

Leserbrief von John A. Chowdhury, Bonn

Der Westen sorgt sich um Taslima Nasreen, die meisten Bangladeshis sorgen sich um die Entwicklung ihres Landes. Daß die fundamentalistischen Moslems in unserem Land so stark geworden sind, ist beschämend, aber nicht durch eine Taslima Nasreen zu ändern. Im Gegenteil: sie hat mit ihren Bemerkungen zum Koran und ihrem vulgären Vokabular weit über das Ziel hinaus geschossen. Resultat: Die 'wirklichen' Moslems wurden gekränkt, die frauen- und entwicklungsfeindlichen 'Mullahs' bekamen neue Munition für ihre Agi-

Chipko is Alive!

*Leserbrief von Vandana Shiva, der an die nepalische Zeitschrift 'Himal' als Reaktion auf die Veröffentlichung des Beitrages über die 'Chipko-Bewegung' gerichtet wurde. In 'Südasiens' 6/94 hatten wir den Beitrag aus 'Himal' in einer deutschen Übersetzung übernommen.*

It has become a kind of fashion these days to say that Chipko the movement that inspired all other environment movements in India, is dead. This new controversy about the death of Chipko springs from the same mind-set that earlier encouraged two decades to be spent arguing about exactly when and how Chipko was 'born' and who gave 'birth' to it. People who issue birth and death certificates to social movements fail to realise that when powerless people stand up in resistance, they do so by drawing on the inspiration of past actions, on the strength derived from the perennial springs of democracy and freedom carried by the collective memory of society.

The values and human striving that infuse ordinary people with extraordinary strength and resilience to face brute force can go latent and underground for a while. They never die. That is why it is erroneous to talk of the death of social movements. People's movements are the expression of that latent energy in ordinary people, ready to burst forth whenever the conditions are ripe.

In the writing of history the social and political movements, the evolution is generally neglected and only the end result is highlighted. This creates two problems. First, future organisational work does not benefit from the lessons of perseverance and patience born of years of movement building; people start looking for instant solutions because it is the instant successes that have been sold through pseudo-history.

Second, while the historical evolution of movements involves small contributions from thousands of participants over extended periods, their climaxes are localised in space and time. Movements are major social and political processes, however, and they transcend individual actors. They are significant precisely because they involve a multiplicity of people and events which contribute to a reinforcement of social change. The fact that the contribution of ordinary people as primary actors goes unrecorded does not reduce the significance of their role in shaping history. Chipko did not die like it was not born. It had existed in the 1930s in the form of the forest satyagraha. It was resurrected in the 1970s as what we call Chipko. And it continues to get resurrected quietly and invisibly in region after region wherever exploitation of nature and people reaches levels where people are forced to act to defend their right to survival.

Such a resurrection was taking place in the small village of Jundiyana in Bhilangana Valley around the time woman of the

tation. Bangladesh kann nur durch eine wirtschaftliche Entwicklung, eine Art industrieller Revolution, den Fundamentalismus bekämpfen. Statt einer Taslima, brauchen wir Tausende von Frauen, die für Entwicklungsorganisationen arbeiten und das Land auf dem Weg in eine bessere Zukunft voranbringen. Es sind diese Frauen, die zur Zeit unter den Fatwa's (religiöse Dekrete, A.d.Red.) religiöser Fanatiker leiden. Über sie sollte mehr in den Medien berichtet werden.

world were celebrating International Women's day on 8 March. The Mahila Mangal Dal of the village started a dharna on 9 March to block the passage of trucks that were carrying illegally logged pines from their village forest. In 1981, as a result of Chipko movement, a logging ban had been implemented in the Uttarkhand hills. The Van Nigam (Forest Corporation) was however allowed to remove dead and fallen timber. Since the Chipko movement had been stirred by the scarcity of fuel and fodder and construction material created by deforestation and excessive logging, the local communities had demanded that all dead and fallen wood should first be used to meet local needs of fodder, fuel, housing material. However, the forest officer did not treat meeting of local needs as a priority, and instead continued to export wood out of the region. The removal of dead and fallen timber became a convenient cover to illegal log green trees.

It was this theft that has troubled the women of Jundiyana village. When they saw their standing trees being cut unnecessarily under the excuse of removal of dead wood, they began the blockade on trucks. We visited the village on 28 March to see what had motivated the woman to take such direct action. The woman's action in Bhilangana valley in 1994 is a resurgence of women power and ecological concern of which Mira Behn's work in Gopal Ashram had been an earlier expression. Mira Behn was one of Mahatma Gandhi's closest disciples who moved to the Himalayan region in the late 1940's. She undertook a community project in the valley of the Bhilangana, built the Gopal Ashram, and concentrated on the forest problem. The self-organised protest of the women of Bhilangana ghati and its connection with the earlier mobilisation by Mira Behn prove false the artificial declaration of the birth and death of Chipko. Narayan Devi of Jundiyana are ordinary peasant women of Garhwal. But they had the courage to resist the power of greed and corruption. As was clear from their response to an incident when the forest contractor and his men attacked the women on dharna, the allegiance of the functionaries of the forest department and district administration is quite clearly to power and money, not to people and survival. As commerce gets totally deregulated under the rhetoric of free trade, these corrupt bureaucratic structures will not disappear. They will act more and more one-sidedly on behalf of greed and violence. The contest and conflict is between women fighting to protect nature and their survival, and men engaged in theft, corruption and violence. This conflict is not just taking place in Bhilangana valley. It is pervasive throughout society. And each one of us has to decide which side we are on. Each of us has a role in determining whether it will be the forces of good or forces of evil which will rule our lives.