

Anil Agarwal 1947-2002



It is truly amazing how much he managed to do in the past seven years. When we first found out he had a rare and possibly fatal lymphoma, which had spread to his brain, his spine and his eyes, his only response was, “is there a possible treatment?” He took chemotherapy so calmly you would think it was a simple stomach pain.

The focus, even then, was on work. The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) had expanded, started a fortnightly magazine, but with hardly any management systems. In the US and then in France, where Anil went for a bone marrow transplantation, we worked furiously to set up internal systems. Anil’s impatience drove colleagues up the wall. But he soon learnt to also give his strength and generosity and, most of all, his time. He died with the knowledge that he had created an institution which would continue to drive the environmental message, as loudly and as stridently as he would have done.

In the 1980s it was generally accepted that environment was “pretty trees and tigers” and that “smoke was the sign of progress”. Poverty was the greatest polluter. Anil debunked this effectively. Environment for the poor was not a luxury but a matter of survival. Today, all this is common knowledge. But for someone who has journeyed with him, I know how difficult each step was.

Our book, *Global Warming in an Unequal World* forced us to fight the most powerful research institutions of the industrialised world. The campaign on air pollution made us take on the powerful automobile industry. But Anil never ever let us, even for one moment, feel that we were less powerful. This is because his faith in democracy was total. As long as we were absolutely sure about our facts we could challenge the world.

“Forensic rigour combined with passion” was how a leading UK journalist described CSE’s work. My last memory of him — barely minutes before he died — was Anil correcting me about something I was saying to a journalist on the phone about a report on the auto fuel policy. For Anil, life began and ended with work.

— Sunita Narain, Editor’s Page, *Down To Earth*, January 31, 2002

Brief chronology

1970: Graduated in Mechanical Engineering from Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur.

1973: Joined *The Hindustan Times* as a science journalist. The Chipko Movement catalyses his understanding of environment-development processes.

1982: Founder-director, Centre for Science and Environment (CSE).

1983: Co-editor, *First Citizen's Report on the State of India's Environment*.

1985: Co-editor, *Second Citizen's Report on the State of India's Environment*.

1986: Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi invites him to address the Council of Ministers.

1992: Started *Down To Earth* magazine.

1996: Began Right to Clean Air campaign, instrumental in introducing CNG-based public transport in Delhi.

1997: With *Dying Wisdom: the Rise, Fall and Potential of India's Traditional Water Harvesting Systems*, started a campaign to popularise rainwater harvesting. *Making Water Everybody's Business* was a subsequent seminal publication.

1997: Launched the Green Rating Project, aimed at making industry more environment-friendly. Guided the rating of the automobile industry, and the paper and pulp industry.

1999: Co-editor, *Green Politics*, on global environmental negotiations. Along with *Poles Apart* (2001), considered important books on the Third World's perspective on these treaties.

Awards:

2000: Padma Bhushan, Government Of India

2000: Environment Leadership Award, by Global Environmental Facility, Washington DC.

1994: Environmentalist of the Year by *Les Realites de l'Ecologie*, France.

1991: Distinguished Alumnus Award, Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur.

1987: Elected to the Global 500 Honour Roll by the United Nations Environment Programme. Honour Summus Award, Watumull Foundation, Hawaii.

1986: Padma Shri by the Government of India, New Delhi.

1984: Fifth Vikram Sarabhai Memorial Award by the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi.

1979: First A H Boerma Award, by the Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome.