

Globalisation and abstraction in the Bhopal survivors' movement

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Abstract

In the context of globalisation, the internationalisation of social movements has become a focus of research and theorisation. In particular there is a suggestion that new forms of internationalisation have emerged in response to globalised economic and technological developments. The movement of survivors of the 1984 Bhopal gas disaster has been cited as a "new/old breed of transnational social movement" whose internationalisation has been facilitated by the anti-toxics movement. Here it is argued that the dynamics of this movement are more complex than has been recounted, and that association with the international anti-toxics movement should be regarded as one form amongst several, of generalisation from the experience of local campaigning. By focusing on the divisions within the movement, the diversity of generalisations may be more properly understood. Raymond Williams' conception of militant particularism, as expounded by David Harvey, is a useful theoretical tool for interpreting the various forms of abstraction which the movement has developed. It is argued that not only does this approach provide a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of this and potentially other social movements, it is also valuable for movement activists to make sense of otherwise negative experiences of division, and thereby reduce the risk of such divisions being exploited.

Introduction

In a special issue of the journal *Global Social Policy* published on the 25th anniversary of the Bhopal gas disaster, Stephen Zavestoski (2009) locates the international mobilisation of the Bhopal justice campaign in the changing fortunes of the global anti-toxics movement, as well as, ironically, in the global reach of the chemical industry itself:

the forces of globalization that facilitated the global expansion of the petrochemical industry are accompanied by counterforces in the form of social movement challenges to environmental hazards introduced by the industry... When the activities of multinational corporations transform material conditions of existence, whether through the spread of chemical hazards or otherwise, civil society responses take aim at a multinational target that necessitates transnational organizing. (Zavestoski 2009 p. 402)

This is a welcome contribution to the analysis of social movement studies, not least because of its emphasis on the dialectical relationships between social movement mobilisation and material conditions. However, because of his

interest in internationalisation, as Zavestoski himself acknowledges, his analysis is based only on a section of the Bhopal survivors' movement most focussed on international collaboration, the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal (ICJB). In fact, the ICJB coalition of Bhopal-based groups and their international supporters represent only part of the Bhopal gas survivors' movement, which is divided between three or four rival campaigning groups. The local divisions are a result of a complex history of ideological and personal disagreements and are commonly interpreted as a source of weakness in the movement. The central argument of this paper is however that the factions have privileged contrasting abstractions from their militant particularist praxis, only one of which takes the form of environmental justice / anti-toxics internationalism. Despite the weaknesses which division inevitably brings, there is strength in the diversity of abstractions which enables the struggle to be fought on multiple fronts, with combinations of alliances which would be scarcely possible in a unified movement.

This paper draws on research conducted over the period 2007-2009 during which interviews were conducted with survivor-activists associated with the three principal campaigning groups in Bhopal: referred to here as the Women Workers' Campaign, the ICJB and the Pensioners' Front (Bhopal Survivors' Movement Study, 2009). The largest of the survivor groups is *Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Udyog Sangathan* (Bhopal Gas Affected Women Workers' Campaign ("Women Workers' Campaign")), a traditionally organised mass movement which, despite its name, mobilises both men and women, and is led by Abdul Jabbar Khan.

The ICJB affiliated groups at the time of the research comprised the Stationery Workers' trade union *Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Stationery Karmchari Sangh* ("Stationery Union"); a community based off-shoot of the Women Workers' Campaign *Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Purush Sangharsh Morcha* (Bhopal Gas Affected Women and Men's Struggle Front) and the solidarity group Bhopal Group for Information and Action (BGIA) - of which a key activist is Satinath Sarangi – and an additional affiliate which emerged during our research, Children Against Dow Carbide.

