sanjay for many years in the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), I found him to be both a friend and an inspiration. He was a very hard working, dedicated colleague who set an example with his acts, not just his words.

He was also a wordsmith with remarkable command over Marathi, Hindi and English. Before becoming an NBA activist, he taught journalism; he also worked with the Marathi newspaper Sakal. Years after he left the paper, I was amazed to see the kind of respect he commanded when I visited their Mumbai bureau with him in early 1990s. He authored a very readable and yet authoritative book, *The River and Life: People's Struggle in the Narmada Valley*, published by Earthcare Books in 2000. He wrote in the Preface to the book, "paradoxically, the written word becomes history." Those words were important from many points of views, but they also expressed an anguish and an anxiety, for he saw that many times written words, if unchallenged, could give misleading impressions of actual events.



During the NBA years I spent with Sanjay in Baroda and elsewhere, I remember that often he was the last person to go to sleep and the first one to get up. He was a voracious reader and prolific writer. His needs were the bare minimum (his eyes always lit up at the sight of a cup of tea, of course), you could see his simplicity from the cotton clothes he wore year round. Behind that unassuming exterior was a mind that could understand the complex social, economic and most importantly, political environment in which the struggles he was involved in were played out. Of late, he was also involved in the campaign against the poverty-generating land acquisitions for the Special Economic Zones.



Friends had known for a decade that he was suffering from a serious heart problem. He fought that bravely, but he rarely discussed his problems with anyone. Against the advice of doctors, he continued to travel wherever the struggles he worked on demanded. While this showed his absolute dedication to the cause, it must have taken its toll. In fact he was under treatment at a naturopathy centre in Ernakulam (Kerala) where he died at 7 am on May 29, 2007. It may sound mundane or predictable, but it is indeed true that losses of such a kind are irreparable.

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