

'J'ACCUSE!'

## WHERE ARE EMILE ZOLAS?

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It has been more than two months that Dr Binayak Sen, a paediatrician by training and profession and a human rights activist by choice has received a new identity: 'A menace to public safety'—The Chattisgarh police whose own record of human rights violations would shame even the Gills of Punjab netoreity, has used the provisions of the draconian Public Safety Act and Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (a substitute for POTA) to detain Dr Binayak Sen in the wee hours of 14th May.

Question naturally arises how does a graduate from the prestigious Christian Medical College, Vellore who has been associated with several community health programmes for the last three decades, who even contributed to the state government's conceptualisation of community health programme 'Mitanin' and who played a significant role in the evolution of 'Shaheed Hospital' - a hospital started by workers for the workers under the leadership of legendary Shankar Guha Niyogi, has suddenly metamorphosed into a menace to public safety ?

One can comprehend this 'transformation' only if one takes a look at the other aspect of Dr Sen's work which he has consistently been doing for quite sometime. Close watchers of Chhatisgarh's deteriorating human rights situation would tell everyone that from his work of curing the physical health of the rural poor in general and kids in particular, he has been actively associated with bettering the social health of the downtrodden and the marginalised as a human rights activist. It is not for nothing that presently he is the General Secretary of PUCL ( People's Union for Civil Liberties), Chhatisgarh region and Vice-President of the organisation at the national level.

An idea of the challenging work which he alongwith his other co-workers are engaged in could be had from the 'encounter killings' of twelve tribals at Santoshpur which recently made headlines at the national level. (March 31, 2007) In this particular case security personnel marched into the hamletts of tribals, in 'Naxal affected' Bastar area of Chhattis-garh, abused the villagers alleging that they were naxalite sympathisers and took away some of them. By the evening news came, that twelve such people were killed by these security personnel after brutal torture. A few of them were just hacked to death.

Madiyam Soni, a tribal woman, from Ponjer, who lost her own son in the genocide, and who alongwith other villagers have left her village the same night, narrated her experience to a correspondent (Express, 20th May 2007) Narrating her experience she shared with the reporter that these tribals are so scared that they have not even registered a complaint at the police station. She rightly asks "How can we hope to approach the police when some of their own have committed the crime"?

It need be emphasised here that the rest of the world could get to know of the state engineered Santoshpur killings only through the painstaking work done by Dr Binayak Sen and his close associates. Apart from Santoshpur killings, Binayak and his co-workers have similarly exposed many such incidents of human rights violations, fake killings, fake arrests. It was only two years back they took initiative in the formation of an All India Committee comprising human rights groups active in different parts of the country, to look into the brutalisation of ordinary tribals at the hands of the Police under the 'Salwa Judum' campaign.

Salwa Judum, literally translated 'Peace Festival', is a campaign taken up by the police to arm the tribals and put them under protected areas. It is no mere coincidence that leading historian Ramchandra Guha, recently filed a petition in the Supreme Court urging its intervention to stop the 'Salwa Judum' campaign.

One can easily imagine the challenges involved in exposing all such cases where the security personnel have been given a free hand to silence the people. But it is remarkable that these people have decided to speak truth to power and are ready to face the consequences. Incidentally while announcing Dr Binayak Sen's arrest, the senior police officer had the audacity of saying that two of his other colleagues in the human rights movement namely Gautam Bandhopadhyay, Rashmi Dwivedi would similarly be detained in the near future.

As rightly noted by a campaign group :

'This is not merely an effort to cover up the crimes the State government has committed in the name of suppressing the Maoists. These developments are also part of a much larger agenda, driven by the Chattisgarh government's close links to large corporations and international capital and aimed at ruthlessly suppressing any resistance to the forcible seizure of people's lands and resources.'

The arrest of Dr Binayak Sen under the draconian Unlawful Activities Prevention Act and Chhatisgarh Public Safety Act which can put him in jail for years together supposedly for connected to 'terrorist activity' reminds one of a chapter in French history which is known as the 'Dreyfus Case',

It was early eighteen nineties when this young Jewish military officer called Dreyfus was arrested supposedly for 'treason' and was sent to St Helena. Captain Dreyfus was caught while he was playing with his young son in the house. The police people had made such a watertight case against the officer that it seemed that everything was lost.

But incidentally the legendary French writer Emile Zola came to know about his case and wrote a series of articles in the newspapers (titled J'accuse meaning I accuse!) explaining the Jewish officer's innocence and the way he was framed by the powers that be. He exposed how the people who have fabricated the case against Dreyfus 'hated jews'. Suddenly the move to release Dreyfus gained such a momentum that within a short time the government was forced to release him.

As far as Dr Binayak Sen is concerned, the 'never say die' activist community has spoken up but where are 'Emile Zolas' who can roar 'J'accuse !' □□□