The smaller *Gas Peedit Neerashit Pension Bhogi Sangharsh Morcha* (Gas Affected Destitute Pension-Entitled People's Struggle Front ("Pensioners' Front")) is led by Balkrishna Namdeo and mobilises economically inactive older and disabled people. We will also refer to the solidarity group *Bhopal Gas Peedit Sangharsh Sahayog Samiti* (SSS) a largely solidarity group affiliated to the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)), although a limitation in our research is that we failed to get past the local leadership to interview survivors active in this group.

Research was based on the pedagogical methodology of Paulo Freire (1972) designed to maximise analytical dialogue between researchers and survivor-activists, without presumption of literacy. Interviews were video recorded and copies of interviews on CD were given to interviewees who were invited to provide additional comment. In many cases follow-up interviews were carried

out in order for researchers and activists jointly to interrogate emerging themes at a deeper level. Objects such as photographs were often used as both memory-aids and "codifications", encouraging critical interpretation of events. A total of 38 individuals were interviewed in Hindi (except for two who were interviewed in English) and four group discussions were conducted, including two which included structured feedback by researchers on emergent themes (Bhopal Survivors Movement Study 2009, Mukherjee et al 2011).

Historical development of the movement

Local mobilisation of the Bhopal movement over the period since the 1984 disaster has occurred through several phases (Saranghi 1998, Bhopal Survivors Movement Study 2009, Mukherjee 2010, Mukherjee et al 2011). In the aftermath of the devastation, survivors, many of them sick, most of whom were multiply bereaved, took to the streets in an expression of unfocussed fury. In the days that followed, the immediate pressing need of providing relief, access to clean water, basic foodstuffs, medical attention and documentation of deaths, illnesses and loss of livestock and livelihood attracted volunteers from throughout India, many of whom brought considerable mobilisation experience through their political or religious affiliations. The principal organisation which was formed from these outsider volunteers was the *Zehreeli Gas Kand Sangharsh Morcha* ("*Zehreeli*"), led by a socialist Alok Pratap Singh, which formed local neighbourhood committees in the gas affected areas for the provision of necessities, gathering information and mobilising protests in support of demands. This, male dominated, outsider-led organisation effectively mobilised in the first few months after the disaster, although the broad range of ideologies which the *Zehreeli* encompassed, combined with sustained state repression, led to conflict, expulsions and disintegration within the space of a year.

The period during which it operated in 1985 was a turbulent time in Indian politics. Indira Gandhi was assassinated by Sikh separatists only two months before the gas leak, there were widespread anti-Sikh riots and a growing Maoist armed struggle (Naxalism) in tribal areas. At the same time, in Bhopal, American ambulance-chasing lawyers infiltrated the community, and Union Carbide, the US multinational company which established and controlled the Bhopal factory through its Indian subsidiary, was subverting legal and humanitarian processes in a bid to extricate itself from responsibility. Thus, despite widespread solidarity expressed throughout the globe, the *Zehreeli* was ambivalent about foreign involvement and reluctant to accept funds from overseas which might be used against them and provide an excuse for state repression.

After the disintegration of the *Zehreeli*, several factions continued, with a mixture of relationships with the state, local survivors, international supporters and Indian political parties. However, the next wave of mobilisation occurred

independently of this process, within the economic rehabilitation work-sheds established by the state and social entrepreneurs. These training workshops in tailoring, embroidery and stationery manufacturing were aimed at women survivors who had, prior to the disaster, largely been employed in domestic and home-based work such as beedi (local cigarette) rolling and piece-work tailoring. Whilst male manual labourers were in many cases incapacitated by the effect of the gas, wages earned by women could be expected to be spent on the family. However, these work-sheds had no accountability to local people, had poor working conditions and were oppressive, short term and endemically corrupt. The women experienced the exploitation of the labour process and started learning the tools of resistance: collective organisation, unionisation (in India it is possible to register an independent trade union at a single workplace), industrial confrontation and Gandhian techniques of direct action.

