

## Dr Binayak Sen as I know him



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I first met Binayak, wife Ilina and their two daughters Aparajita and Pranhita at the conclusion of Pokaran to Sarnath 'Global Peace March' on 6th August, 1999 at the Central Tibetan Institute of Higher Learning in Sarnath, near Varanasi . Sarnath is the place where Gautam Buddha delivered sermon to his first five disciples after attaining enlightenment at Bodh Gaya. The peace march was symbolically between the place of destruction - Pokaran, to the place of peace - Sarnath. It began exactly a year after on the day when India tested the nuclear weapons in 1998 and concluded on the Hiroshima Day. The objective of the peace march was total global nuclear disarmament. Ilina had also brought with her drawings made by some children on the theme of nuclear disarmament. While the march was in progress for 88 days and 1500 kms, the Sen family was busy organizing activities in Raipur and their work area in its support. We also later got a chance to work together for the Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (CNDP), a national level platform of organizations and individuals committed towards nuclear disarmament.

Dr. Binayak Sen is currently in Raipur jail. He has been targeted under the draconian Chattisgarh Special Public Security Act, 2005, and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 2004, to silence the voices of humanity and justice. He is charged with sedition and conspiracy to wage war against the state, among other things. His trail has begun

after a year in jail and his bail has been refused even by the Supreme Court. The six prosecution witnesses, out of a total of 89, who have been presented in court so far have failed to stand the cross examination. There doesn't seem to be an iota of evidence against him. Yet, he is being illegally detained so that nobody dare question the experiment of Salwa Judum in Chattisgarh which legitimizes extra-constitutional violence and pits adivasis against adivasis. Binayak, who is the Chattisgarh General Secretary of nationally the most well known human rights organization, People's Union for Civil Liberties, which was founded by none other than Loknayak Jayaprakash Narayan, exposed the killing of three teachers and one student, all innocent, in Gopapalli, Dist. Dantewada on 4th November, 2004, which was being projected as an encounter by the police. In November 2005 Binayak organized an all India team of human rights activists to visit Dantewada and study the systematic decimation, rape, loot, arson of ordinary adivasis and their properties by the police and Special Police Officers in the name of Salwa Judum. Binayak also objected to the brutal oppression by police of adivasis who were opposing the take over of their lands in Bastar for setting up a Tata-Essar industry. How could the Chattisgarh government tolerate Binayak who was out to expose what they claim as their successful experiment of countering the Naxalites through a 'self motivated people's movement,' the Salwa Judum?

Dr. Binayak Sen after completing his M.B.B.S. finished his M.D. in Paediatrics from Christian Medical College , Vellore . That he had a social concern from quite early in his life is obvious from the fact that he chose to do his Masters' thesis on malnutrition. He was a faculty member at the Centre for Social Medicine and Community Health at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi from 1976 to '78. He left his job to join a community based rural health centre in Hoshangabad, M.P. From 1983 to '87 he helped famous trade union leader late Shankar Guha Niyogi build the Shaheed Hospital in Dalli Rajhara for mine

labourers. This 100 bed hospital, managed by the labourers' organization, still provides good quality treatment to hundreds of labourers at affordable cost. This was a unique experiment where the community which required medical care for itself made its own hospital. There are some competent and dedicated doctors who provide their services here. Binayak was one of them. Dr. Binayak Sen was also making his services available at Ganiyari, Bilaspur, Dhamtari District and Urla-Birgaon. Interestingly, the government took his help in designing the community based health worker programme across Chhattisgarh, now known as 'Mitanin.'

Realizing that health care work was closely associated with human rights issues he got involved with the PUCL and is currently its national Vice President too. He has been continuously raising issues covering the spectrum from fake encounters and custodial deaths to hunger deaths, malnutrition and dysentery epidemics.

Dr. Binayak Sen was awarded the Paul Harrison distinguished alumnus award in 2004 by CMC, Vellore. He was cited as a role model for students and faculty members of the Medical College. After incarceration he was awarded the R.R. Keithan Gold Medal in recognition of his service to the community at the Indian Social Science Congress on 31 December 2007 by B.L. Mungekar, Member, Planning Commission and Chairperson, Indian Academy of Social Sciences.

Most recently, the Global Health Council has awarded him the prestigious Jonathan Mann award for global health and human rights. Dr. Sen is the first South Asian to receive this prestigious US award.

Subsequently, 22 Noble prize winners have requested the Government of India to release Dr. Binayak Sen.

Rarely, has a prisoner been honoured, nationally and internationally, so much. It speaks about the man and also the fact that the government has committed a blunder. The soon the government realizes this the better it'll be for it.

Binayak's and his family's commitment to peace is redoubtable. They are a family of very sensitive individuals with deep respect for human life. When a group of us met Binayak in Raipur Jail in January 2008, I was surprised that even after spending over eight months in jail Binayak was more worried for the cause of civil liberties than anything else. He was saying that by targeting him and creating an atmosphere of terror the authorities are doing irreparable damage to the struggle for justice and human rights. The indomitable spirit that Binayak and his family have displayed during this gruelling phase is a source of inspiration for all the people in the world who are fighting to make this world more humane.

**-- Dr Sandeep Pandey**

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