One of these unions (Women Workers' Campaign) expanded to include workers from several work-sheds, neighbourhood committees and other survivors in the gas affected communities. The Women Workers' Campaign thus became a broad front for male and female survivors, focused on economic demands of wages, employment conditions, compensation and other, more general issues. Another union (*Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Stationery Karmchari Sangh* (Stationery Union)) remained independent and became part of the ICJB some 15 years later.

In addition, a pre-existing welfare and campaign group for economically inactive people, *Neerashit Pension Bhogi Sangharsh Morcha* (Destitute Pension-Entitled People's Struggle Front) took up the cause of the gas affected elderly and disabled under the leadership of a local activist Balkrishna Namdeo, adding *Gas Peedit* (Gas Affected) to their name. These unions and campaign groups of survivors with indigenous leadership became the principal organisational structures for mobilising local people in the gas affected areas, often in alliance with small remnants of the *Zehreeli*.

One such remnant is the Bhopal Group for Information and Action (BGIA), led by Satinath (Sathyu) Sarangi, who has been considerably influential in the internationalisation of the movement. Sarangi has had a key role in forming the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal and in mobilising supporters and funds in the USA and Europe for projects in Bhopal.

Militant particularism and divergent abstraction

The divergent praxes of these sections of the movement, it is argued, constitute contrasting processes of abstraction from a militant particularism in relation to the political opportunities afforded by the global structuring of capital as well as the internal relations of the movement itself. Raymond Williams' concept of militant particularism has been built on by David Harvey to explain how "[i]deals forged out of the affirmative experience of solidarities in one place get

generalised and universalised as a working model of a new form of society that will benefit all of humanity" (Harvey 1996 p. 32). However, he also draws attention to difficulties in this process:

The move from tangible solidarities understood as patterns of social life organised in affective and knowable communities to a more abstract set of conceptions that would have universal purchase involves a move from one level of abstraction – attached to place – to another level of abstraction capable of reaching out across space. And in that move, something was bound to be lost ... The shift from one conceptual world, from one level of abstraction to another, can threaten the common purpose and values that ground the militant particularism achieved in particular places (Harvey 1996 p. 33)

The higher level abstractions which can be achieved, whilst made possible by the material conditions in which the militant particularism arises, is not narrowly determined but can take a variety of forms. It is argued here that what we are seeing in the Bhopal Survivors' movement is a divergence in the forms of abstraction between sectors of the movement. This is illustrated by describing three forms of abstraction from the Bhopal movement's material conditions: environmental justice, which privileges the condition of being polluted; class struggle which emphasises the poverty of the gas victims; and gender, which highlights the fact that survivor activists are overwhelmingly female. ICJB has developed an environmental abstraction, whereas the Women Workers' Campaign has adopted a class analysis. Despite the emergence of a gendered critique amongst survivor activists and feminist commentators, gender has not emerged as an abstraction from the militant particularism of any sections of the movement.

Environmental justice

In environmental abstraction, the primary collective experience of the survivors is the impact of pollution. The natural allies of survivors are those who are suffering in other pollution impacted communities in India or across the world, and the organisations who are campaigning against pollution. ICJB consists of the local survivors' groups and a network of Indian intellectuals, international supporters and groups such as Students for Bhopal in the USA, many of whom are linked into global anti-toxics and environmental movements. The Campaign has allied itself at various times with Greenpeace International and India's Centre for Science and Environment, each of which has conducted monitoring for pollutants.

The campaign prioritises detoxification and health care in a post-pollution situation, emphasising chemical-free environments and health-care critical of the power of the pharmaceutical industry. There is a strong focus on the ongoing pollution and water contamination from the site of the former factory – and indeed the pollution from the factory prior to the gas leak. A central campaign target is to pressurise Dow Chemical company to clean up the site to internationally high standards, and to mobilise communities wherever Dow attempts to build chemical hubs or deliver Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives in India. ICJB has also been relatively successful at constructing an

identity of *pani peedit*, or "water affected" so that recent arrivals and young people who were not exposed to the gas but have been exposed to contaminated water and other pollutants can join *gas peedit* as victims of the disaster

The process of environmental abstraction from militant particularism is illustrated by an interview extract from Rasheeda Bee, leader of the Stationery Union and an articulate and critical strategist, although uneducated and non-literate:

There were many people who were falling sick beside the Union Carbide walls and all around it. Why were they falling sick? Most of the women who I knew were from these areas where people were facing new problems. I met up with Sathyu and he told me about the contamination of the water. And after the [Greenpeace] reports in 1999 it was found for a fact that the water was indeed toxic. In one of the hand pumps black water started gushing out and every one went to see.

Greenpeace came in 2000 and it was after this that we in the Stationery [Union] joined hands with Sathyu. After hearing about the contaminated water, and from what I had learned over the years, I started to realise that this is about saving the world. What happened in Bhopal has already happened, but we need to join forces to stop it from happening again anywhere else in the world. I also came to know about the law that says the polluter must pay, which strengthened us all the more because we now knew that we had the law on our side... Then in 2004 the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal was formed.

There had been a conference in Japan in 1996 which some people from Bhopal had gone to. There had been a mercury leak from a factory in Japan and many people were affected and children were being born deformed. People had been fighting for justice for 40 years... We saw the situation there and the state of people. It was due to high amounts of mercury, which is also the case here in Bhopal. This meant that we could face the same problems that they have in Japan if we didn't do something about it and stand up against injustice.

Then in 2002 I went to South Africa for a conference regarding environment and its safety – the World Summit on Sustainable Development. There too I saw and heard more about Dow's atrocities... (Bhopal Survivors' Movement Study 2009 p. 113)

The particular abstraction from experience through contact with international environmental NGOs, pollution impacted communities and international conferences on sustainable development has contributed to an environmental justice framing of the ICJB.

In 2004 Rasheeda Bee and her fellow leader of the Stationery Union, Champa Devi Shukla, were jointly awarded the Goldman prize "for excellence in protecting the environment". For this, major international award for environmental campaigning to go to poor women, trade union leaders, one of whom is illiterate (and in the context of increasing communal divisions in India, one Muslim and one Hindu), was of major significance to international environmentalism and to the ICJB's reputation as an environmental justice movement. However its receipt amongst the other organisations in Bhopal was divisive, leading to public mockery, accusations of corruption and a split within the Stationery Union. In the context of Bhopal, the distinctiveness of Rasheeda Bee and Champa Devi Shukla is not their skills and commitment as leaders of a survivors' union (of which there are others in Bhopal) but rather their

willingness to court an international support base of environmentalists. For many in this non-literate culture of personal loyalty, this amounted to betrayal.

Class struggle

The Women Workers' Campaign by contrast emphasises the class dimension of oppression. The campaign focus is largely on economic issues: compensation and economic rehabilitation: its primary campaign is for "five times compensation" and the organisation runs an economic rehabilitation training project, *Swabhimaan Kendra*, with state funding. Self-reliance is highly regarded to ensure that the interests of the survivors remain central to the movement and not distorted by the interests of funders or international organisations with their own agendas. The Women Workers' Campaign refers to the principled position taken by *Zehreeli* to refuse international support on the grounds that it leaves the group open to accusations of foreign political interference, and for the Women Workers' Campaign leader, Abdul Jabbar, this also has a class dimension:

For the first 10 years of the movement it seemed like a good idea to involve intellectuals just as they were active in the NBA [*Narmada Bachao Andolan* – Save the Narmada [river, against dams] movement]. Now such people think very lowly of the Bhopal gas movement, they think it's a nuisance. They never have it in them to struggle. I feel that they could not connect to the problems of the common man because their experience was all book based... During the British rule most of the intellectuals were in important positions in the system and they were the main hindrance to the freedom movement. It has been the same with the French revolution and the Russian revolution. The intellectuals are always with the rulers. So I would say that the uneducated people who do not possess 'literary' knowledge are the ones who can bring justice, much more than the educated... The poor will have to fight their own battle because the injustice has been done to them. I believe that all the major movements around the world have been led by the poor. The rich have only got in the way. (Bhopal Survivors' Movement Study p. 78-79)

The Women Workers' Campaign responds therefore to material conditions primarily through class-based struggles. The reference point of many of the movement's leaders is the *Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha*, led, before his assassination in 1992, by Miners' union leader Shankar Guha Niyogi whom Jabbar describes as his guru. On the 25th anniversary of the gas disaster, the Women Workers' Campaign hosted a gathering of peoples' movements affiliated to the *Jan Vikas Andolan* (Peoples' Development Movement), which originates in the *Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha*, incorporating tribal, peasant and workers' movements from across India, whilst most international supporters and media focused on the activities of the ICJB.

This is absolutely not to say that environmental issues are of no interest to the Women Workers' Campaign, but environmental concerns are regarded as local problems, not abstracted to the same degree as other, especially class related issues. Here is Mohini Devi, a leader in Women Workers' Campaign and trainer in *Swabhimaan Kendra* discussing how her trade union involvement led to environmental awareness:

Issues picked up by the women were never restricted to workplace issues, they were open to the problems that people face over all. So their voices were raised for everything from medical health care, economic rehabilitation, compensation, environmental, social etc or for that matter the continuing rise in prices. For every problem, if you look at it on a larger level, there is a problem that relates all other humans not just the ones suffering in that place and time. This is why our solidarity went out to other campaigns also and likewise got the same back from them.

I have learnt the importance of the environment and the meaning of the term.

Environment is what surrounds us and it is very important for a person to know what his/her environment is. The *sangathan* has also raised a lot of environmental issues like the misuse of the big and small lakes in Bhopal. The Hindus (for idol immersion) and Muslims (tazia) use it for their religious rites and we have raised the issue of pollution due to these activities many times. This does not mean that I am a disbeliever but this is of course not acceptable even for me as a person who believes in God. Similarly on a larger scale when forests are cut in the Himalayas its impact will be felt throughout India. I am not aware about the global environmental issues but I know that large dams are causing huge impacts on the environment. (Bhopal Survivors' Movement Study 2009 p. 72)

For Mohini Devi and the Women Workers' Campaign, environmental issues are an extension of her experience of militant particularism, rather than an abstraction as is the case for Rasheeda Bee and ICJB.

Gender order

One striking feature of the movement is its gender dynamics, which illustrate an issue where particularist practices have imperfectly generalised, leading to emancipatory practices within the context of a local patriarchal gender regime, whilst rejecting the universalist abstraction of feminism. The *Zehreeli* mostly comprised male activists whereas the union-based groups of the second phase of mobilisation were female. All current groups, in their different ways, have key male leaders, whilst the secondary levels of leadership and the vast majority of the rank and file are female.

Suroopa Mukherjee, in her oral history of the women survivors of the Bhopal disaster (Mukherjee 2010), makes the case for seeing the women as the double victims of Bhopal, oppressed both by the gas leak and by the patriarchal response to it. She argues that women have been the core to the movement, having made a transition from repressed and silenced wives and daughters, to being the leaders and tacticians in the unions and campaign groups which make up the movement. She claims that the Bhopal survivors' movement is essentially a women's movement, largely led by and made up of women, practicing their politics through female media: "dancing bodies" and telling stories. Praxis for women is carnal, visceral and passionate, which counters the cerebral, moralising, conceptual praxis of their opponents in the form of economic company functionaries, bureaucratic legislators and technocratic medics. The experience of poison in the women's bodies in its disruption of menstrual cycles and gynaecological functions, abnormal births and dependent children, becomes reflected in the bodily practices of protest.

Sadhna Karnik, one of the few female activists in *Zehreeli* and current local organiser of the CPI(M) affiliated SSS, criticises this impression of a women's movement. She argues that whilst the women are numerically strong and there are competent female leaders, they are only able to act within parameters set by the men. A system of patronage ensures that a few men retain the power, and women who step outside their allotted roles are treated viciously. Women attain greater freedom within the movement than they previously did in the family or the workplace, but their roles are still circumscribed by men in the leadership of the movement organisations. Disputes between men lead to splits and rivalries, with women expressing loyalty to this or that male leader. As Karnik explains:

Bhopal has not been a platform for particular women's issues, or their political and general demands, so the mobilisation of large numbers of women victims following their male leaders in various organisations does not mean that Bhopal is a women's movement. (Bhopal Survivors' Movement Study 2009 p. 170)

In 1984, North Bhopal was a socially conservative, patriarchal and gender segregated society. Many women, from both the Muslim and Hindu communities, lived in a degree of purdah, had no contact with men outwith their immediate family, and conducted both domestic and paid work in the home. Female literacy in Madhya Pradesh in 1981 was under 20% (Census of India 1981), and unlikely to be much higher in Bhopal at the time of the disaster in 1984. In such a context it is perhaps not surprising that a largely female movement should have male leadership.

For many women activists, the experience of being politicised through the movement has been liberating, albeit within the context of a resilient patriarchy. Mukherjee (2010) documents multiple experiences of women's empowerment through the praxis of the movement. From an experience of purdah, women have become activists and leaders in an international movement, speaking on stages across the world. In daily practices, women make decisions which would previously have required male approval. In many cases husbands and fathers are dead or have abandoned their womenfolk, but in others, women have evicted or divorced uncooperative men. Religious practices (removal of burqa, inter-caste and inter-communal food sharing etc) are being redefined outside the edicts of male religious leaders, whose support has been notably absent from the movement. For the ICJB activists, there has been regular contact with North American and European women, often educated feminists willing to share their analysis.

However, our interviews on marriage demonstrate the complexity of this. Women activists, empowered by their engagement in the movement, express their aspirations to sustain caste and religious endogamy in marriage, practices which, as Uma Chakravarti (2003) has argued are the foundations of Indian patriarchy. These strong women aspire for their daughters to be empowered, yet regard the degree of empowerment which these daughters achieve to be entirely in the hands of the daughter's husband and his family. Moreover, these same women select their future son-in-laws on the basis of caste integrity and economic status, not on their enlightened attitudes to women. Whilst the daily gender regime in the movement, and consequently in the community, is

certainly being renegotiated through the militant particularism of a highly gendered political practice, there seems to be no evidence that this is being generalised in any of the groups through commitments to any form of feminist universalism which might serve to critique the patriarchal gender order.

Discursive encounter

In social movement theory, the different forms of abstraction adopted or not by these groups might be understood as frame alignment, in which ICJB is internationalising through framing itself as an environmental movement whereas Women Workers' Campaign is framing itself as a poor people's movement. Frame theory however, largely lacks the complex dynamics of relations between material conditions and political opportunities. Amita Baviskar (2005) introduces the useful concept of discursive encounter:

The politics of naming movements as "environmental" or otherwise ... emerges from a discursive encounter between different groups within the movement and their supporters. The multiple contending meanings that different groups bring to the terrain of struggle are negotiated and new understandings created in an ongoing process of dialogue between unequally situated actors. (Baviskar 2005 p. 164)

The mechanisms of achieving these discursive encounters require, not just selection of allies and negotiation over acceptance by parties outwith the movement, but also internal communication and knowledge exchange which ensures a degree of adherence from the movement membership. The forms of communication within ICJB and Women Workers' Campaign differ in this respect.

With ICJB, knowledge exchange must occur between Bhopal-based, Hindi speaking, non-literate survivor-activists and international, English speaking, internet using and metropolitan intellectual activists. In Bhopal, a core group of leaders and activists meet weekly and communicate news and decisions at a weekly mass meeting at which, during our research, typically between 50 and 150 people would attend. These meetings involve motivational speeches and also serve to gather information from the neighbourhoods, provide some individual welfare support, and to mobilise for actions. Some of the activists who attend these meetings take information back to the neighbourhoods and further outreach work is conducted by paid and voluntary mobilising cadres. Communication relies on oral traditions of public rhetoric and storytelling..

None of the Bhopalis involved in ICJB speaks English, whereas the Indian intellectuals and international supporters communicate in English, primarily through email and other electronic forms of communication. Translation between the two forms of communication is dependent on Sarangi and a very few other educated, Bhopal-based activists, mostly incomers. The Bhopal groups and Indian and international supporters meet annually in Bhopal, a collective, participatory meeting with ongoing informal translation between English and Hindi. At other times, the translation between the English

language, literate-culture, electronic communicating wing of the movement and the Hindi language, non-literate culture, verbal communicating survivors' groups is mediated by a few activists.

The robustness of this structure is evident in its capacity to mobilise effectively. The interaction occurs within the meaning-making frame of environmental justice, drawing on both technical and local knowledge. Indian Right to Information legislation has been used to access technical data, for example on pesticide residues in groundwater, analysed with the help of US anti-toxics specialists, and this has been combined with local experience of contaminated drinking water and chemical induced ill health. This also has implications for the supporter base of the ICJB whose material conditions are reflected in the environmental justice frame. The Campaign has been successful at mobilising *pani peedit* (water affected) and younger people from across all caste and religious groups, including people with no direct experience of the gas leak but with a greater access to education than the older generation.

Unlike ICJB's emphasis on participatory decision making amongst small groups of activists, the Women Workers' Campaign employs a more traditional, leadership-led, paternalistic structure. Its leader, Abdul Jabbar Khan is literate and school educated but not a graduate, and has limited knowledge of English and computer skills. Jabbar places significant importance in solving individual survivors' welfare problems and commands considerable respect and trust which he draws on in mobilising for actions. The level of leadership below Jabbar is primarily made up of fiercely loyal women. In his dealings with legal and administrative issues, Jabbar acts as a trusted advocate of his supporters' interests, and there is less of a requirement for translation of technical information into popular forms. The Women Workers' Campaign has moreover developed alliances of solidarity with trade union, peasant, land rights and tribal movements through *Jan Vikas Andolan* (Peoples' Development Movement).

The Women Workers' Campaign remains the largest organisation mobilising Bhopal survivors, using weekly mass meetings of several hundred people and (unpaid) outreach to mobilise supporters but has cultivated no international support and precious few Indian intellectuals. The group is proud of its independence, relying on multiple small subscriptions from its members rather than international funds. Several of its leaders are employed as trainers or administrators in the economic rehabilitation project *Swabhimaan Kendra*. On the basis of our surveys at rallies and public meetings, the Women Workers' Campaign supporter base has a higher proportion of Muslims and the lower status Hindu castes classified as Other Backward Classes (OBC).

Neither Women Workers' Campaign, nor ICJB include a large number of dalit survivors, who are found disproportionately in the third major group, the Pensioners' Front. There is a largely paternalistic relationship between the leader Balkrishna Namdeo and the, almost entirely uneducated, older women who make up its membership. Addressing welfare issues related to pension provision and other forms of state support such as Below Poverty Line (BPL)

rations is a major part of Namdeo's work, and its campaign focus is therefore oriented towards state welfare.

In addition to the ICJB's environmental internationalism and the Women Worker's Campaign's class-based internationalism, a third form of internationalism of a more vanguardist nature is that employed by the *Bhopal Gas Peedit Sangharsh Sahayog Samiti* (SSS), which is made up of an alliance of CPI(M) affiliated and Left associated groups including Delhi Science Forum and the Railway Workers Union. This latter affiliate appears to be a locus of Bhopal-based mobilising since the proximity of the Union Carbide factory to the main railway station has led to a high incidence of gas impacted people amongst rail employees and their families living in adjacent Railway Colony.

Internationalisation in the case of SSS seems to be based on existing fraternal relations between communist parties and operates at high level, involving party cadres rather than survivors. Survivors are, nonetheless, mobilised in relation to nationally coordinated programmes.

Conclusion

The two quotations above from Rasheeda Bee and Abdul Jabbar Khan illustrate the focus of the framing of the two major organisations. For Rasheeda Bee, who remains a leader of a small trade union, the form of abstraction which has developed from her experience of local struggle is that of environmentalism: "After hearing about the contaminated water, and from what I had learned over the years, I started to realize that this is about saving the world", whereas for Jabbar the abstraction is one of class: "the uneducated people ... are the ones who can bring justice... The poor will have to fight their own battle because the injustice has been done to them. I believe that all the major movements around the world have been led by the poor." Although cautious about building links directly with international supporters, Jabbar is an internationalist, building a movement through class solidarity.

During a particular period of history, during which neoliberal policies in India accelerated, ICJB moved towards a successful international environmentalist abstraction and moved away from the economic aspects of militant particularism of the workplace struggle in Bhopal, whereas Women Workers' Campaign sacrificed a rapid internationalism in the interests of maintaining class-based militant particularism and building with other subaltern class-based movements.

ICJB is internationalising through discursive encounter with educated professionals committed to environmentalism (anti-toxics activists), which is made possible by key leaders in Bhopal abstracting from their local struggle through an environmentalist discourse. This frame also provides an identity, *pani peedit*, for Bhopalis who were not directly gas affected but are still victims of the polluting activities of the factory and therefore legitimate comrades in the

struggle. The Women Workers' Campaign by contrast is focusing on its militant particularism, material economic conditions and building class solidarity, and sustaining a high level of supporter base, especially amongst underemployed and low paid working class adults. The Pensioners' Front's supporter base is the economically inactive, incapacitated and low caste poor, those dependent on meagre state rations and beggars with no means of support, and employs a discourse state welfare.

As Zavestoski (2009) suggests, there has certainly been a globalisation of the Bhopal survivors' movement through the global anti-toxics and environmental movements, and in relation to the increasing global reach of the chemical industry. Such organisation has occurred against a background of cautiousness, if not resistance to internationalisation, through a carefully negotiated settlement between a small alliance of survivors' and Bhopal-based groups, and an international network of supporters and solidarity groups. This is, however, only one form of abstraction from the experience of local militancy of the survivors, which can be contrasted with a class-based abstraction of the biggest of the survivors' groups.

Other forms of generalised abstraction also appear to be present – institutional communism and social welfare – but with more limited support. As a largely female movement with significant female leadership, it may be expected that abstraction through feminist universalism might be potentially significant, although this appears not to be the case. By contrast, female militancy finds some expression in renegotiations within the gender regime of the movement, with some impact on family life, but without significantly challenging the forms through which patriarchy is practiced.

This is an important distinction in terms of understanding social movement dynamics. Whilst social movements which emerge from local militancy can and do develop abstracted analysis through analytical learning and knowledge generation (Choudry and Kapoor 2010) as well as "discursive encounters" with other communities and wider movements Baviskar (2003) – joining hands in order to join the dots (Nilsen 2008) – this can take a range of forms.

Baviskar (2003) has identified the varying classification of movements on the basis of the discursive encounters which they have with more powerful groups. Learning within these movements then may take divergent paths and selecting certain forms of abstraction can constrain opportunities for others (Scandrett et al 2010). The institutional selection from potential forms of generalised abstraction can have major impact on the praxis of the movement, not least because sections of the movement may identify with different generalisations. In the Bhopal survivors' movement, different abstractions have led to divisions and opportunities for emancipatory gendered praxis have been missed. However, the divergent abstractions has extended the reach and longevity of the movement with the opportunities for a broad, if unstable alliance across multiple sectors of struggle.

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